CONNECTED

A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO
BULLYING PREVENTION WITHIN
THE SCHOOL GATES AND BEYOND

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT

Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Connected was the South Australian Government's statewide strategy to bullying prevention within the school gates and beyond.

Bullying prevention requires a whole-of-community response. The strategy's community approach to bullying reflected community feedback, bullying prevention research and best practice. The strategy outlined a shared vision and a practical plan for working together to keep children and young people safe from bullying.

Across the 3 years of the strategy, that concluded June 2022, the Department for Education worked closely with the government, Catholic and independent school sectors, government departments, non-government organisations and researchers across the state to implement more than 40 initiatives.

Within the South Australian education system, in 2022, there were 715 schools comprised of 508 government schools, 103 Catholic schools and 104 independent schools.[1] Altogether, the 3 education sectors employed more than 39,000 school staff[2] and supported more than 275,000 students.[3]

Vision

South Australian children and young people are thriving in safe environments that promote positive relationships, safety and wellbeing so that they can achieve their full potential.

Measuring our success

The strategy was based on a model that focused on the strength and quality of social connections within and beyond the school gate. While the COVID-19 pandemic affected South Australian schools and communities during the strategy's implementation, significant progress was still made. This included evidence-informed professional development and resources, piloting programs and strengthening supports for the prevention of and response to bullying of South Australian children and young people.

A 2-staged approach is being taken to evaluate the strategy. Stage 1 in the form of this key achievements report focuses on process evaluation, capturing what has been achieved at a system-level over the last 3 years.

Stage 2 comprises an initial evaluation of the overall outcomes of the strategy and is being undertaken in 2023. This is expected to provide an early picture of the impact of the strategy on children and young people's experiences and will help inform an ongoing, sustained effort in bullying prevention across the state.

To measure the success of the strategy the outcomes evaluation focuses on:

Increase measures

- An increase in the number of children who report feeling included at school and having positive relationships with teachers and peers.
- An increase in alignment between student and teacher reports of bullying and departmental data.

Reduction measures

- A reduction in the number of children reporting re-experiencing bullying behaviour.
- A reduction in the number of children re-engaging in bullying behaviour.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 'Table 35b Counts of all Schools, 2010-2022', https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#schools, accessed 18 May 2023.

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 'Table 50a In School Staff Number, 2006-2022', https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#schools, accessed 18 May 2023.

3. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) 'Table 42b Number of Full-time and Part-time Students, 2006-2022', https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#schools, accessed 18 May 2023.

Summary of content

This report highlights key achievements across the 5 strategy principles and captures initial measures for individual initiatives, where available.

Principles

1. Visible leadership inspires positive environments for children

- local policy implementation tool
- professional development resources
- induction materials
- cross-sector guidelines for dealing with serious online incidents
- child safe environments.

2. Communities are inclusive and connected

- support for children to be included in education
- resources that support inclusion for all children
- Playford Game On program
- the Guardian for Children and Young People and the Training Centre Visitor.

3. Children and young people are active participants

- evidence-based social and emotional learning resources
- Youth Law learning packages for children and young people
- Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA)
- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
- Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People.

4. Educators, families, professionals and community members work together in partnership

- cyberbullying training for pastoral care workers
- parent education sessions
- parent resources and fact sheets
- grants for National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence
- new resources to promote community awareness.

5. Communities model, promote and support positive and respectful behaviour

- practice guidance for effective bullying prevention and response
- PEACE Pack School Bullying Prevention program
- Friendly Schools pilot
- specialist professional development for entrenched and complex bullying.

Work also occurred across system enablers such as:

- Bullying Prevention Coalition
- data for school leaders
- monitoring of research projects.

Visible leadership inspires positive environments for children

These initiatives:

Model positive, respectful and inclusive behaviours

Challenge exclusionary, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours

Teach skills to improve problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience

Local policy implementation tool

Government schools were given access to a new **online policy tool** in 2020 to help them develop and implement best practice bullying prevention policies and plans. While optional, it provides a structured approach to ensuring government schools' bullying prevention policies and implementation plans use the national definition of bullying and comply with key criteria.

The user-friendly tool helps schools to:

- survey their staff
- customise bullying prevention policies to their school's needs
- select evidence-based strategies proven to reduce bullying
- use action plans to keep track of bullying prevention policy implementation.

As at end of December 2022, 255 government schools have commenced a bullying prevention policy and plan using the tool. There were 44 completed policies and plans in place. Further, 92 schools have used the staff survey and 22 schools have created an action plan. This represents approximately 50% of government schools engaging with the tool in development of local bullying prevention policies.

The tool supports capacity for central auditing of government schools' policies about behaviour, attendance and bullying prevention.

Work is ongoing to continue promoting the tool in addition to targeted follow-up to make improvements.

The plan template gives schools 38 evidence-informed strategies; 16 that are mandated and 22 that are optional. The top 4 optional strategies most commonly selected by schools are:

- Explicitly teach positive behaviour and social and emotional skills. Guide students to have healthy relationships, both in person and online.
- Use consistent language among staff, students, parents and carers that encourages positive behaviours and social interactions.
- Set up school values and behaviour expectations. Make sure these reflect inclusion, respect, safety and diversity.
- Make sure students feel safe to raise concerns and report bullying.

The bullying prevention policy template was shared across all 3 school sectors to ensure consistency of approaches statewide.

Both the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) and Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) conducted a review of their bullying prevention or behaviour policies during the strategy period.

School leadership teams are strengthened to play an active role in building positive environments where children and young people feel engaged, respected and safe.

Supports are provided to reduce administrative burden on schools and increase transparency of auditing of bullying prevention policies.

Professional development resources

The Department for Education developed a suite of professional development modules **Training to recognise and respond to bullying behaviour** for educators and school staff across all 3 school sectors to build capacity in bullying prevention and response. Modules were developed from extensive research into best practice and expert advice to create interactive, scenario-based learning.

The foundational modules, 'Understanding bullying', 'Strengthening relationships for safe and supportive communities', and 'Providing effective interventions and support' have been available since August 2021.

A fourth module 'Cyberbullying' has been available since September 2021.

The fifth module 'Preventing and reducing bullying for children and young people at highest risk' has been available since April 2022.

A sixth and final module 'Working with parents to prevent and respond to bullying' has been available since June 2022.

By the end of December 2022, across government, Catholic and independent schools and corporate offices, 2876 staff have registered to access the modules. This has amounted to 7742 engagements across modules and 73% completion rate for those engagements.

A cross-sector communication campaign was implemented in term 3, 2022 to enhance consistent messaging and promotion of available resources across all school sectors.

Induction materials

An **induction checklist** was created for government schools to assist with the induction and training of new staff, pre-service teachers and temporary relief teachers. The checklist guides users through policy requirements, professional development, available teaching resources and other materials created under the strategy.

School leaders can use the bullying prevention induction checklist to make sure all staff have current knowledge and expertise to prevent and respond to bullying.

The template is available on the external department website as a downloadable resource that can be adapted for all school sectors. This resource has been available since August 2022.

Cross-sector guidelines for dealing with serious online incidents

Cross-sector guidelines were developed to help all schools to assess and respond to online safety incidents, including cyberbullying, in a consistent way. These have been available on the external department website since September 2021. The guidelines help schools to:

- respond consistently and proportionally to online behaviours of concern
- recognise which online incidents need to be escalated for additional supports
- identify which online incidents need cross sector and interagency coordination.

The development of these guidelines was a recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The guidelines were distributed to key areas of the department that provide advice and support to schools, as well as to CESA and AISSA. Between 1 September 2021 and 31 December 2022, the guidelines were downloaded 536 times.

> **Clear policies, training and resources support educators to:**
>
> - **be skilled and confident in providing consistent responses to bullying incidents**
> - **teach about bullying and online safety**
> - **work with parents to respond to bullying concerns**
> - **support children and young people who are at the highest risk of bullying.**

Child safe environments

The Department for Human Services (DHS) led implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations in South Australia from July 2021.

In addition to the other 8 principles, the DHS Child Safe Environments program developed guidance documents, **guideline to writing a policy** and **developing a code of conduct,** that address the requirements for:

- National Principle 4 – Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
- National Principle 6 – Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.

The Child Safe Environments program reviews all policies and procedures submitted by organisations lodging a compliance statement to ensure that all national principles are captured in their policies. All submitted policies and procedures must comply with and are assessed against the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* including section 145(b)(ii). The content is assessed according to the size, scope and context of the organisation that is submitting the compliance statement.

Support is provided for organisations that work with children and young people to ensure they are skilled and confident in preventing and addressing bullying.

Communities are inclusive and connected

These initiatives:

Challenge exclusionary, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours

Teach skills to improve problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience

Promote inclusive environments and communities around children and young people

Reduce power inequities in children's social groups

Support for children to be included in education

Under this principle, an overarching inclusive education approach was to occur with a focus on a range of student cohorts. This included children with disabilities, Aboriginal children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, gender and sexually diverse children and children who are living in out-of-home care.

Following the release of the bullying prevention strategy, the Department for Education began a program of reform to address the inclusion of children and young people in education.

The program of reform is a series of inter-related projects under 2 significant areas, known as One in Four and Student Engagement. These aim to improve participation, engagement and learning achievement for children and students. This work prioritises children and students with disability or functional needs, Aboriginal students and children in care. Key initiatives that link with planned activities under the strategy include:

One in Four

Practice guides
New **practice guidance** was developed to help educators support all learners, particularly those in mainstream preschools and schools, who require adjustments to participate in their learning.

They offer guidance to support learning for all and are produced in 2 formats – a 2-page factsheet for 'just in time' guidance, and a longer online format with additional information, references and resources. As at the end of December 2022, there were 16 practice guides available, developed in collaboration with key stakeholders. They cover various topics from autism, hearing loss and vision impairment to school refusal and visual supports.

Further guides will be released throughout 2023, starting in Term 1. The practice guides were developed for government schools however have been made available to the non-government sectors.

Capability building in sites
As part of the **Autism Inclusion Teacher initiative,** all government schools will have access to a module on 'engaging families'. This module will include recommended models of support that schools can adopt and will be co-designed by individuals with disability and their families. In time, this resource will be adapted to address ways of engaging families in the early years.

Site leaders will have access to a wide range of evidence-based resources to enhance understanding on how to promote and design inclusive environments. In addition, several resources inform schools on inclusive education and ways to develop inclusive policy and processes for diverse learners and communities. Local and international scenarios are available to support implementation.

Teachers will have access to various books and information for teaching social skills and developing wellbeing, particularly focused on the inclusion of learners with disability.

Student engagement

Positive Behaviour for Learning initiative
School-wide **Positive Behaviour for Learning framework** is being implemented in 41 schools. The initiative commenced in term 4, 2022 and schools will be supported for 3 years. The framework aims to reduce exclusionary responses and improve inclusion of students in their education.

Review and training relating to the 'suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students (SEE) procedure'
Good practice guidance and training is being developed to support leaders with their decision making about exclusionary responses. Improved information and advice will also be available to families.

Additional review work by policy and project areas
In addition to key reforms, policy and project areas are reviewing how the department supports students to promote engagement and success in education. This includes the joint plan of action with the Department for Child Protection on how children and young people in care will be included and the Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019 to 2029 to support each Aboriginal child or young person to be a proud and confident learner, achieving at their highest potential.

Over the strategy CESA developed a 'student diversity, equity and inclusion policy' which was endorsed by the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools.

AISSA supports member schools to build capacity in inclusive education through various activities, including providing quality professional learning with a focus on building leader and educator expertise in legislation, policies and procedure development. During 2022, AISSA reviewed its 'student behaviour support policy', which will be made available to member schools.

Resources that support inclusion for all children

An online professional development module that addresses barriers to education for students who are gender diverse, intersex or sexually diverse was developed for government schools. The module supports implementation of the updated **gender diverse and intersex children and young people support procedure**. This module has been available to department staff since May 2022. By the end of December 2022, more than 2500 staff had registered to complete the module.

The Department for Education also provides whole of school staff face-to-face training on request after completion of the online module. If schools request additional support, specialist consultancy is available.

In addition, an online presentation about bullying prevention for children with disabilities was made available to educators and support staff in government schools as part of the 2020 Inclusive Education Expo. The annual expo showcases high-quality practice in inclusive education.

The department has developed **2 videos on diversity and inclusion, and racist bullying** for educators to use with students. Accompanying practice guidance supports educators to guide classroom discussions on harassment, discrimination and racist bullying and enables schools to proactively address community concerns. These resources have been available to all sectors via the external department website since March 2021. The diversity and inclusion video and practice guidance were highlighted in the 2022 National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence school event kit distributed to all registered schools nationally. The diversity and inclusion video has been viewed more than 1300 times and the racist bullying video has been viewed 480 times.

CESA supports its schools through disability standards training, the early career teacher Thrive program, and ongoing professional learning related to disability and behaviour. In addition, each of the 6 regions has a dedicated Learning Diversity and Equity Advisor and an Engagement and Wellbeing Advisor.

AISSA works with its schools to build capacity in inclusive education including via Inclusive Education Coordinators. These roles provide support for schools with professional learning and data collection and promotion of the bullying prevention and response professional development modules via the early career teacher program.

> **Educators are supported to be skilled and confident in educating and responding to bullying by supporting children and young people in a way that reflects their diverse needs.**

Playford Game On

The Department for Education collaborated with the City of Playford to pilot a community recreation program Game On. The program ran in the City of Playford council area from August 2019 to June 2021. It was designed to strengthen children's involvement in community programs, which is known to be a protective factor against bullying.

See the overview of the Game On evaluation for further information.

> **After school community programs support social and emotional learning skills, helping to protect children from bullying.**

The Training Centre Visitor and the Guardian for Children and Young People

The Training Centre Visitor (TCV) conducted an inspection of the Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre (KTYJC) in November 2019 with a **full report** released in June 2020. This report highlighted the prevalence of bullying at KTYJC and made several recommendations to enhance bullying prevention. The subsequent **TCV Annual Report 2020-2021** included bullying as a theme nominated for regular TCV oversight and noted a lack of implementation of anti-bullying and peer support-based programs as proposed in recommendations from the 2019 inspection report. In TCV's **2021-2022 Annual Report**, centre implementation was undermined by COVID-19 requirements and a general staffing crisis that impacted negatively upon the delivery of programs, including in relational areas such as bullying, and activities provision remains inadequate. The TCV noted that a robust strategy, with associated capacity, is needed to ensure access to programs and activities in a pandemic context.

In the **2021-2022 Annual Report**, the Guardian for Children and Young People again highlighted monitoring and advocacy activities connected with the safety and stability of placements as well as the call for the closure of large-scale residential facilities to reduce relational incidents and issues between peers. The impact of placement and staffing shortages on safety and stability in residential care was highlighted.

The **Final Report of the South Australian Dual Involved (SADI) Project: Children and young people in South Australia's child protection and youth justice systems (June 2022)** provided a child focused examination for this particular cohort of vulnerable children and young people.

Several of the recommendations seek to address relevant concerns, including those arising from poor placement matching in residential care that contributes to 'unsafe social dynamics and a fraught, unpredictable living environment [which] can increase or reshape the risk of further traumatisation, physical or sexual abuse and emotional and psychological harm for children and young people while in residential care (including through intimidation, bullying, verbal taunts or threats, and pressure to adopt inappropriate lifestyles).'

> **Enhanced bullying prevention occurs in residential care and custody at Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre.**

Children and young people are active participants

3

These initiatives:

Model positive, respectful and inclusive behaviours

Challenge exclusionary, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours

Teach skills to improve problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience

Promote inclusive environments and communities around children and young people

Reduce power inequities in children's social groups

Children and young people access teaching and learning through the Early Years Learning framework, Australian Curriculum (reception to year 10) and the South Australian Certificate of Education (years 11 and 12). In addition, the **Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum (KS:CPC)** is mandated for all children and young people (age 3 to year 12) in all government preschools and schools and Catholic schools, and is available to independent schools.

The KS:CPC is a child safety and respectful relationships curriculum that explores the right to be safe, relationships, recognising and reporting abuse, and protective strategies. The KS:CPC is regularly reviewed and updated. Recent updates have strengthened content on online safety, cyberbullying, domestic and family violence, and consent.

Evidence-based social and emotional learning resources

A variety of high-quality, best practice external curriculum resources have been identified and promoted to teachers via the resource lists in the bullying prevention and response professional development modules.

In early 2023 the department released an evidence-informed directory of externally provided wellbeing and social-emotional learning programs.

The directory of programs and accompanying guidance will help schools choose evidence-informed programs that best meet their local needs.

In addition, all 3 school sectors regularly promote resources developed by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

> Educators are supported to be skilled and confident in teaching children and young people to use their social and emotional skills to be respectful, resilient and safe.
>
> Schools are more easily able to make informed decisions about social emotional learning and bullying prevention programs available.

Youth Law learning packages for children and young people

The interaction between bullying behaviours and the law can be complex. The Department for Education collaborated with Youth Law Australia to develop a learning package, **Bullying prevention lessons — Youth Law Australia,** about bullying and online safety for children and young people.

The lessons cover South Australian laws and children and young people's rights and responsibilities relating to:

- bullying and harassment
- cyberbullying
- image-based abuse
- sex and sexting.

The lessons are aligned with the Australian Curriculum and have been available to all school sectors since term 2, 2021.

Developed as a classroom resource to complement the bullying prevention and response professional development modules, there are 16 lessons for educators to use, tailored by year level. They include suggestions for differentiation to support students with diverse learning needs.

As at end of December 2022, 705 staff across government, Catholic and independent schools and corporate offices have registered to access the lesson files. An annual review and update of lesson content is conducted to ensure they reflect current laws.

> **Children and young people are supported to be active participants in their own learning and wellbeing and are knowledgeable about bullying, cyberbullying and online safety.**

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA)

Student led-bullying prevention
Across 2019 and 2020 students from Underdale, Nuriootpa, and Christies Beach High Schools and Valley View Secondary School worked with YACSA to plan and implement activities at their schools. Key activities included:

- Creating a video about bullying aimed at students transitioning from year 7 to year 8.
- A project led by peer support leaders to consult and develop 2 presentations about bullying – one for students and one for teachers. Presentations were handed over to the new peer leader group at the start of the following school year.
- Students and school staff working together to review Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) data on bullying and to share their perspectives on bullying at the school. The group created banners for each of the school's houses via a school-wide competition and reviewed the school's anti-bullying policy and processes for responding to bullying.

YACSA's work with the 4 schools informed the development of a practical resource guide that supports educators to involve students in meaningful participation in bullying prevention initiatives.

Train the trainer model
YACSA delivered 2 full-day peer-to-peer training bullying prevention workshops during 2020 to students across years 5 to 11. As part of this work, a peer-to-peer bullying prevention training package was created. It has PowerPoint presentations, notes, and resources for facilitators.

The training consists of 3 modules:

- understanding bullying
- responding to bullying
- peer education.

Initially 30 peer leaders were trained from Charles Campbell College and Blackwood High School. After completing the sessions, students reported an increased understanding of bullying, how to respond to bullying and of the role of peer education.

Student participation framework
Through work with students over the previous 2 projects and an extensive literature review, YACSA developed a participation framework based on Lundy's model of youth participation, Lansdown's levels of participation and the 9 basic requirements for participation in the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. The framework was delivered to the department in 2021 and provides key minimum standards for meaningful participation in policy development.

The department currently holds these resources, and further consideration is being made about next steps for use. The resources developed through these projects were also used to inform delivery of the 2022 National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, with a further focus on supporting student-led bullying prevention activities.

> **Children and young people are supported to be active participants by leading bullying prevention activities. Training is developed to support children and young people's knowledge about bullying and skills to support peers. Approaches are explored that support young people to be engaged in policy development.**

Commissioner for Children and Young People

In 2019 the Commissioner for Children and Young People engaged with young people through the **Youthful Adelaide project and report.** Young people provided advice to decision makers and urban planners about how to establish safe child- and youth-oriented spaces in Adelaide that support young people to 'participate, connect and hang out'.

To build on the contents of the report, in 2020 and 2021 the Commissioner worked with the City of Adelaide to operationalise many of the report's key recommendations. This resulted in a 5-year project titled **Welcoming Spaces for Young People.** In developing 'welcoming spaces', the council has worked directly alongside South Australian young people to better understand what elements of a space welcome young people, as well as to identify locations where they would like to socialise. It is anticipated that activation of a new space in the southwestern triangle of Victoria Square Tarntanyangga will be in place for 5 years.

Over the life of the strategy, the Commissioner for Children and Young People has undertaken a series of consultations that addressed children and young people's experiences of bullying, and developed reports such as:

- **Press Play** advocating for more safe public spaces for children and young people, with recommendations around increased play spaces for 13- to 18-year-olds.
- **More than a Game** covering what children and young people think about sport.
- **Stereotypes and Sexism** addressing the stereotyping of girls that discourages them from playing sport.
- **No Exceptions: Creating safer schools for LGBTQIA+ students.**

Bullying prevention resources for teachers, including factsheets were also developed.

> Children and young people contribute advice about the establishment of safe child and youth-oriented spaces that support them to be connected, creative and confident and what is needed to support respectful and inclusive sporting environments.

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

Building on the 2019 youth forums under the theme 'Be Seen. Be Heard. Flourish', the state's first Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People undertook a second statewide Aboriginal youth engagement process culminating in the 2021 **Youth Voices Report,** which captures the voices of almost 600 Aboriginal children and young people across South Australia.

The unique report was Aboriginal led, with Aboriginal children and young people speaking strongly about their experiences of racism and bullying, both in a school setting and externally, highlighting racism as a key driver. Aboriginal children and young people shared that discrimination is experienced frequently from peers, teachers, security guards and police. Bullying and discrimination based on their Aboriginality leads to feelings of low self-worth, impaired self-esteem, increased anxiety and societal alienation. Their stories gave rise to concerns on how society manages racism for the young person. The outcomes often result in the marginalisation of their experience and shifting the focus onto their reactions rather than the impact of the racism. The Commissioner concluded this is the ultimate experience of injustice.

Aboriginal young people also shared their thoughts, feelings and experiences, with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement amongst a variety of key topics. The report affirms the priorities of Aboriginal young people and will continue to set the tone for future engagement and activity by the Commissioner.

Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People

In 2019, South Australia's **Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People** was developed and gazetted in line with the provisions of Part 6 of the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016.* The framework enables systemic monitoring and reporting in 5 key dimensions of health, safety, wellbeing, education and citizenship. This will inform collaboration action across state and local government to improve the life outcomes of children and young people.

At the core of the framework, is the **Charter for Children and Young People** that reflects a commitment to work from a foundation of children's rights; to represent the voices of children and young people and what is important to them. The charter has 20 essential life conditions that all children and young people in South Australia can and should have to thrive and have opportunities.

Connection points between initiatives progressed under the framework, including the charter, reflect that children and young people should be:

- supported to know, respect and celebrate their abilities, beliefs, cultures, languages and communities
- live without violence, abuse or exploitation
- make safe decisions about alcohol, drugs and relationships
- have opportunities to establish and maintain friendships
- have safe and supported digital access
- experience physical and mental wellbeing, and have access to quality health care and support
- have opportunities to influence matters of current and future significance
- have a say in matters that directly affect them.

Educators, families, professionals and community members work together in partnership

4

These initiatives:

Model positive, respectful and inclusive behaviours

Challenge exclusionary, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours

Promote inclusive environments and communities around children and young people

Cyberbullying training for pastoral care workers

Pastoral care workers across all sectors have been trained in cyberbullying via the development and delivery of **eSafety training** by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner. The roll out of training began in late 2019, and all South Australian pastoral care workers completed the training by the end of 2020.

Training is available each month for all new pastoral care workers, who are to complete the training within 3 months of commencement. Compliance is managed via contracting processes with service providers. Over a 3-year period, 524 pastoral care workers completed the training.

> **Pastoral care workers have increased skills and knowledge in supporting children and young people to be safe from bullying and cyberbullying.**

Parent and carer education sessions

This activity was not progressed during the strategy due to COVID-19 impacts that limited opportunities for engagement with parents and caregivers. As an alternative to face-to-face and live stream sessions, a **PowerPoint resource** was developed that schools can use to hold education and information sessions with parents and caregivers.

This resource provides a practical application of the professional development module available to all staff on engaging parents in bullying prevention.

Parent and carer information sheets

Six parent and carer information sheets were created to support parents to be more informed and skilled in supporting their children to be safe from bullying.

Information sheets cover:

Cyberbullying

- **the signs**
- **parents and carers guide**
- **what parents and carers can do.**

Online safety

- **supporting safe and responsible use**
- **talking with your child about online risks**
- **what to do when your child has an online problem.**

They are available to all sectors via the department's website and were released in 2 groups in September 2020 and February 2021.

> **Parents are encouraged to be more informed and skilled in supporting their children to be safe from bullying.**

Grants for National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence

In 2020, to promote the 10th anniversary of the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence (NDA) in South Australia as a community event, 138 schools and community organisations received funding to prevent bullying within the school gates and beyond. The Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing promoted the funding, resulting in a high level of participation from sporting and recreation organisations. Funding totalling $130,000 was provided to 116 government schools, and 21 community organisations received an additional $100,000 of funding to promote bullying prevention in their settings, provide professional development for their staff, or provide bullying prevention education to their community stakeholders.

This work continued through funding to schools in 2021 and 2022.

As part of the 11th annual NDA in March 2021, 72 schools and one behaviour centre received up to $5000 each to help reduce bullying by implementing protective physical environments. The department's Engagement and Wellbeing directorate produced a resource to support schools, **protective physical environments that reduce bullying.** This resource was downloaded more than 100 times.

As part of the 12th annual NDA in March 2022, 74 schools and one learning centre received up to $5000 each, to implement student-led bullying prevention projects. To help guide applications, the Engagement and Wellbeing directorate offered guidance to schools on meaningful student participation.

In total over the 3 years of the strategy, $1.13 million in funding was provided to support bullying prevention within and beyond the school gates. Increased engagement of schools with the NDA occurred over the strategy, with a record number of 539 schools registered for 2022 representing 75% of South Australian schools.

> Knowledge and awareness about bullying is strengthened with an increase in understanding and shared responsibility for bullying across South Australian schools and the community.

New resources to promote community awareness

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) published a new web chapter on **Bullying of children and young people** in its widely used South Australian Law Handbook Online. This chapter includes both new and revised content and complements extensive information about bullying on the LSC website. Training was also delivered to Legal Aid helpline staff and other community sector lawyers to help them provide high quality legal advice and assistance to parents, carers and young people about bullying.

> Greater clarity across government and community about the most appropriate responses to bullying of different levels of severity and seriousness.

SA Health (Parenting SA) has continued to promote and distribute **Parent Easy Guides** about children's behaviour, bullying, cyberbullying and cybersafety. Guides are also available on topics including infant and child mental health, coping skills, peer pressure and supporting transgender and gender diverse children and young people.

SA Health (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, CAMHS) has continued to provide child and youth mental health services to address the emotional, behavioural and social needs that might arise from children's experiences of bullying.

Wellbeing SA provided a 'public health approach to bullying' paper to the Department for Education in October 2021. The paper was developed to support the implementation of the strategy by highlighting areas of alignment between 'Connected', the bullying prevention strategy, and a public health approach. It also offered recommendations for areas of continued focus to strengthen the implementation of the strategy. This work delivered on the commitment outlined in the joint Public Health Partner Authority Agreement between the Department for Education and Wellbeing SA.

South Australia Police has continued to deliver the **ThinkUKnow** cyberbullying and cybersafety program to government, Catholic and independent school sectors and in a range of community settings over the strategy period for parents, carers and professionals. SAPOL also continued to work with the Department for Education to update community education resources for schools about bullying, online safety and other key topics.

Communities model, promote and support positive and respectful behaviour

5

These initiatives:

Model positive, respectful and inclusive behaviours

Challenge exclusionary, disrespectful and aggressive behaviours

Teach skills to improve problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience

Practice guidance for effective bullying prevention and response

Practice guidance resources were developed to complement the professional development modules and are available to staff in all sectors. These provide additional information and guidance to education site staff on:

- **preventing and reducing bullying for children and young people at highest risk**

- **working with parents to prevent and respond to bullying**

- **using the CO-LATE model to help build positive relationships**

- **using the support group method in responding to bullying**

- **using the method of shared concern in responding to bullying.**

The Department for Education developed a new **behaviour support policy** in 2019, which takes a positive behaviour approach. The policy is complemented by a behaviour support toolkit developed in 2020, which addresses broader behaviour approaches to encourage safe inclusion of all children in education and care.

The engagement reform work underway within the department will also support those engaged in and/or experiencing bullying through a focus on reducing exclusionary practices.

Both CESA and AISSA completed a review of their policies covering behaviour and responsibilities and bullying prevention.

> Educators are supported to be more skilled and confident to promote and support positive and respectful behaviour.

PEACE Pack School Bullying Prevention program

In 2018, the PEACE Pack School Bullying Prevention program was successfully trialled in 26 government schools and was similarly trialled and evaluated in 11 CESA schools in 2019. COVID-19 interruptions led to a modification of a further targeted rollout of the PEACE Pack planned for the strategy period. The materials were instead offered on request to governments schools seeking a whole-school approach. CESA has also made the PEACE Pack available to Catholic schools.

See the overview of the PEACE Pack evaluation for further information.

Friendly Schools pilot

The Friendly Schools pilot involved 10 government schools (9 primary schools and 1 B12 school) in the Greater Gawler partnership implementing a whole-school response to bullying prevention over 2 years (2020 and 2021). To foster a community approach, at the end of 2019 joint training was available to government, Catholic and independent school representatives and principals in the Greater Gawler area.

See the overview of the Friendly Schools evaluation for further information.

Specialist professional development for entrenched and complex bullying

In addition to the professional development modules for all corporate and site staff developed under the strategy, a range of professional development was provided to the department's student support services (SSS) staff and student wellbeing leaders. The 2018 Student Wellbeing Leaders Day was themed around bullying and included a session on responses to complex and entrenched bullying. The 2019 Student Wellbeing Leaders Day focused on capacity building of whole school approaches to wellbeing, and in 2021 the focus was on mental health and wellbeing and positive behaviour for learning.

SSS behaviour support coaches and social workers were trained in restorative practices to increase expertise within the department for schools to access when challenged with complex, entrenched, or high-profile bullying incidents. This helps ensure that restorative approaches are used.

CESA provides responses to individual schools to meet their needs, as required. CESA is developing a roundtable initiative, constructing professional development opportunities by region for clusters of schools within each of their 6 regions.

AISSA also provides specific learning in support of behaviour and wellbeing to meet the demands of member schools. The Allied Health Specialist Support program funding is available through AISSA to support access to allied health professionals to build capacity of school staff to support students with challenging behaviour.

> **Specialist staff are supported to be more skilled and confident in responding to entrenched and complex bullying and supporting school-based educators.**

System enablers

Bullying Prevention Coalition

Members of the Bullying Prevention Coalition played an instrumental role in developing 'Connected' the bullying prevention strategy. The coalition comprised representatives across Department for Education, Catholic and independent school sectors, South Australian government departments, non-government organisations and researchers.

Face-to-face meetings were held in the early period of the strategy and the coalition has since played a consultative role. Members had input into the development of the Monitoring and Evaluation framework, progress reports, resources and training.

Stakeholders are engaged in effective implementation of systemic change to respond to bullying.

Data for school leaders

The Department for Education improved access to the bullying data collected as part of the annual Wellbeing and Engagement Collection. This has been achieved through transitioning the data onto Power BI, an interactive electronic platform known as the Student Wellbeing and Engagement Explorer. The Explorer provides access to schools' overall wellbeing results, including bullying data (for 5 years) on an interactive reporting platform. This allows schools greater capability to explore their results in detail through using different filter functions.
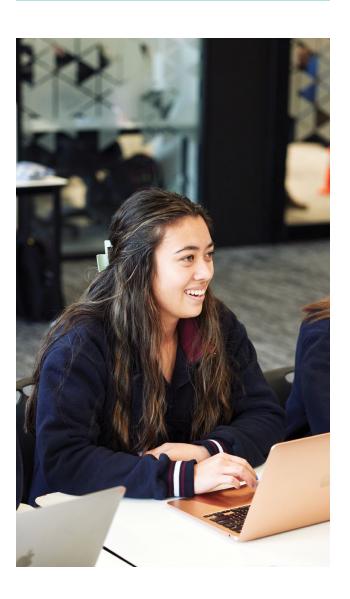
The School Improvement Dashboard, as well as the Achievement Profiles applications, provide information to schools in a form that is easy to interrogate and apply relevant filters (sex, year level etc) to further understand what the data is showing.

Strengthened government education data systems provide more consistent and practical information for school leaders to guide their analysis of local needs and plan effective responses to reduce bullying and increase student wellbeing.

Monitoring of research projects

Over the strategy period, the department continued to monitor local and international research projects relevant to the bullying prevention strategy and ongoing work to support children and young people in South Australia.

Future initiatives are informed by an evidence base that is locally, nationally and internationally relevant.

Program evaluations

Game On program

What is it?

Game On's project design was drawn from academic and practice-based evidence, with the overarching principle of an interconnected approach between home, school and community.

The program supported children to learn social skills, conflict resolution and problem solving in the context of tabletop gaming. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, Game On was run both face-to-face and online to support social distancing over the activity period.

The key aims of the program were to:

- deliver an engaging game-based activity to young people aged 10 to 12 years from schools in the City of Playford region
- teach skills to improve problem solving, conflict resolution and resilience based on evidence that these are protective factors against bullying
- create an environment that contributes to peer-to-peer connections and connections to role models and mentors, based on evidence that modelling positive and respectful behaviours and promoting inclusive environments around children are protective factors against bullying
- engage parents and caregivers to support their understanding of the benefits of the activities for their children and strengthen their community connections to encourage ongoing participation
- achieve a reduction in bullying incidents for the children who participate in the program, including a reduction in the rates of them engaging in bullying behaviour and experiencing bullying behaviour
- explore other possible benefits for participating children such as improvements in school attendance and behaviour.

What did we do?

Over the period of the pilot, 40 children were enrolled in Game On, however due to COVID-19 impacts a core group of 23 children were most actively engaged. As predicted, attendance fluctuated across the program. The average attendance of children at Game On was 60%, however a fifth of children attended 75% or more of sessions.

Game On encouraged peer relationships across school levels and ages through a shared activity with participants from year levels 4 to 7. Together, the children travelled to the venue, shared afternoon snacks and played various games in teams.

Staff and volunteers used a practical, co-designed 'Game On Code', with a reward system based on recognition of peers that encouraged peers to support each other and create connections by focusing on the strengths and positive behaviours of the children. Staff and volunteers worked from the basis of inclusion and used principles of trauma-informed practice.

What did we learn?

City of Playford undertook an evaluation of the program between July and December 2020 based on an 18-week period of data collection from the children, facilitators, parents and adults from the schools involved.

A pre and post program survey was made available to all participants, facilitators, parents, and adults in the school known to the children with a series of questions on self-awareness, self-management and social awareness. The evaluation indicated a small positive effect for several students who engaged in the program.

PEACE Pack

What is it?

The PEACE Pack, developed by Professor Phillip Slee and Dr Grace Skrzypiec from Flinders University, has a series of school-based strategies to provide safe learning and play spaces for students. It includes an 8-week anti-bullying intervention delivered by classroom teachers.

What did we do?

More than 2000 children and young people and 26 government schools took part in the PEACE Pack bullying prevention pilot program that ran in 2018. It trialled a new primary school curriculum to complement the existing secondary school curriculum.

What did we learn?

Evaluation of the 2018 pilot found that children and young people reported:

- feeling safer from bullying
- having fewer incidents of bullying
- having more skills to deal with bullying.

Students who were bullied reported a decrease in bullying at the end of the program which was sustained 2 months later. The extent of the reduction in bullying was higher for male students than female students.

Students who were seriously bullied (once a week or more) reported a decrease in bullying at the end of the program, which 2 months later was sustained. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female students.

More than 80% of the teachers in the pilot program reported enjoying teaching the PEACE Pack, and more than 70% of the teachers said that they intended to use the PEACE Pack again and would recommend it to other schools.

Friendly Schools

What is it?

Friendly Schools is a whole-school approach to building positive relationships, increasing social and emotional wellbeing and preventing bullying behaviours in primary and secondary schools.

Evidence shows that a student's social and emotional wellbeing influences their learning, behaviour and mental health.

Friendly Schools has 6 components of evidenced-based practice and typically takes schools at least 3 years to fully implement under a 5-stage cycle.

Each component has implementation toolkits that focus on building:

- school capacity
- a positive school culture
- robust policies and procedures
- higher levels of student, staff and parent understanding and competencies
- a protective physical environment
- engagement with families, services and the wider community.

What did we do?

The Friendly Schools pilot involved 10 government schools (9 primary schools and 1 B-12 school) in the Greater-Gawler partnership implementing whole-school response to bullying prevention over 2 years, 2020 and 2021. To foster a community approach, at the end of 2019, joint training was provided to government, Catholic and independent school representatives and principals in the Greater Gawler area.

Telethon Kids Institute evaluated the Friendly Schools pilot, examining process aspects (support and capacity for its implementation) and impact aspects (student, staff and school outcomes) for the schools that participated in the pilot. The evaluation also looked at the impact on students in years 4 to 6 by comparing outcomes for students at pilot schools with outcomes for students at similar schools who did not run the pilot.

What did we learn?

The pilot evaluation found that funded leadership positions were important in getting Friendly Schools established in each school and off the ground quickly in the first year of implementation. Systems-level roles were also critical in guiding school teams and facilitating efficiencies in communication, training/coaching, dissemination of resources, and whole-school collaborations and learning.

The school coordinator positions were important in facilitating team coordination, staff motivation and buy-in, increasing the school's capacity by facilitating planning and supporting classroom teachers.

Receiving a physical environment grant enabled schools to create a 'visible' first project that positively engaged students and facilitated opportunities for student voice.

Of the schools involved, 8 out of 10 demonstrated a high level of adherence to the implementation process after 2 years. The 2 schools that demonstrated low adherence faced significant leadership and staff changes that influenced their progress.

Map the Gap was found to be a powerful implementation tool used to assess current school practice and guide evidence-informed decision-making by teams to identify priorities and develop their action plans. Challenges to implementation included lack of team and staff planning time, staff buy-in and parent engagement, with the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions highlighted as a contributing factor to such challenges.

All pilot schools reported increases in implementation actions across each of the 6 whole-school components over the stages of the pilot. Increases in Friendly Schools implementation actions were found to strengthen the capacity, culture and policies and procedures of these schools. The impacts of this were more apparent than changing the school environment and building partnerships with parents and the wider community.

The Friendly Schools project components reported to have the largest impact in whole-school change were establishing a common language around social/emotional wellbeing and bullying behaviours – using lanyards for teachers for consistent response, and posters for students to reinforce skills learnt in curriculum lessons. These approaches supported positive student relationship building, bystander and help-seeking skills and behaviours.

Staff also reported feeling better equipped to respond and help students when they were approached with peer relationship issues.

Staff perceptions of both their school's climate and the priority of student wellbeing and bullying prevention significantly increased over the 2 years. In contrast, no significant differences were found in staff perceptions of the effectiveness of school actions and responses by staff.

The consistent positive outcome for students in pilot schools in 2019, 2020 and 2021 was having an important adult at school. In 2019 and 2021 students at pilot schools reported significantly higher school social engagement scores (combined connectedness to school, emotional engagement with teachers, school climate, school belonging, peer belonging, and friendship intimacy scores) than students at non-pilot schools.

At the end of the 2-year pilot, whole-school staff and school teams reported high levels of acceptability, fit, feasibility and likely sustainability of Friendly Schools. All schools perceived Friendly Schools to be a good return on investment.

Summary

This pilot evaluation reflects a mid-way look at the implementation and impacts of Friendly Schools within 10 schools. Research shows that it can typically take schools at least 3 years to embed whole-school strategies into everyday practice. Despite some challenges to implementation due to COVID-19, the pilot schools demonstrated progress towards implementation of evidence-based actions, and reported observed important changes at the school, staff and student levels.
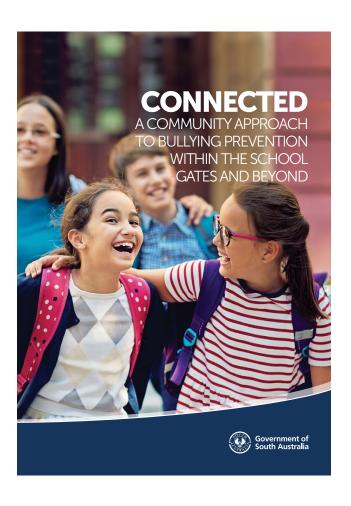
This pilot evaluation also offers important evidence about the implementation supports required for schools to effectively implement such a whole-school intervention. These are key considerations to inform implementation of the Friendly Schools approach more broadly across South Australian schools. The department is continuing to work with Telethon Kids Institute to further unpack the key findings and how best to translate this into effective implementation in schools.

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  - Catholic Education South Australia
  - City of Playford
  - Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People
  - Commissioner for Children and Young People
  - Department for Child Protection
  - Department for Education
  - Department of Human Services
  - Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People
  - Legal Services Commission
  - Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing
  - SA Health
  - South Australia Police
  - Training Centre Visitor
  - Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
  - Youth Law Australia.

CONNECTED
A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO BULLYING PREVENTION WITHIN THE SCHOOL GATES AND BEYOND

Government of South Australia

Beyond the strategy

Following the completion of the strategy, partners have a continued commitment to supporting safe environments for children and young people.

Lessons learnt and resources developed will continue to ensure evidence-informed approaches for bullying prevention and response in South Australian schools.

With significant investment in resource development over the strategy period, moving forward will bring with it an important focus on the promotion of resources to ensure they reach target groups, including educators and school-based staff.

Work undertaken under the strategy by Department for Education will be embedded into the business functions of the Engagement and Wellbeing directorate. This will incorporate the ongoing promotion and support for National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, regular review and update of resources, and ongoing monitoring of local and international research to inform future initiatives.

Government of South Australia
Department for Education