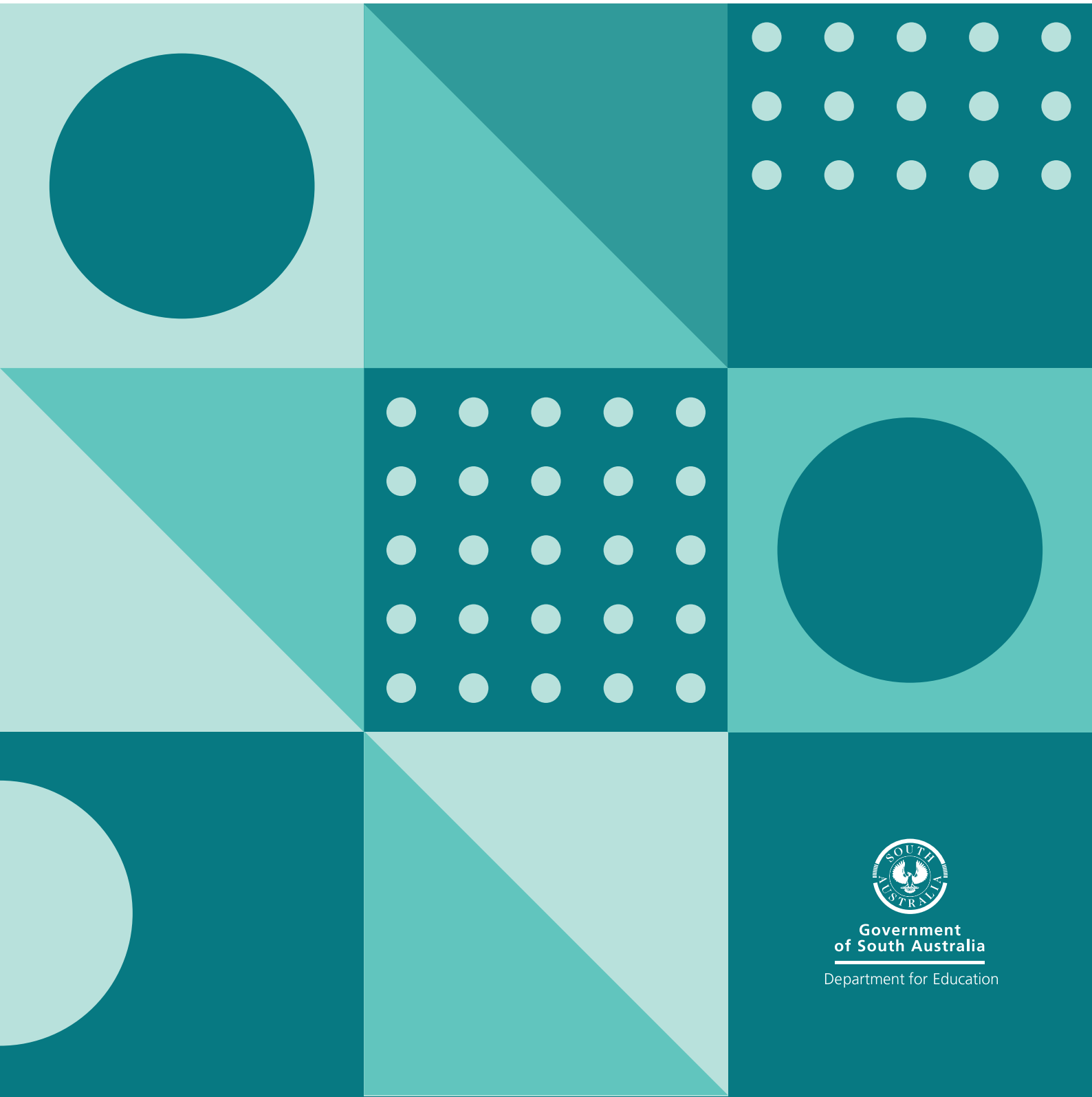
TAKING IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

MINISTER'S ROUNDTABLE ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS: SUMMARY REPORT



Government of South Australia
Department for Education

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

Violence in schools is a complex social issue and can stem from issues well beyond school. However, violence brought into the school environment can create unsafe learning environments and must be addressed – so we can ensure our schools are safe and supportive learning environments.

Preventing and responding to violence in schools is a priority for the South Australian Government.

While the number of violent incidents in schools are relatively small, and most students feel safe and well supported by their schools, there has been an increasing trend of violent incidents post-COVID. Any incident is unacceptable.

That's why I convened a Violence Prevention in Schools Roundtable. I wanted to know how the South Australian Government can further support preventive and responsive action to reduce this behaviour among students and parents.

The roundtable brought together schools, youth organisations and community groups, health professionals, academics, researchers and associations, along with the Offices of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, to have an honest conversation about what causes violence in schools and the practical steps we can take to address it.

Culture shapes behaviour. Behaviour in schools is influenced by the way adults and leaders behave and by the expectations of how the school community conducts itself. Cultures that are learning centred, respectful, inclusive and focussed on the empowerment of young people and meeting their need to belong are central to reducing violence in our school communities.

Supporting positive behaviour and preventing violence in schools is a shared responsibility and one we must all work towards to support all South Australian children and young people. Working in collaboration with stakeholders, families, and students is crucial.

Along with pursuing the immediate actions outlined in this report, we will continue to monitor data on violent incidents to inform system reforms and proactively provide tailored wrap-around support for schools as they need it. Whether it be security guards, the support of additional experienced leaders, or extra wellbeing and behaviour specialist support, we will not hesitate to respond decisively when needed.

I am committed to using every resource at my disposal to implement both system-wide and individual strategies to address this increasingly complex issue.

Hon Blair Boyer MP
Minister for Education, Training and Skills

ROUNDTABLE SNAPSHOT

On 6 December 2022, the Minister for Education, Training and Skills held a roundtable to hear from a broad range of government and non-government school stakeholders to better understand the causes of violence in schools and suggestions for responses.

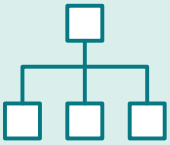
The event was attended by more than 70 people, including:

30

interagency partners and external stakeholders

17

school representatives



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departmental staff

(including executives, operational support staff and panellists).

At the event, participants:

- explored the comprehensive framework of departmental procedures, policies and programs already in place
- learnt about planned reforms underway to support the positive behaviour development of students
- heard from a panel of key departmental staff about the work being done to address violence in schools
- had an opportunity to ask questions about the systems and processes already in place as part of the existing program of reform.

Participants were also asked to identify:

- What is influencing the reported increase in violent behaviour in our schools?
- What strategies are effective in responding to violence in our schools?
- How can we better prevent violence occurring in our schools?

Following the roundtable, participants were encouraged to provide further detail on the 3 topics explored at the event via written submissions. Seven written submissions were received.

KEY THEMES

A comprehensive analysis of the roundtable discussions and written submissions was undertaken to identify key themes for further action. Roundtable participants agreed that violence in schools is a complex social issue. The need to engage in a community-wide approach to violence prevention and response was a recurring concept throughout the roundtable discussions and in the written submissions.

Preventative approaches

Preventing school violence requires building strong school and student foundations to strengthen overall wellbeing, resilience and positive behaviour support.

It is important that schools are supported and funded to implement proactive evidence-based wellbeing and positive behaviour programs to prevent behaviours that lead to violence.

Restorative practices

Support is needed for all children across all settings and schools. These supports need to include restorative practices in responding to and preventing violent behaviour in schools. This messaging came from both external stakeholders and school representatives, who were strongly united in their belief that this a key intervention.

It has been found that restorative approaches are extremely effective. Restorative practices at a whole school level build healthy and supportive school cultures by creating space for understanding others and developing relationships. They can include fostering empathy and respect, mutual responsibility and building trust.

Restorative practice can also be applied at the individual level when an incident has occurred. It can include identifying the impact, taking active responsibility and repairing the harm caused to others.

Teacher education

There is value in continued education and learning around positive behaviour development, as well as ongoing professional development. While there is significant training for staff involved in the Positive Behaviour for Learning pilot, there are opportunities to explore additional training for teachers. This would broaden and deepen their understanding of behaviour and how to respond to and prevent behaviours of concern.

Student voice and agency

Students are often the most knowledgeable about and most motivated to work together to help solve complex issues such as bullying and violence.

Involving student voice, participation and influence in decision making enriches solution exploration and implementation at both the school and system level.

Strengthening school, family and community partnerships

Trusting and transparent relationships between schools and families is key. We need to work with the community in collaboration to better support our schools in prevention and responsive action to violent behaviour.

Responses to violent incidents

It is important that schools use evidence-based response mechanisms that promote self-reflection, creating a safe space for those harmed to be heard and to repair relationships damaged through behaviour. Responses need to support reconnection and reintegration of students after violent incidents.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

Based on the emerging themes from the discussions at the roundtable and written submissions across school and corporate staff, interagency partners and external stakeholders, a number of immediate actions for 2023 will build on existing violence prevention and response initiatives:

1. The Department for Education will lead the development and implementation of an evolving and dynamic **Plan of Action** regarding violence prevention and response, informed by the voice of our students, parents, communities and partner agencies.

Preventative approaches

2. Funding totalling $14.2 million will be distributed to all schools for wellbeing as part of the new **Commonwealth Student Wellbeing Boost** initiative. The funding will be distributed proportionately based on student need and school factors, such as size and location.

3. **A dedicated webpage** has been developed providing schools with one stop easy access to a range of services, programs, resources and training available including preventative approaches such as positive behaviour, bullying prevention, and mental health and wellbeing.

4. A new **External Wellbeing Programs Directory** has been developed to support schools in selecting preventative evidence-based wellbeing programs relevant to their school needs. The directory programs have been rigorously selected to be evidence-based and effective in making a difference for students and schools. The directory will be reviewed and updated regularly.

Existing prevention actions

Where schools have been identified as being at risk of further violence, principals have been engaged to determine appropriate preventative supports, including:

- additional staff to assist further behaviour support processes and practices
- focussing on the needs of middle school/junior secondary students
- additional partnerships with community organisations delivering programs
- strengthening of security measures (personnel and technology)
- strengthening communications across the school community, to raise student, parent and community voice
- engaging local businesses where students congregate
- accelerating implementation of the Mobile Phone Policy
- review of physical space and recommended enhancements.

Restorative practices

5. Face-to-face **restorative practices training** will be available to all schools to build staff capacity to implement restorative approaches at a school-wide prevention level, as well as at a targeted level based on school needs (eg specific year levels).

6. Initial **direct funding** of $300,000 across around 30 schools will be provided to identified schools to engage external providers for more focused support to build school capacity and embed restorative practices at a **whole school level**. It will also be available to schools who require support to implement face-to-face restorative conferencing in the aftermath of a violent incident.

Teacher education

7. A series of **online learning modules** will be available to all school staff to scaffold professional development in violence prevention and response. Initially proposed modules include:
    - Preventing violence
    - Responding to violent incidents
    - Restorative interventions and conferencing.

Student Voice and Agency

8. A series of **student forums** will be undertaken to engage a diverse range of student cohorts directly on the issue of violence in schools.

9. A **student summit** will bring together students to discuss violence prevention and responses.

Strengthening school, family and community partnerships

10. **Online training and supporting resources** will be developed to help schools to strengthen engagement and partnership with their school community.

11. The 2024 **Parents in Education** (PIE) parent engagement grant funding round opening in 2023, which provides project funding for schools to better engage families, will focus on violence prevention through strengthening family, community and school partnerships. An increase to the funding pool will also be considered.

Responses to violent incidents

12. Improved data sets will be developed to enable **better monitoring and tracking** of current issues, targeted supports and impact of actions over time.

Existing responses to violent incidents

Where schools have experienced serious violent incidents involving students, either on campus or locally, initial supports can include:

- immediate engagement of parents and carers of impacted students and communication with the wider school community
- reporting to SAPOL and the department's Incident Management System
- prompt and clear application of the department's Behaviour Support Policy to understand the drivers of violence and establish appropriate consequences
- counselling services to impacted staff and students
- tailored support to priority student groups impacted
- security personnel on site
- referral to specialist services as required.

EXISTING INITIATIVES

Since March 2022, more mental health, wellbeing and positive behaviour development support for teachers and schools has been introduced, including:

School Mental Health Service

Rolling out in 2023, this service provides mental health practitioners based in schools to support young people with mild to moderate and emerging mental health concerns.

This is part of the State Government's commitment to invest $50 million to enable an additional 100 FTE mental health and learning support specialists to provide more support to students across South Australia. Those already recruited include Positive Behaviour for Learning specialists and Behaviour Support Coaches and Special Educators.

Autism Inclusion Teachers

Autism Inclusion Teachers (AITs) are now in every primary school (including reception to year 12 schools). AITs provide support to their fellow educators on how to best support and educate students with autism and drive improved practice relating to autism that works for their school.

Mobile phone ban

The department has introduced a new Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy, which bans the use of mobile phones at all public high schools. This has already been implemented at a third of high schools, with the remainder to implement the policy by term 3, 2023.

Student Wellbeing Leaders Conference March 2023

This year's conference featured expert local and national speakers on mental health, wellbeing and trauma informed practice and specific workshops on restorative practices to build Student Wellbeing Leaders' skills and knowledge to better support students.

Targeted support for schools

Focused support continues to be provided to schools identified to be at risk for and/or have experienced violent incidents.

For more information,
visit **www.education.sa.gov.au/violenceprevention**

The department has a range of training and resources available for schools to support positive behaviour development and violence prevention in schools, including:

Behaviour Support Coaches

Educators work in partnership with preschool and school staff, and families, to develop and implement evidence-based behavioural interventions.

Positive Behaviour for Learning

A framework that focuses on teaching behavioural skills through explicit instruction. This new whole-of-site approach pilot commenced in 2022.

National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence

The National Day of Action is an annual event that supports schools to work with their school communities to find practical and lasting solutions to bullying and violence. The department provided funding for nearly 400 eligible South Australian government schools and preschools to celebrate the 2022 National Day of Action and support their bullying prevention efforts. More information on funding available in 2023 will be released in term 2.

Behaviour support policy and toolkit

This policy outlines how department staff support safe and positive behaviour for children and young people in our learning environments, with supporting resources available in the toolkit.

Suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students procedure

This procedure guides school leaders in the targeted use of suspensions, exclusions and expulsions to support safe and positive behaviour in schools. It will be reviewed in 2023.

Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum is being updated to increase information about respectful relationships and consent.

The Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum (KS:CPC) is a respectful relationships and child safety curriculum for children and young people from preschool to year 12. It's taught to every year level in all public preschools and schools.

Learning about respectful relationships is at the foundation of the KS:CPC. The curriculum is set up so that what students are taught is appropriate for their age and developmental stage.

NEXT STEPS

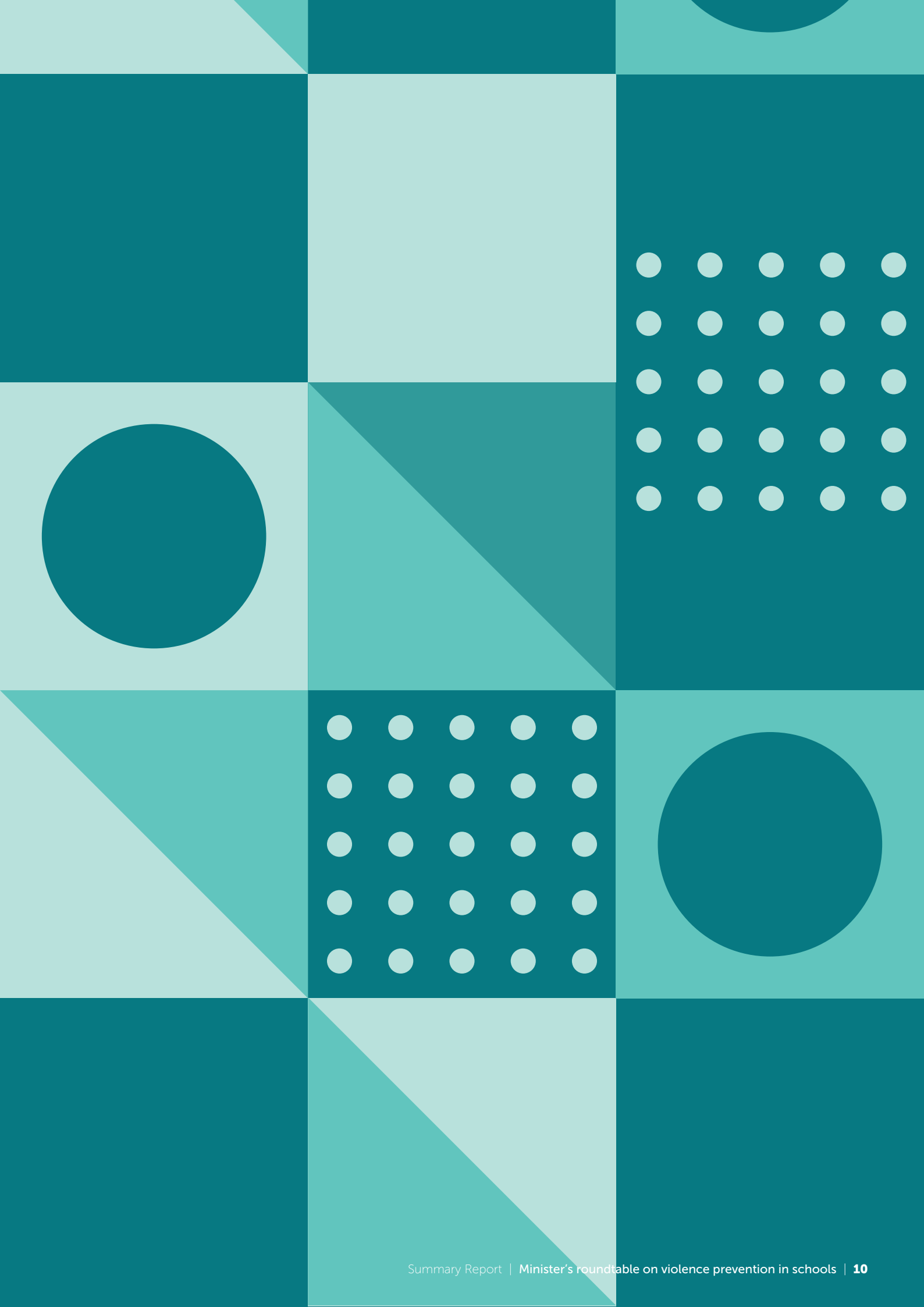
This is just the beginning. It aims to give us a solid foundation to make further improvements.

Violence is a complex social issue that requires a coordinated, multi-level strategic response.

Areas already identified for further exploration include:

- expansion of existing programs where data and evaluation is demonstrating impact
- refreshing bullying and violence programs with key government agencies
- alignment with complementary programs of work, including support for students with disabilities and reducing exclusionary discipline
- working with community and non-government schooling sector partners to identify shared and interrelated actions to address violence in schools.

As we develop our **Plan of Action**, we will continue to work with schools, parents and families, interagency partners, external stakeholders and students to review, refine and evolve our violence prevention and response strategies, to ensure schools are safe spaces for children and young people to grow, thrive and learn.



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