

School and Learning Consultation Technical Report



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

January 2018

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

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Message from the Commissioner

The evidence provided by the 1,812 West Australian school students who participated in this consultation is both compelling and thought provoking.

The student engagement framework developed out of the report identifies nine factors that influence a student's level of engagement in school and learning and the complex interplay these factors have on each other and overall engagement.

While reaffirming that the approaches within our schools meet the needs of most children and young people much of the time, the students' accounts also clearly identify areas for significant improvement that cannot be ignored. This is across all school sectors – government and non-government – and across a range of issues such as bullying, behaviour management, pedagogy and curriculum.

The findings also show that students, families, teachers and school staff, education administrators, governing authorities¹ and academics all have a role to play in creating the optimum learning environment for children and young people.

This report highlights a number of areas within education that require further research and exploration to test and better understand the impact of current approaches to engaging children and young people faced with a rapidly changing world.

Through the consultation, Aboriginal children and young people, children and young people with long-term health problems or disability, and males in regional schools identified specific issues that impact on their learning and engagement with education that urgently require greater attention. Within the context of this report, these children and young people are particularly vulnerable and the issues they experience require deeper consideration.

This will be a continuing area of advocacy for my office, and I will be working with schools and governing authorities to respond to the views expressed by students in this and previous consultations. I also plan to develop a series of policy briefs to further explore issues arising in the data to guide and assist decision-makers and teachers.

Schools are very busy environments with increasingly more demands placed on them to respond to a range of societal issues and educational needs. Much effort has been put into developing resources, frameworks, policies and programs to support and engage students. This work is important and has helped many students, but this report shows there is more to be done to create a truly responsive and equitable education system. I look forward to working with all school sectors to achieve this.

I will also monitor and report on progress on the recommendations of this report to ensure children and young people's views are respected and result in practical improvements for all WA students.

My thanks to all the school staff and students who participated in this project, your effort and insight has been invaluable.

Colin Pettit
Commissioner for Children and Young People

Findings and recommendations

The following findings and recommendations provide the starting point for an ongoing approach to building a community that values education and works together to build a system that is respectful, inclusive, dynamic and responsive to the needs of children and young people to achieve positive education outcomes to the best of every child's ability.

The findings and recommendations encapsulate the nine factors children and young people identified as influencing their engagement. As such, the recommendations focus on strengthening supportive relationships and addressing circumstances that impede engagement, with action required across all levels of the education system.

Finding 1

The views of WA school students are an invaluable but underutilised resource that provides an opportunity to challenge our approaches and beliefs regarding education and continually improve our practice.

Their voice will be critical in understanding if we have made progress, and undertaking a regular dialogue with students will be important to developing an ongoing, collaborative relationship between schools and students.

The National School Opinion Survey (NSOS) collects information from students, staff and parents on a regular basis and is an important repository of information that could be used to guide individual schools and systems level policy and practice.

Recommendation 1

- a) The Minister for Education review the way NSOS data is used and reported on to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policy and practice at a school level across WA.
- b) Governing authorities report on aggregated NSOS data relevant to the school sector in the annual reporting framework to monitor trends over time.
- c) Schools demonstrate via their annual reports the actions they will take as a result of the NSOS survey of student's responses.

Finding 2

Aboriginal students identified a number of areas that hinder engagement in their education and learning. The nature and quality of relationships with teachers and peers, the availability of support for learning and personal health problems, particularly difficulties with mental health, emerged as areas where many Aboriginal students experienced greater challenges than their non-Aboriginal peers.

Recommendation 2

Governing authorities review and evaluate the implementation of cultural frameworks for supporting Aboriginal students across schools in WA and report publically on the findings.

Finding 3

The foundations of a student's engagement are primarily based on the quality of relationships they have with teachers, school staff and other students.

Relationships with teachers emerged as the most significant foundational factor, even suggesting this to be a protective factor for students who had difficulties with family or peer relationships. Students acknowledged they had an important role to play in developing positive, respectful relationships with teachers, and also wanted teachers to treat students with respect.

The importance of having friends and positive relationships with other students was identified as a foundational element for engagement for any child or young person. Students looked to teachers to help students foster and maintain friendships with other students and build their resilience to bullying and adverse experiences.

Students called for teachers to be skilled not only in their subject matter but also in their ability to be able to develop positive and constructive relationships with students.

Recommendation 3

The governing authorities review the use of strategies and resources, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub, available to develop positive and respectful relationships across a school environment and report on the uptake, implementation and effectiveness across WA schools.

Recommendation 4

Schools be resourced to implement a whole-of-school approach to improve student-peer and student-teacher relationships and monitor and report annually on the strategies and outcomes of the approach. NSOS survey results or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on these relationships.

Recommendation 5

Governing authorities incorporate staff selection criteria addressing personal characteristics such as the value that teacher and student support candidates place on the development and maintenance of positive, respectful student-staff and parent-staff relationships into recruitment and selection processes.

Recommendation 6

Universities review current teacher training curriculums/course content in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with regard to a clear expectation of teacher requirements to include strong interpersonal skills with a desire to build positive relationships with students and parents. This should be incorporated into practical development and assessment.

Finding 4

Children and young people involved in the consultation valued the role that parents or guardians and their broader families played in their learning. The ability of parents or guardians and broader families to understand the significance of a balanced approach to schooling, in particular homework, was significant to students.

Students recognised that those students who do not have supportive families needed extra assistance provided through the school to address their disadvantage.

Recommendation 7

Governing authorities and other parent program providers support schools in accessing information for parents and guardians on how to support their children in their learning, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub website.

Recommendation 8

Governing authorities monitor and report on the effectiveness of reporting procedures and communication processes with students and parents employed by schools to ensure maximum effectiveness. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor this.

Finding 5

The role of teachers in providing a stimulating and positive learning environment was, unsurprisingly, critical to students' school and learning experiences.

Schools offering a wide range of learning activities and demonstrating the relevance of the curriculum to students' life outside of school and their future aspirations were seen as positively influencing engagement, particularly in the high school years.

Importantly, practical, hands-on learning tasks and opportunities for physical activity were seen as highly positive by male and female students alike.

In addition, when teachers were fair to all, had clear expectations and provided a safe and consistent learning environment, students stated they were more motivated and positive towards learning.

More than half of the participating students reported 'at least some of the time' not getting the help that they need to complete their school work and this has a significant influence on their indicators of engagement.

Recommendation 9

Federal and State Ministers for Education review the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians with regard to ensuring the relevance of curriculum and other aspects of education meet the contemporary needs of students.

Recommendation 10

Governing authorities review the mechanisms for monitoring the provision of support to students who require assistance to complete their school work and develop strategies to ensure that such assistance is provided. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on this.

Finding 6

Feeling safe at school was a key issue nominated by children and young people as something that schools should address as a matter of priority. Students who reported positive relationships with other students and with teachers were more likely to report feeling safe at school. Students with disability or long-term health conditions were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school and worried about issues such as bullying.

In addition to relationships, safety was impacted by the physical environment, school culture and approaches to responding to instances of bullying, such as consistency of response and modelling of respectful behaviours by teachers and school staff.

Recommendation 11

Governing authorities review and report on the resourcing, support and ongoing monitoring of the implementation of child safe policy and practice, and positive behaviour management across all schools in WA.

Recommendation 12

All schools implement the principles and practices of child safe organisations, underpinned by their own child safe policy. NSOS or other surveying of students should be used to monitor students reporting of safety at school on an ongoing basis.

Finding 7

Feeling supported to address personal problems and challenges, and feeling physically and mentally well was also important to students being able to attend, participate and achieve at school.

Physical and mental health has an impact across a range of engagement factors. There appears to be an under-diagnosis of physical and mental ill-health in schools, particularly for Aboriginal students, which warrants further investigation.

All students with a physical or mental health issue should have access to appropriate levels of support from schools to identify and manage the issue and reduce the impact of the issue on their engagement with school and learning.

Recommendation 13

Relevant governing authorities and key stakeholders work with the Commissioner for Children and Young People to review and develop a best practice model/s for implementation of social and personal support within schools.

Recommendation 14

The Department of Education commission a research project to investigate across all school sectors the apparent under-diagnosis of health conditions and the impact on students.

Endnotes

- 1 The information and recommendations in this report apply to government and non-government schools. The term 'governing authority' is used to describe the decision-making bodies that have oversight of the education system in WA and includes the Department of Education in its recently amalgamated form and, where separate governance is responsible, the Catholic Education Office, the Association of Independent Schools WA and individual governing bodies of independent schools.



Introduction

Why focus on children and young people's engagement in education?

Education is a key influence on a child's life. Early engagement with school and learning assists a child to develop skills to succeed academically and build and maintain social relationships.

Schooling has a strong influence on a child's future pathway into employment and further education.² Children and young people have also identified that getting a 'good education' is important to their wellbeing and future opportunities.

Research shows poor engagement with school may result in poor educational outcomes, diminished employment prospects and, for some, adverse life outcomes, including social exclusion, poverty and involvement with the justice system.³

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have the right to accessible education and should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.⁴

The difficulties some WA children and young people experience in attending school and having a positive educational experience has often been raised with the Commissioner in his discussions with parents and professionals in both regional communities and metropolitan Perth.

When speaking to the Commissioner, children and young people have also expressed concerns that some of their peers do not participate positively in school, which can either mean that some do not regularly attend school and others attend but disrupt learning for fellow students.

To gain a broader understanding of the issues influencing engagement in education, the Commissioner published in 2015 a literature review, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*.⁵

One of the key issues identified in the literature review was that children and young people's views on school and learning and their experiences of education are largely absent from research on student's engagement and disengagement. Similarly, there is little evidence of students' involvement in shaping the way education is delivered to them – particularly in regard to improving their engagement with school and learning.⁶

When consulted, children and young people identify two factors as most significant:

1. Relationships with friends and teachers
2. Curriculum content and the way it is taught.⁷

International research on resilience led by Dr Michael Ungar (2014 Commissioner for Children and Young People Thinker in Residence) has found supportive relationships are one of the nine factors important for resilience and to protect children and young people from the negative consequences that follow exposure to risk.⁸

In almost every consultation the Commissioner has undertaken with children and young people, education, school, teachers and other school staff have been consistently identified by children and young people as having an important role in relation to their wellbeing.⁹ Through a consultation in 2010, a good education was one of eight things children and young people said was important for their wellbeing.¹⁰ In a more recent consultation, Aboriginal children and young people identified how important it was for them to access education and for barriers to access to be reduced.¹¹

Consultations on youth health, mental health and wellbeing identified the importance of schools, teachers and other school staff for help, advice, information and support.^{12 13}

The literature review found very limited research on parents' views on their child's engagement/disengagement¹⁴ despite there being a large body of evidence demonstrating the significant and ongoing impact parental engagement has on the academic outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.¹⁵ Parental engagement is the focus of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Parental Engagement Project, after parent engagement formed one of the four components of the Commonwealth Government's Students First policy.

Understanding children and young people's views on what factors influence their engagement or disengagement from school and learning is critical to improving educational outcomes for all Western Australian students.

Overview of the School and Learning Consultation

From July to November 2016, the Commissioner for Children and Young People undertook the office's largest consultation to date, the School and Learning Consultation.

The purpose of the School and Learning Consultation was to seek the views of Year 3 to Year 12 students enrolled in government, Catholic and independent schools across WA on the positive and negative factors that influence their engagement in education.

The consultation comprised two components: an individual electronic student survey and group discussions with students facilitated by the Commissioner's staff.

The survey enabled a large number of children and young people to participate in the consultation, with the group discussions enabling children and young people to express more wide-ranging and in-depth views on school and learning.

In total, 1,812 students across 98 schools participated in the survey and 1,174 students participated in the group discussion between July and November 2016. Schools from all nine geographic regions of WA were involved in the consultation.

Participation by students in the consultation was anonymous and voluntary. Active student and parent/guardian consent was required for participation in the consultation.

The survey questions were drawn from the New Zealand Youth 2000 Survey¹⁶ and adapted to the Western Australian context, for a younger cohort of students and for students with disability attending education support centres. Each version of the survey was slightly different meaning that the different cohorts of students were not asked all the same questions.

Both the survey and group discussions were designed to canvas a broad range of factors identified by the literature review as associated with engagement and disengagement including:

- relationships with staff and students
- curriculum content
- safety
- health
- academic achievement
- attendance
- help and support
- pedagogy
- participation in school activities
- family situation and involvement.

Framing a discussion around engagement

The Commissioner's 2015 literature review showed a student's engagement or disengagement with school and learning is complex and influenced by multiple factors.¹⁷

The literature review identified the following concepts as being core to understanding the complexity surrounding student engagement or disengagement:

- Students can be disengaged at different levels (e.g. with content, in class, with school, and/or with education as a whole).
- There are different types or domains of engagement (e.g. emotional, behavioural, and cognitive).
- Where levels of disengagement intersect with types of disengagement, different indicators of disengagement can be identified (e.g. behavioural disengagement with class content may be indicated by poor classroom behaviour; emotional disengagement with school in general may be indicated by poor school connectedness). Disengagement can therefore be indicated and measured in multiple ways.
- Disengagement is both a process and an outcome. For example, student absenteeism may reflect disengagement from school, but it is also a risk factor for other disengagement indicators such as early school leaving.
- Contexts beyond the educational setting (i.e. family) are an integral part of disengagement processes for children and young people.

Student engagement is important because disengaged students are at risk of a range of adverse academic and social outcomes that have implications beyond the compulsory school years. Critically, disengagement is reciprocal, cyclical and reinforced over time, and it is therefore important to identify problems with engagement early.¹⁸

Student engagement and disengagement is strongly associated with the home and family context and the degree to which parents can economically, socially, and emotionally support children and young people to engage at school. A large volume of Australian and international research consistently shows that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience markers of disengagement.¹⁹

Poor attendance and engagement at school remains problematic particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal students and students living in remote areas.²⁰ The Longitudinal Study of Australia's Children has also found higher levels of non-attendance among Aboriginal children, children from lone-mother families, children experiencing bullying at school, and children with non-working mothers, than other children.²¹

Due to its complexity, there is no 'one indicator' to measure the prevalence of student disengagement. The literature review therefore examined a range of single markers and found that in Australia about one in five students (20%) could be considered to have some level of disengagement with school.

In setting out to hear from students about the positive and negative factors that influence their engagement in education, a wide range of elements identified as impacting on engagement were canvassed for the consultation in order to understand what factors are important and meaningful to students themselves.

The indicators that emerged from the School and Learning Consultation as meaningful and relevant to students are discussed in Chapter 2 – Engagement Indicators.

WA context

While complexities exist in measuring engagement, at its rawest form engagement can be measured through enrolment, attendance and retention rates.²²

In 2016, there were 443,595 students enrolled across 1,109 schools in WA. More than one-third of schools (40.9% to 36.9%) were located in a regional area and had a combined enrolment of 97,050 students (21.9%).

28,038 or 6.3 per cent of all WA students identified themselves as Aboriginal.²³ Nationally, the enrolment of Aboriginal students in schooling has increased substantially.²⁴

Attendance

Regular school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind socially and developmentally.²⁵

Nationally, student attendance rates are specified as a performance indicator within the National Education Agreement and as a key performance measure (KPM) in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia. From the year 2014 onwards, nationally comparable student attendance data are being collected.²⁶

The National Report on Schooling Data Portal shows that for WA in 2016, the student attendance rate for all schools was 93.0 per cent in Years 1 to 6 dropping to 89.9 per cent in Years 7 to 10.²⁷ These rates were lower than the national rates for that year (93.5% for Years 1 to 6 and 91.1% for Years 7 to 10).²⁸

Aboriginal students were significantly more likely than other students to attend less than 80 per cent of the time, with the National Report on Schooling Data Portal showing an attendance rate of 76.6 per cent for Aboriginal students in WA in 2016 compared to a rate of 92.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal students. This represents the second lowest attendance rate for Aboriginal students nationally.²⁹ The difference in student attendance rates between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students increases from primary school to high school.³⁰

Nationally, student attendance decreases the further students live from major cities.³¹

Retention

Young people who complete Year 12 or an equivalent education have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes and higher incomes across their lives.³²

In WA, students are required to remain at school or participate in an approved non-school option (such as employment or training) until the end of the year they turn 17 years and 6 months, or graduate from high school.

In 2016, the apparent retention rate Year 10 to Year 12 for all students in WA was 80.5 per cent. This represents an increase from the 76.5 per cent recorded in 2010 but was slightly lower than the equivalent national rate of 82.9 per cent.³³ However, particular groups of students report much lower rates of retention.

It remains of ongoing concern that the proportion of WA Aboriginal students continuing from Year 10 to Year 12 remained as low as 51.4 per cent in 2016, which was significantly below the rate for non-Aboriginal students of 82.3 per cent.³⁴

In regard to students in regional and remote areas, Year 12 completion rates of Australian young people in remote and very remote areas in 2011 were only 56.4 per cent and 43.4 per cent respectively.³⁵

The proportion of Aboriginal young people (20 to 24 years) who had achieved Year 12 or an equivalent qualification varied from 65.6 per cent in outer regional areas to 36.8 per cent in very remote areas.³⁶

In 2015, only 41 per cent of people aged 15 to 64 years with disability had completed Year 12 or an equivalent qualification compared to 61 per cent of people without disability.³⁷

Data on domains of engagement

In regard to the three domains of engagement (cognitive, emotional and behavioural), 2012 data showed that WA students recorded results just below the Australian and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) averages in cognitive and emotional engagement, but just above in behavioural engagement.³⁸ Further, analysis of student dispositions towards school found approximately 30 to 40 per cent of WA students did not feel a sense of belonging, self-confidence, purpose or perseverance.³⁹

Endnotes

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- 20 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015, *Australia's welfare 2015*, Australia's Welfare Series No. 12, Cat. No. AUS 189, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, section 3.4.
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- 24 From 84.1 percent in 2008 to 97.8 percent in 2014. For further information see Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre 2017, *Educate Australia Fair? Education Inequality in Australia*, Focus on the States Series, No. 5, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre.
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- 33 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2017, *National Report on Schooling data portal*, 'Apparent retention rates for students, Year 10 – 12 by state/territory and sector', [website], <<http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/displayviewreport?cubeid=6&viewid=1>>
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- 39 Ibid, p. 62.



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Undertaking the School and Learning Consultation

Reference Group

A Reference Group was established to inform the development and implementation of the consultation.

The Reference Group comprised the following members:

Mr Colin Pettit, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (Chair)

Professor Barry Down, School of Education, Murdoch University

Mrs Annie Fogarty AM, Ambassador for Children and Young People and Founder, The Fogarty Foundation

Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools Western Australia

Mr Lindsay Hale, A/Deputy Director General Schools, Department of Education

Ms Hancock, Life Course Centre Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute

Ms Fiona Harlond, Principal Education Officer, Child Protection and Family Support, Department of Communities

Ms Eileen Kuruckchi, President, School Psychologists Association of WA

Associate Professor Dr Libby Lee-Hammond, Early Childhood Education, Murdoch University

Dr Tim McDonald, Director, Catholic Education Office

Ms Paulina Motlop, Director Aboriginal Education Teaching and Learning, Department of Education

Ms Nikki Niha, Teacher, Corridors College

Ms Joanne Taggart, Director Education Regulation, Department of Education

Associate Professor Edward Wilkes, National Drug Research Institute

The Reference Group met four times and provided advice outside of the meetings.

Advisory Committees

The two 2016 Advisory Committees supported the consultation by providing advice at various stages of the project including providing feedback on the content and structure of the survey and group discussion questions.

The 2016 Advisory Committees were:

Swan View Senior High School – Metropolitan Advisory Committee

North Albany Senior High School – Regional Advisory Committee

Advice on the Year 3 to Year 6 survey and the group discussion questions was also sought from:

Year 4 and Year 5 students Scotch College Junior School

Year 3 and Year 6 students Carine Primary School

Methodology

The purpose of this consultation was to seek the views of Year 3 to Year 12 students enrolled in government, Catholic and independent schools across WA on the positive and negative factors that influence their engagement in education.

A mixed methods approach was adopted for the consultation, comprising two components: an individual electronic student survey delivered through the SurveyGizmo platform (quantitative research tool), and group discussions with students facilitated by the Commissioner's staff (qualitative research tool). This approach enabled the views of a large number of children and young people to be heard through the survey, with more in-depth discussions occurring through the group discussions.

In addition to these components, parents/guardians of students who agreed to take part in the consultation were also given the opportunity to provide their views via a survey that comprised quantitative and qualitative elements (multiple choice questions and open narrative responses).

A two-stage stratified sampling design was used for the surveys:

- The stratified random sample was drawn from all WA schools using the WA School List 2016 (Semester 1).⁴⁰
- Education support centres were included.
- Schools with an enrolment of less than 20 students were included and matched with a supplementary school.
- Single sex schools were matched with a supplementary opposite sex school.
- Stratification was by geographic location (metropolitan and regional) and educational sector (government/Catholic/independent).
- Schools selected through stratified random sampling constituted the main sample.

In addition, a distinct number of regional schools were also drawn (not randomly) in order to increase the participation of regional students and students who are Aboriginal. These schools constituted the additional sample (and were not part of the main sample). The purpose of the additional sample was to oversample for these two particular groups of students in order to allow for more accurate comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and between regional and metropolitan students.

In total, 1,812 students across 98 schools participated in the survey and 1,174 students participated in the group discussion between July and November 2016.⁴¹

Participation by students in the consultation was anonymous and voluntary. Active student and parent/guardian consent was required for participation in the consultation (opt-in approach).

Students could choose to participate in the survey, the group discussion or both the survey and the group discussion. Participation in the consultation was limited to no more than 40 students per school for the survey and no more than 15 students per school for the group discussion.⁴²

Parents/guardians who provided consent for their child's participation in the consultation could choose to participate in the parent survey. A link to the survey was provided to them following their child/children's participation in the student consultation.

In total, 421 parents participated between August and November 2016.

All student surveys as well as the group discussion questions were trialled with selected student groups. The parent survey was also trialled with a select group of parents.

Similarly, key findings from the consultation were presented and discussed with a number of students from participating schools at post-consultation workshops held in February 2017.

Further detail about the sampling method, strategy and sample characteristics are included in Appendix 1 – Technical notes.

Data analysis

The student and parent survey data were analysed using SurveyGizmo analysis tools, including cross Tabulation. The Telethon Kids Institute was engaged to provide statistical advice and to conduct independent checks of the survey data and the results provided in this report. These checks included accuracy of the reported figures, confidence intervals of proportions, and assessing if group differences in survey responses were statistically significant (for example, if the proportion of students who like school 'a lot' was statistically different for regional and metropolitan students). The chi-square test of independence was used to assess these group differences. The data checks were carried out using SAS 9.4 and the surveyfreq procedure. The detail of the statistical checks are not included in the report but are available upon request.

The group discussion data was analysed using NVivo content analysis tools.

The sample

Despite the use of a stratified sampling design from the frame of all WA schools, the participating students are not representative of the WA student population as a whole.

The reasons for this are:

- 1. Active consent requirement for students and parents/guardians (opt-in approach rather than opt-out):** the opt-in consent approach requires potential participants and their parents/guardians to return a signed consent form through which they indicate their consent. The opt-out approach on the other hand is a method where information will be provided to the potential participants and their parents/guardians regarding the activity and their involvement in which their participation is presumed unless they and/or their parents/guardians take action to decline participation. Research has shown that studies carried out under parental opt-in consent conditions can result in low participation rates and return samples that under-represent students “who are more involved in and more at risk of involvement in problem behaviours” and “young people at higher risk who are most able to inform and benefit from the research”.⁴³

The active consent requirement meant that the anticipated response rate from students was revised from 80 per cent to 10 per cent. The actual student response rate in the study was eight per cent.
- 2. Lower than expected response rate from schools:** Schools are extremely busy environments that often face competing research projects amidst a raft of other priorities. It was often difficult for the schools to agree to participation in the Commissioner’s School and Learning Consultation due to other commitments.

The anticipated response rate from schools was 80 per cent. The actual school response rate was 63 per cent.
- 3. Information provided to potential participants and parents/guardians was too comprehensive:** Feedback from participating schools revealed that the information provided to potential participants and their parents/guardians was for some too comprehensive or lengthy. This may have impacted on the response rate from students and their parents/guardians in that the information was not read and the invitation rejected.

These factors resulted in a sample of students that can be described as having a higher level of engagement with their schooling than the broader student population as a whole.

The prevalence of disengaged behaviours for the population of Western Australian students is therefore likely to be higher than those reported in this consultation report.⁴⁴

Ethics

The consultation underwent external ethics review by two research experts as required by the Commissioner’s Ethical Research and Consultation with Children and Young People Policy.

In addition, the consultation received ethics approval from the Department of Education and Catholic Education Office. Principals provided consent for their students in their schools to be approached to participate.

The children and young people who participated in the consultation and their parents/guardians were required to provide written informed consent. The Commissioner’s Participation Policy and Participation Consent Policy guided the processes for seeking consent and for undertaking the consultation.

Notes on the report

The structure of this report aligns with the three key components of the Student Engagement Framework Model, as depicted in Chapter 2 – Engagement Indicators.

First, the report presents findings relating to Engagement Indicators. This is followed by a discussion of the primary and then secondary factors that have been found to influence students' engagement with school and learning.

In most chapters, findings from the quantitative and qualitative research components have been integrated in such a way that the survey findings (quantitative component) are discussed first followed by an analysis of the group discussion findings (qualitative component). The remaining chapters contain results from one research component only (for example if the topic was not part of the student survey or the group discussion).

Specifically relating to data from the student survey, each chapter includes results for all participating students as well as comparisons between the following student groups: female and male students, students in metropolitan and regional areas, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In some chapters, additional comparisons such as between students born in Australia and students born elsewhere have also been included if they were deemed relevant.

Where differences have been found between individual student groups, the report identifies whether the difference is statistically significant or not.

No comparisons between individual student groups have been made in the analysis of the information from the group discussions. However, some comments from students are included where they made reference to particular groups of students based on school characteristics (such as students attending schools in regional locations or boarding schools) or student characteristics (such as those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersex (LGBTI)).

Each chapter concludes with student suggestions for change as articulated by students in response to the question: "If you could change one thing about your school, what would that be?"

Additionally, the report also includes separate chapters with information and findings relating to:

- students in education support centres and students with disability
- students in regional areas
- Aboriginal students.

The chapter relating to students in education support centres is a descriptive analysis of information from the survey that includes no quantitative findings due to the small sample size of participating students.

The chapters relating to students in regional areas and Aboriginal students are comparative in nature and present quantitative findings that compare the results for regional students to the results for metropolitan students and the results for Aboriginal students to results for non-Aboriginal students.

The last chapter is a summary of the information gained from parents and carers through the electronic parent survey. The chapter presents both quantitative and qualitative findings.

Endnotes

- 40 List provided by the Department of Education WA in March 2016.
- 41 For a detailed breakdown of the main and the additional sample see Appendix 1 – Technical notes.
- 42 An exception was made for a small number of schools at which significantly more than the expected number of student consent forms were returned. For operational reasons and in order to avoid student disappointment, the decision was made to increase the number of students participating in the survey and/or the group discussion. Where this occurred, students were consulted on separate days and in separate groups of no more than 20.
- 43 Shaw T 2014, *Submission to Review of Chapter 2.3 of the National Statement: Qualifying or waiving conditions for consent submission*, Submission ID: 38, National Health and Medical Research Council, <https://consultations.nhmrc.gov.au/public_consultations/submissions/NSC/2684?>
- 44 While there is no ‘one indicator’ to measure the prevalence of student engagement or disengagement, single markers may be used as indicators of different types of disengagement. The literature review found that about 20 per cent of students are consistently disengaged when considering classroom behaviours. See Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p. 6.



Results of the School and Learning Consultation

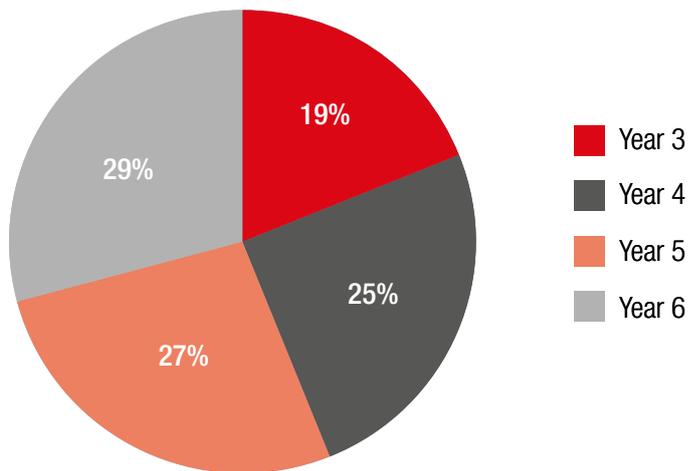
1. Profile statistics

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 – main sample

A total of 954 students in Year 3 to Year 6 participated in the School and Learning survey, with 774 of these students constituting the main sample.

The distribution of students in the main sample across the four year levels was relatively even:

Graph 1.1: Distribution of Year 3 to Year 6 students across each year level, students in main sample



More female students than male students participated with 58 per cent of the main sample identifying as female and 42 per cent identifying as male.

Sixty per cent of participating Year 3 to Year 6 students attended school in metropolitan areas and 40 per cent attended a regional school.

Nine per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students were Aboriginal. Among Aboriginal students, 76 per cent attended school in a regional area and 24 per cent attended a metropolitan school.

Eighteen per cent of participants were born in a country other than Australia and 69 per cent reported having a nationality or cultural background in addition to or other than Australian (British was the most common other nationality or cultural background followed by New Zealander, Aboriginal Australian, Indian and Malay).

Nearly 30 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said that their parents usually spoke a language other than English with Aboriginal languages, Mandarin and Italian being the most commonly spoken other languages by parents.

In regard to their own language skills, almost 46 per cent of students reported speaking at least one language other than English fluently enough to have a conversation in. Italian, French, Mandarin and Aboriginal languages were the languages most commonly named by students. The list of languages named by students suggests that the 46 per cent includes those who acquired a language through informal tuition in the home environment as well as students who learn or learnt a foreign language through formal tuition at school.

Nearly one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students (46%) had attended more than one primary school and 17 per cent had attended three or more.

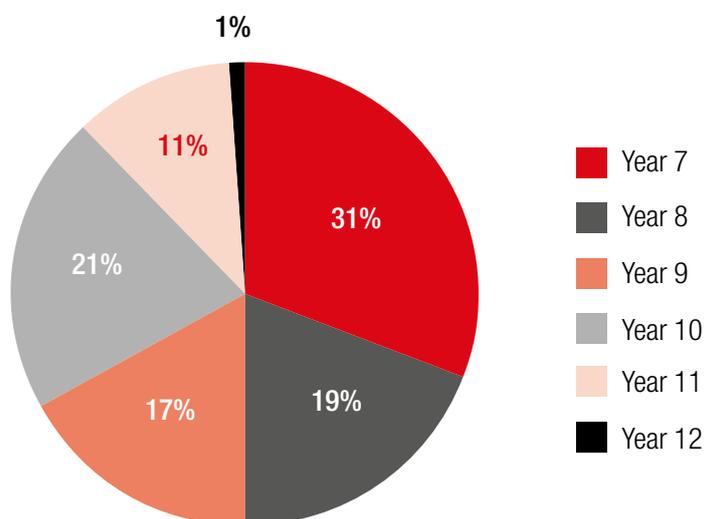
No significant differences were found between male and female students and between students in regional and metropolitan areas. A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported having attended three or more schools (24.6% versus 16.1%), however the difference was not statistically significant.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 – main sample

A total of 837 students in Year 7 to Year 12 participated in the School and Learning survey with 681 of these students constituting the main sample.⁴⁵

The distribution of students in the main sample across the six year levels was as follows:

Graph 1.2: Distribution of Year 7 to Year 12 students across each year level, students in main sample



More female students than male students participated with 57 per cent of the main sample identifying as female, 42 per cent identifying as male and one per cent identifying as other.

Seventy per cent of participating Year 7 to Year 12 students attended school in metropolitan areas and 30 per cent attended a regional school.

Six per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students were Aboriginal. Among participating Aboriginal students, 67 per cent attended school in a regional area and 33 per cent attended a metropolitan school.

Twenty-three per cent of participants were born in a country other than Australia and 89 per cent reported having a nationality or cultural background in addition to or other than Australian (British was the most common other nationality or cultural background followed by New Zealander, Aboriginal Australian and Indian).

One-third of Year 7 to Year 12 students said that their parents usually spoke a language other than English with Aboriginal languages, Arabic and Vietnamese being the most commonly spoken other languages by parents.

In regard to their own language skills, 40 per cent of students reported speaking at least one language other than English fluently enough to have a conversation in. French, Italian, Arabic and Vietnamese were the languages most commonly named by students. The list of languages named by students suggests that the 40 per cent who speak at least one other language includes students who acquired a language through informal tuition in the home environment as well as students who learn or learnt a foreign language through formal tuition at school.

Twenty-five per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students had attended more than one high school and eight per cent had attended three or more. As with the younger cohort, there were no significant differences measured between male and female students and students in regional and metropolitan areas. Yet again, a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported having attended three or more high schools (13.9% versus 7.5%) however the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 1.1: Proportion of participating students having attended three or more primary or high schools, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Year 3 to Year 6 | 16.3 | 17.2 | 15.8 | 18.2 | 16.1 | 25 | 16.8 |
| Year 7 to Year 12 | 8.2 | 8 | 7.6 | 8.7 | 7.5 | 14 | 7.9 |

Table 1.2: Proportion of participating students with selected characteristics, by year level

| | Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 42.1 | 41.9 |
| Female | 57.9 | 57.3 |
| Other | n/a | 0.9 |
| Metropolitan | 59.6 | 69.5 |
| Regional | 40.4 | 30.5 |
| Non-Aboriginal | 91.0 | 93.7 |
| Aboriginal | 9.0 | 6.3 |
| Born in Australia | 82.2 | 76.8 |
| Born elsewhere | 17.8 | 23.2 |

Students attending education support centres

In total, 21 students in Year 3 to Year 12 attending an education support centre participated in the School and Learning Consultation survey. Due to the small sample size, the discussion of findings is descriptive and focuses on outlining broad trends only.

One-quarter of students in education support centres were born outside of Australia and reported that their parents spoke a language other than English at home.

No Aboriginal students attending an education support centre participated in the survey.

The discussion of findings for students attending education support centres can be found in Chapter 5 – Students in education support centres and students with disability.

2. Engagement Indicators

The complexity of student engagement has been firmly established in the research literature on the issue.⁴⁶ Various terminology has been used to describe the different influences on engagement, including indicators, factors and elements. Often these terms are used interchangeably. In setting out to hear from students about what helps them be engaged with school and learning and what makes it difficult, a wide range of elements identified as impacting on engagement were canvassed to understand what factors are important and meaningful to students.

Analysis of the data gained from students showed evidence of a complex interplay between the different elements. Four elements emerged as clear indicators of engagement and were used to measure a student's level of engagement. Other elements were identified as factors that influenced engagement but did not show an indication of how well a student was engaged at school.

The following four indicators emerged from the consultation as meaningful and relevant to students in the context of engagement:

1. Attendance
2. Academic achievement
3. Liking school
4. Sense of belonging.

Each of the indicators was measured by specific survey questions (for example "How important is it to you to be at school every day?" or "Do you feel like you are part of your school?"). For students in Year 3 to Year 6, Indicators 3 and 4 were combined as one survey question to make them easy to understand.⁴⁷

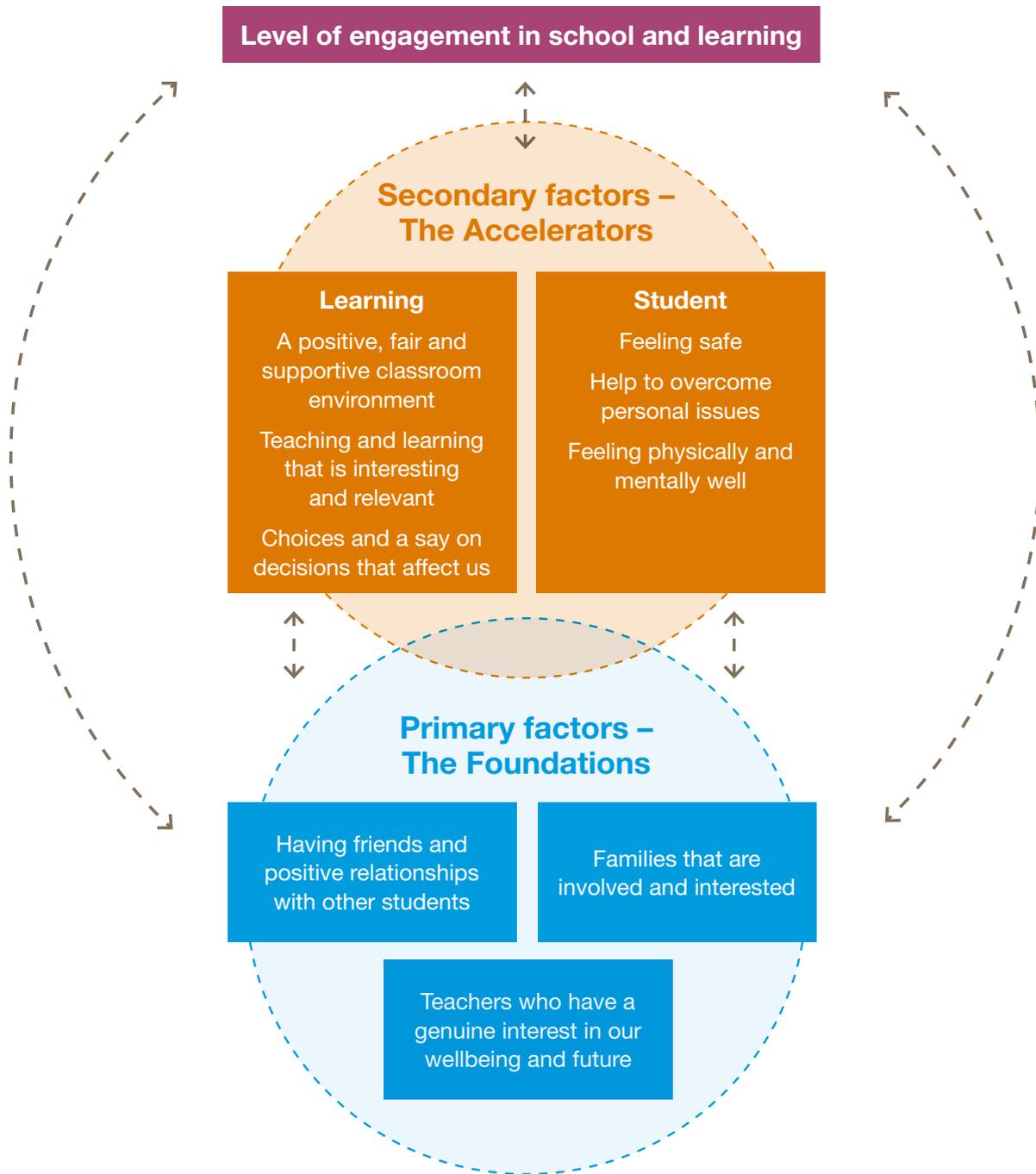
These indicators provide a sufficiently broad 'definition' of engagement, identifying, for example, that even if a student attends school and achieves well, they may not be fully engaged or achieving maximum value from their education if they do not enjoy school or feel as though they belong.

By analysing participants' comments in relation to these four indicators, the consultation was able to identify what factors had the most influence on their engagement. The factors are discussed in Chapter 3 – Primary factors – The foundations for engagement with school and learning and Chapter 4 – Secondary factors – The accelerators for engagement with school and learning.

The following sections of this chapter describe the level of engagement students who participated in the consultation have with their school and learning according to the identified indicators.

The Student Engagement Framework

The nine factors and their inter-relatedness can be described with the following model:



2.1 Liking school and sense of belonging

Sense of belonging is a basic human need such as food or shelter, and is critically important to a child's healthy physical and mental development. Sense of belonging at school can be referred to as 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment'.⁴⁸

Research suggests that sense of belonging at school and the degree to which students report liking school has an important influence on students' academic motivation, engagement and participation, and that unless students identify well with their schools, their educational outcomes will be limited.^{49 50}

Survey findings

- 49 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 33 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they like school 'a lot'.
- Four per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 11 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'don't like' school.
- Four in five students across all years mentioned 'seeing my friends'/'hanging out with friends' as one of the things they most like about school.
- 75 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel like they are part of their school.

Do students like school?

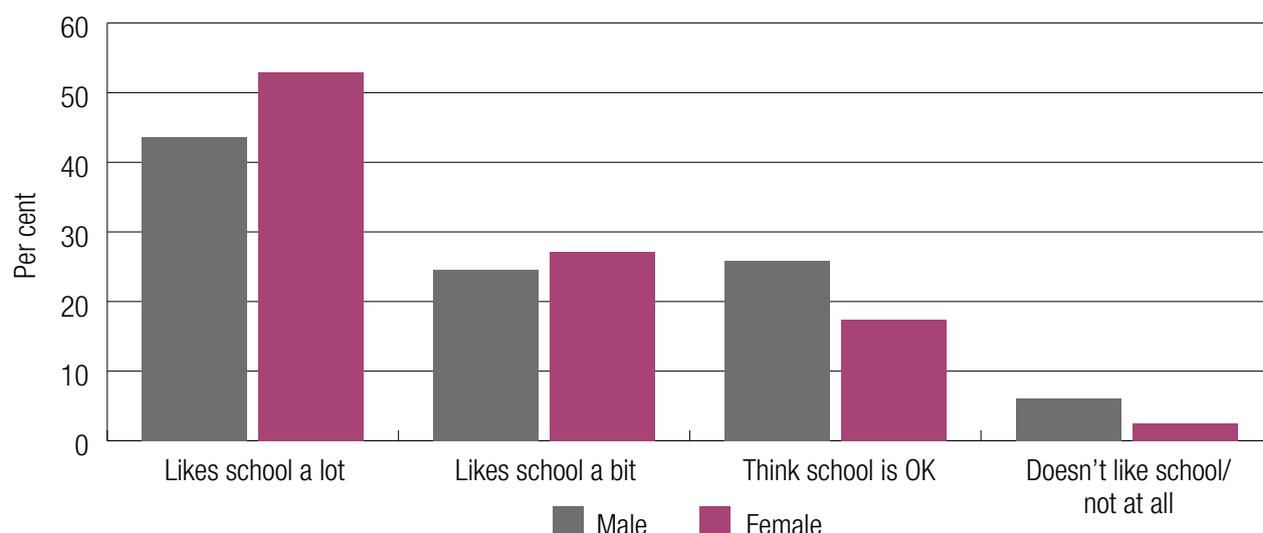
Almost one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students (49.0%) reported that they like school 'a lot' and one-quarter (26%) said they like school 'a bit'. Twenty-one per cent of students answered school 'is OK'.

Four per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'.

Female students were more likely than male students to report that they like school 'a lot' (52.9% of girls compared to 43.6% of boys). Female students were also slightly more likely to say they like school 'a bit', however, the difference was not statistically significant (27.2% of girls said this compared to 24.5% of boys).

Consequently, boys were more likely than girls to say that school 'is OK' and they were also more likely than their female counterparts to not like school or not like school 'at all' (6.1% of boys compared with 2.5% of girls).

Graph 2.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school/not at all, by gender



Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students were somewhat more likely than non-Aboriginal students to say that they 'like school a lot' (54.8% compared to 48.4%) and also that they 'don't like school'⁵¹ (6.9% compared to 3.7%) but the differences were not statistically significant.

No significant difference in relation to how students feel about school was found between regional and metropolitan students and students born in Australia and elsewhere.

Table 2.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don't like school or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Born in Australia | Born elsewhere | All |
|----------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|------|
| Likes school a lot | 43.6 | 52.9 | 48.8 | 49.2 | 48.4 | 54.8 | 48.3 | 52.2 | 49.0 |
| Likes school a bit | 24.5 | 27.2 | 26.0 | 26.2 | 26.8 | 19.2 | 25.6 | 28.3 | 26.1 |
| It's OK | 25.8 | 17.4 | 21.3 | 20.4 | 21.0 | 19.2 | 21.9 | 16.7 | 20.9 |
| Doesn't like school | 4.3 | 1.6 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 5.5 | 3.0 | 1.4 | 2.7 |
| Doesn't like school at all | 1.8 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.3 |

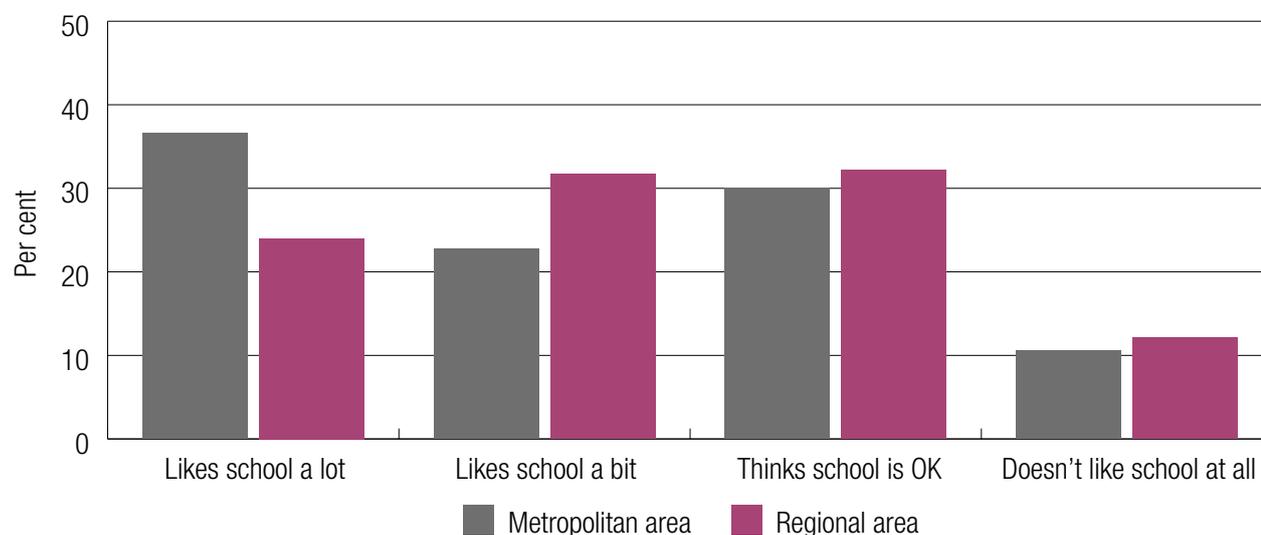
Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, one-third (32.7%) responded they like school 'a lot' (this compares to one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying the same). One-quarter (25.6%) said they like school 'a bit' and around 30 per cent think school 'is OK'.

However more than one in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students (11.0%) said they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'.

There was little difference between the genders. The increased likelihood for girls in Year 3 to Year 6 to like school 'a lot' compared to boys was not found for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Male and female students in Year 7 to Year 12 were almost equally likely to enjoy school.

A significant difference however was found between regional and metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students with those in metropolitan areas being more likely to report that they 'like school a lot' (36.6% compared with 24.0%).

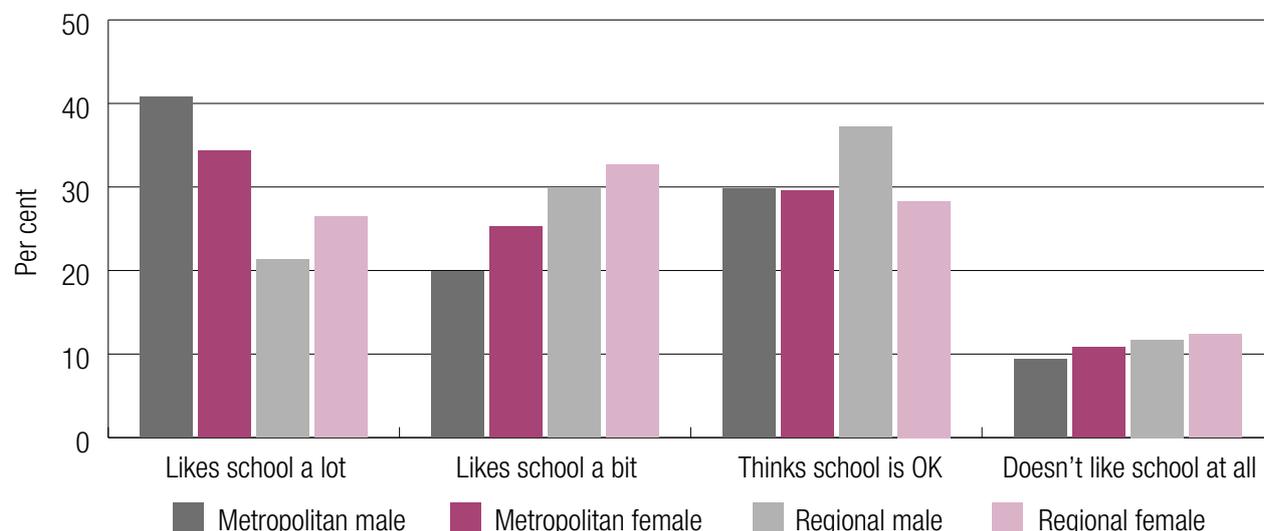
Graph 2.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school/not at all, by region



The regional difference between students was even more significant once a gender split was applied. Male Year 7 to Year 12 students in metropolitan areas emerged as the group most likely to say they like school ‘a lot’ (40.8%) while male students in regional areas were the group least likely to say this (21.3%).

Similarly, female students in metropolitan areas were more likely than those in regional areas to like school ‘a lot’ (34.3% versus 26.5%) however this difference was not statistically significant.

Graph 2.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/not at all, by gender and region



A difference in the proportion of students saying they like school ‘a lot’ was also found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Year 7 to Year 12. A lower proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said that they ‘like school a lot’ (22.7% compared to 33.4%) however the difference was not statistically significant. In regard to not liking school, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were about equally likely to say that they ‘don’t like school’⁵² (13.6% compared to 10.9%).

Little to no difference in regard to how much students enjoy school was found between students born in Australia and students born elsewhere.

Table 2.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don’t like school or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Born in Australia | Born elsewhere | All |
|----------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|------|
| Likes school a lot | 34.4 | 32.1 | 36.6 | 24.0 | 33.4 | 22.7 | 31.7 | 33.3 | 32.7 |
| Likes school a bit | 23.2 | 27.4 | 22.8 | 31.7 | 25.4 | 27.3 | 27.2 | 24.7 | 25.6 |
| It's OK | 32.3 | 29.2 | 30 | 32.2 | 30.3 | 36.4 | 30.4 | 30.1 | 30.7 |
| Doesn't like school | 7.7 | 6.7 | 6.8 | 8.7 | 7.5 | 4.5 | 7.3 | 9.7 | 7.3 |
| Doesn't like school at all | 2.5 | 4.6 | 3.8 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 9.1 | 3.4 | 2.2 | 3.7 |

What students most enjoy about school

About four in five Year 3 to Year 6 students (82.6%) said they like school because of 'seeing my friends'. The other most frequently mentioned reasons were 'sports' (68.6%), 'learning new things' (66.8%) and 'arts and/or music' (64.0%).

Notably, one in 10 students (10.1%) answered that they like school because of 'being away from home'.

There was some difference between the genders with Year 3 to Year 6 female students being more likely than their male counterparts to say that they like school because of 'seeing my friends' (88.1% of girls compared to 75.0% of boys) and 'arts and/or music' (74.3% of girls compared to 49.7% of boys).

Boys on the other hand were more likely than girls to say that they like school because of 'sports' (79.1% of boys compared to 61.0% of girls).

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, more than four in five students (84.7%) mentioned 'hanging out with friends' as one of the things they most enjoy about school (multiple responses were possible for this question). Other most common responses were 'learning new things' (60.9%) and 'sports' (56.1%).

Notably, almost one in five Year 7 to Year 12 students (17.2%) answered that 'being away from home' is one of the things they most enjoy about school (compared to one in 10 Year 3 to Year 6 students who said the same).⁵³

There was little difference between the genders in regard to what students most enjoy about school with the only notable variances being an increased likelihood for male Year 7 to Year 12 students to mention 'sports' (62.8% compared to 51.3%) and for female students to mention 'arts and/or music' (46.2% compared to 33.0%)

Students who don't like school

A small proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students (4.0%)⁵⁴ reported that they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'. When asked about their reasons for not liking school, three-quarters of these students (74.2%) answered 'it's boring'. Other reasons for not liking school were 'what I'm learning is not interesting' (41.9%) or 'not useful' (32.3%).

Some Year 3 to Year 6 students noted personal reasons for not liking school⁵⁵ and these can largely be grouped into issues around bullying, health-related issues (including problems with concentration) and teacher-related issues.

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, 11 per cent reported that they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all'. When asked about their reasons for not liking school, more than one-half of these students (53.3%) answered 'because it's boring'.

Similar proportions of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'don't like the way that I'm being taught' (49.3%) and 'what I'm learning is not interesting' (46.7%).

As with the younger cohort, some students noted personal reasons for not liking school.⁵⁶ These reasons can be grouped into issues around bullying and teacher-related issues. Only few comments related to health issues.

Being part of school

Year 7 to Year 12 students were also asked whether they felt like they were part of their school. While three-quarters (75.2%) of students answered that they do feel like they are part of their school, around 20 per cent reported they feel 'unsure' about this. Five per cent of students said they do not feel like they are part of their school.

Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they feel like they are part of their school were more likely than other students to say that they:

- enjoy school 'a lot' or 'a bit'
- 'usually' get along with their class mates
- feel safe 'all the time' or 'most of the time'.

When asked about what makes students feel like they are part of their school, the most commonly mentioned reasons were 'friends', 'teachers' or particular activities and subjects offered by the school.

In regard to teachers, Year 7 to Year 12 students said that positive relationships with teachers and other school staff, and teachers who are kind, calm, helpful, supportive, welcoming, communicative and inclusive help make them feel like they are part of their school.

“Everyone is so welcoming and the teachers are so open to talk making you feel like you belong. Making friends is so easy as well as the people here are generally lovely, there are things for everyone.”

Students also said that friends and the relationships they have with their friends, other students and people at the school is what helps them feel like they are part of their school.

“I feel as if I belong, I know lots of people and the school grounds very well. I am asked to participate in lots of activities.”

“School feels like an extended family.”

Some Year 7 to Year 12 students mentioned special activities or particular subjects as reasons for why they feel like they are part of their school.

“Being in the music program as it gives me an opportunity to meet people who have the same interests as me and to also be here for a reason, which is to do music.”

On the opposite end of the continuum, students who said they don't feel like they are part of their school or who were unsure about this also most commonly mentioned teachers and friends as the reason(s) for feeling this way.

These students described the way teachers treat them, often saying they felt excluded, bullied, not listened to, not respected or ignored. In regard to friends, students often described a lack of friends, feelings of not fitting in, and being excluded.

In summary, the factors contributing to students feeling like they are part of their school – or not – can be summarised under the following three themes:

1. **Active involvement:** students understand being or feeling like part of their school and school community is self-initiated and a direct result of active involvement. Students used active language to describe their involvement:

“I get involved”, “I participate”, “I talk”, “I volunteer”, “my involvement”

Conversely, students who said they do not feel like they are part of their school or who were unsure about this often described their passive behaviour or lack of involvement using phrases such as:

“I don't get involved”, “I don't participate”, “I'm not part of anything”

2. **Student characteristics:** Students who feel like they are part of their school often mentioned things like:

“I get along”, “I fit in well”, “I like the people here”, “people are like me”, “I feel accepted”

On the other hand, students who feel like they are not part of their school or who are unsure about this mentioned things like:

“I don't get along”, “I don't fit in”, “I'm different”, “I don't belong”

3. **Choice and having a say:** students who feel like they are part of their school said things like:

“I am offered opportunities”, “I can voice my opinions”, “[...] being treated as an individual”

Conversely, students who feel like they are not part of their school or who are unsure made comments such as:

“I am just another student”, “I cannot voice my opinions”, “teachers don't value my opinions”.

2.2 Attendance

Regular attendance and engagement in school is important for the development of intellectual and social emotional skills, and contributes significantly to not only educational outcomes⁵⁷ but outcomes across the life course. While engagement with school and learning is a multifaceted concept, absence can be considered a marker of disengagement.^{58 59} Understanding from the view of students the reasons behind attendance and absence from school is important to inform responses to absence and increase attendance.

Survey findings

- 74 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 67 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day.
- 24 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students 'worry lots' if they miss school, 55 per cent 'worry a little'.
- 12 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students had wagged school for a full day or more in the current school year.
- Seven per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students had previously received a suspension.

Being at school every day

Three-quarters of Year 3 to Year 6 students (74.4%) reported that being at school every day is 'very important' to them, with the remaining one-quarter saying it is 'somewhat important' to them. A small proportion of respondents (2.1%) said it is 'not important' to them.

No statistically significant difference was found between male and female Year 3 to Year 6 students in regard to how important being at school every day is to them.

There was also no regional difference measured.

A significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students said being at school every day is 'very important' to them (84.9% versus 73.4%).

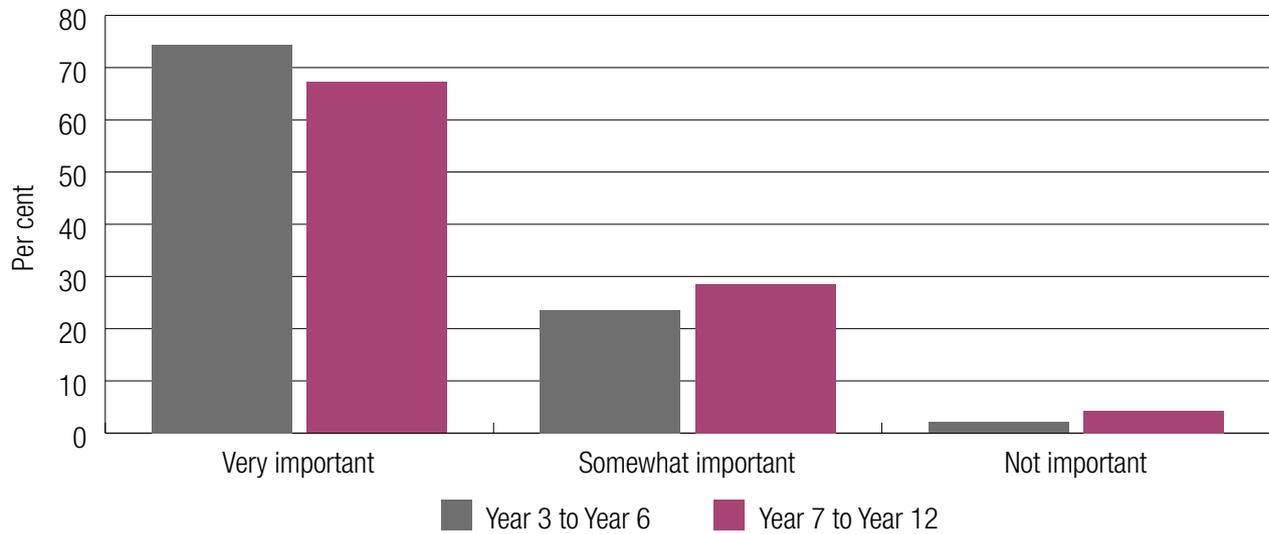
Table 2.3: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying being at school every day is very important, somewhat important or not important, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|--------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Very important | 71.5 | 76.6 | 72.9 | 76.7 | 73.4 | 84.9 | 74.4 |
| Somewhat important | 25.5 | 22.1 | 24.7 | 21.7 | 24.6 | 12.3 | 23.5 |
| Not important | 3.1 | 1.3 | 2.4 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 2.7 | 2.1 |

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, two-thirds of respondents answered that it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day and 29 per cent said it is 'somewhat important' to them. The remaining four per cent answered that this is 'not important' to them.

This result represents a small shift in the proportions measured for Year 3 to Year 6 students.

Graph 2.4: Proportion of students saying being at school every day is very important, by year level



Similar to the younger cohort, there was little difference between male and female students and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Year 7 to Year 12 in regard to this question.

There was however a significant regional difference between male Year 7 to Year 12 students: 56.4 per cent of male students in regional areas answered that being at school every day is 'very important' to them – a significantly smaller proportion than the 69.1 per cent of male students in metropolitan areas who said the same.

Table 2.4: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying being at school every day is very important, somewhat important or not important, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|--------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Very important | 64.9 | 69.6 | 69.5 | 61.8 | 67.5 | 63.4 | 67.2 |
| Somewhat important | 30.9 | 26.5 | 26.9 | 32.4 | 28.3 | 31.7 | 28.6 |
| Not important | 4.2 | 3.9 | 3.6 | 5.8 | 4.2 | 4.9 | 4.3 |

Year 7 to Year 12 students who said being at school every day is 'somewhat important' or 'not important' to them were asked to write down some of the things that were more important to them than being at school.

Many students mentioned one or more of the following topic areas:

- being with and spending time with friends and/or family
- having time for me or myself – relaxing, being free, particularly stress-free
- doing things that promote being healthy – physically and mentally
- a sport or particular activity.

“My family and friends are more important to me than being at school. Also netball is a bit more important to me.”

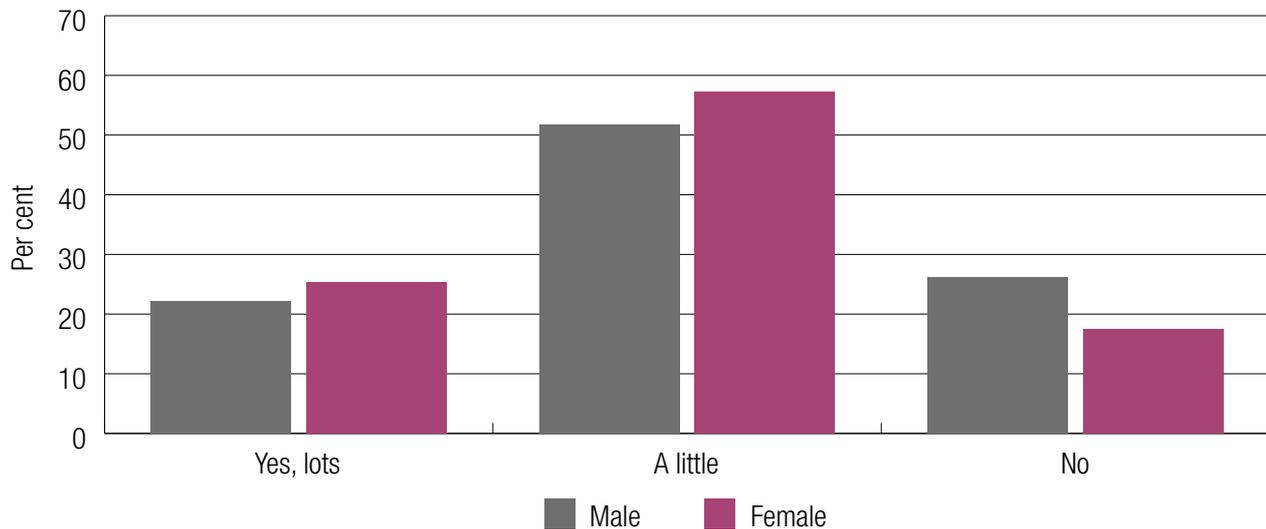
“Playing sport, hanging with friends, being a kid and messing around and spending time with family.”

“Taking days to step back and take a breath – mental health days [...] sometimes one day of school is less important than your mental health.”

Missing school

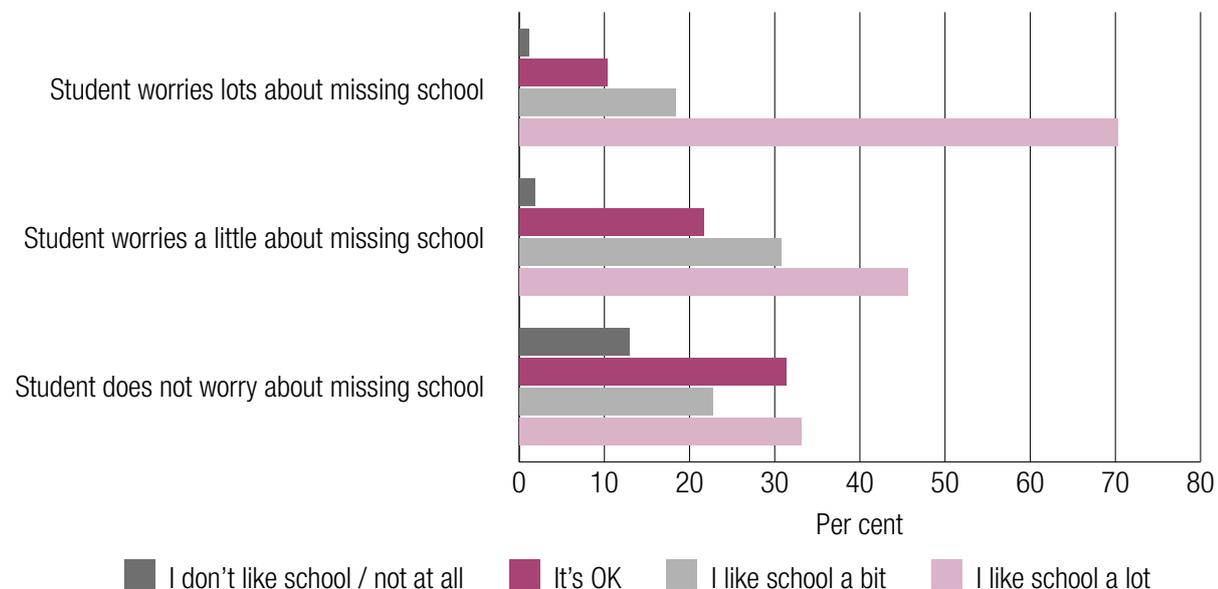
More than one-half of Year 3 to Year 6 students (55.0%) said they worry 'a little' if they miss school. About one-quarter of students answered 'lots' (23.9%) and the remainder (21.1%) said they did not worry about this. Girls were a little more likely than boys to worry about missing school (either 'a little' or 'lots').

Graph 2.5: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they worry lots, a little or they don't worry if they miss school, by gender



Students who answered that they 'worry lots' if they miss school were more likely than other students to like school 'a lot' (70.3% of students who worry 'lots' like school 'a lot' compared to 33.1% of students who 'don't worry' if they miss school).

Graph 2.6: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they worry lots, a little or they don't worry if they miss school, by how student feels about school



Wagging

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, 12 per cent (n=82) had wagged school for a full day or more in the current school year (2016). Students in Year 3 to Year 6 were not asked questions related to wagging.

Of the 12 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students who reported wagging:

- The majority had wagged school for one or two days (46.3%) but more than one in 10 (13.4%) had wagged for 10 days or more in the referenced school year.
- More than two-thirds (69.1%) answered that their parents or the people who look after them know when they wag school.

The most common reasons for wagging were:

- I didn't feel like going to school (43.8%)
- Family reasons (37.5%)
- School is boring (27.5%).

Students who reported wagging also listed a range of 'other reasons' including feeling/being sick, having an injury and going on holidays.

Suspensions

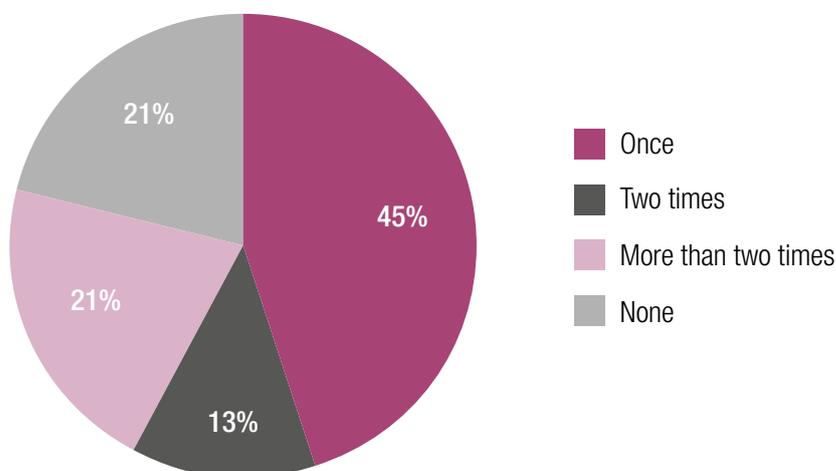
Seven per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students (n=47) answered that they had previously been suspended from school and 6.6 per cent (n=46) reported that they had received an in-school suspension sometime in the past. About one-half (47.8%) of students who reported a suspension from school also reported an in-school suspension.

It is also interesting to note that the cohort of students who reported suspension(s) from school was not identical to the cohort who reported wagging. Only about one-fifth (21.7%, n=18) of students who reported wagging also reported having been suspended from school.

Male students were twice more likely than female students to have been suspended from school (9.8% of male students compared to 4.9% of female students) and nearly three times more likely to have received an in-school suspension (10.5% of male students compared to 3.9% of female students).

Those students who had previously been suspended were asked to identify how many times in the current school year (2016) they had been suspended. Almost 45 per cent (n=21) answered 'once', 13 per cent said 'two times' and 21 per cent said 'more than two times'.

Graph 2.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students having been suspended in the current year, by number of suspensions



Group discussion findings

“When they are encouraged to come to school because (they know) that day (or any day) will be a good day.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Understanding why students are absent from school, from their own perspective, is an important element in responding to the complexity of attendance. Students clearly articulated the multi-layered factors influencing attendance and absence. Student, family and school factors all came into play. Responding to attendance concerns therefore requires multiple approaches and shared responsibility. What is clear from the student’s comments is that the relationships with their peers and school staff are significant factors in the motivation to attend. Schools that invest effort into creating a school culture in which students feel valued, accepted and safe are likely to increase student motivation to attend school. Students also articulated the need for support to prevent and to mitigate the effects of absence.

“Maybe if there is a reward each week for coming to school they will want to come.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Relationships and attendance

The social aspect of school was highly significant for students in Year 3 to Year 12 and positive relationships with peers and teachers made school an enjoyable place to be. Poor relationships negatively influenced interest in learning and attendance, and made students feel anxious about going to school.

Students in Year 3 to Year 12 discussed how friendships gave them motivation to attend school and made school enjoyable. For some students, friendships were essential to provide the support that may not be available in the home.

The feelings and experiences associated with not having friends – such as feeling unsafe, unhappy or excluded – meant that students did not enjoy school and were not motivated to attend. Often experiences of school without friendships caused stress and anxiety. As discussed in Chapter 3.1 – Having friends and positive relationships with other students, relationships and spending time with friends gave students a sense of purpose to attend school and this purpose was diminished without friends.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“They [friends] give you someone to look forward to and play with.”</i></p> <p><i>“You might be lonely and you need someone to talk to and you will also want to come to school more. Friends also encourage you and help you if you need a friend to talk to especially if you don’t want to talk to a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t have any friends you might not want to go to school. No enthusiasm. Friends can encourage you to keep going.”</i></p> <p><i>“To make you happier and want to come to school more.”</i></p> | <p><i>“It’s one of the reasons people come to school for friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“I suppose not everyone has a great family and it might provide additional support. Also if they lean towards extraversion it might make them more likely to attend.”</i></p> <p><i>“You look forward to going to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“They distract you from the schoolwork, give you something to look forward to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Even for kids who don’t like school, having a group of friends gives them something to come to school for.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“If you don’t have friends you won’t want to go to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“[...] you’d be upset and bored.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you don’t have friends you will always be lonely and might not be willing to attend school all the time. Without friends you will always be the left one out in group activities and leave you with someone you dislike. You will also have no one to talk to when you need someone the most.”</i></p> <p><i>“School would not be worth coming to.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would be by myself and be really lonely. I would hate coming to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will feel lonely and people will tease you and make fun of you. You will start feeling depressed. You will hate school and start skipping school.”</i></p> | <p><i>“You will feel like not going to school anymore and not being interested.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel unsafe and unable to come because you will get bullied.”</i></p> <p><i>“You don’t have support when you need it. This means that you may breakdown and turn to drugs for help. It also means you won’t enjoy school as much. This will make you want to ditch and do something more interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Then you struggle to find the motivation to come to school. For many people seeing your friends is the highlight of the day.”</i></p> <p><i>“A lower self-esteem can make you want to wag school if you don’t have any friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“You might not want to come to school without them.”</i></p> |

Similarly, relationships with teachers influenced student attendance. Positive student-teacher relationships meant students were more likely to enjoy school, whereas if student-teacher relationships were not positive or non-existent, students were less likely to enjoy school and would not want to attend.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Because if you don't get along with your teachers you won't be happy and then you wouldn't want to come to school."</i></p> <p><i>"If the teacher is nice and the student really likes school the student will have a reason to be excited to come each day and see someone nice."</i></p> | <p><i>"May increase duration at school."</i></p> <p><i>"You might not want to learn or come to school/class."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along with them you may not want to go to their class and maybe even come to school."</i></p> |

These comments from students emphasise the importance of relationships with peers and school staff for making school a place students want to be. When students are in a positive environment and feel a sense of belonging and that people care about them, they are more likely to be motivated to attend school.

Sense of safety

Students emphasised feeling and being safe as critical for school and learning. Bullying was a factor that made students feel unsafe at school and, for some, made them not want to attend, whereas for others the uncomfortable feeling of not being welcome or of not having friends influenced their sense of safety.

Year 3 to Year 6

- "It may help kids come to school if they know they're safe and are in good hands. And know that no one will harm them. It may help if we stop bullies."*
- "It may be hard for kids to come to school if they are being bullied or don't feel safe."*
- "They might be scared of bullies and won't come to school."*

Obstacles to attendance

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 discussed several obstacles to their attendance at school. These included transport access, family situations and organisation to get to school.

Year 3 to Year 6

- "It may be hard for kids to go to school if they have family issues. If their mum or dad don't drive a car they might miss or be late for school."*
- "They can't get to school on time."*
- "[Hard] To get up in the morning."*
- "Phones have alarms on them so some kids use them to get up early in the morning. It is difficult for teachers to get ready for school at 8 o'clock."*

Impact on learning

Students in all year levels noted that absences from school and from the classroom can make learning or receiving support for learning difficult. This included when students attended extension or gifted and talented programs, with students explaining they missed 'regular' class.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"My friend needs help because he always travels and can't have as much time for homework."</i></p> <p><i>"If they are away and other kids get to practice more, it is hard to learn the play or recital that they are doing."</i></p> <p><i>"When kids are away from school e.g. sick or on holidays. Kids are at other classes e.g. Imagineers."</i></p> | <p><i>"Being sick and next day it's hard to catch up."</i></p> <p><i>"Missing lots of classes."</i></p> <p><i>"Travelling."</i></p> <p><i>"School attendance – wagging [makes it hard for kids to get support]."</i></p> |

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed a desire for strategies to mitigate the negative effects of absence. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested that to know the curriculum content before coming to class was a helpful strategy to prepare for class and for when they were away. Students felt it was unfair that they needed to cover missed learning in their own time and suggested that school staff should help them understand the work they had missed. Support for gaps in learning is particularly important for students who may have interrupted connections to schooling, such as students who experience high mobility, homelessness, illness or caring responsibilities.^{60 61 62 63}

2.3 Academic achievement

Academic achievement is one of the central aspects of schooling and, increasingly, a criterion for measuring school and system effectiveness. While academic achievement is important, so too are learning progress and 21st century capabilities to develop adults able to participate economically, socially and civically.^{64 65 66}

High academic achievement positively affects students within school (increasing, for example, personal motivation, self-confidence and engagement) and life outcomes (being better positioned for various post-school pathways, including employment and tertiary education). Importantly, academic achievement is not necessarily an indicator of engagement – students may achieve at a high level but be disengaged with school; and low achievement may contribute to decreased engagement (rather than being a causal factor).⁶⁷ As noted throughout this report, a range of factors influence engagement including individual factors, and these in turn are reflected in the indicators of engagement such as attendance and achievement.

Student's own academic self-concept can also influence behaviour, attitudes and perceptions towards school and learning, and academic achievement.⁶⁸

Survey findings

- 49 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they do well or very well in their school results.
- 65 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they achieve results above average or near the top.⁶⁹
- 59 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that it is 'very important' to them to be proud of their school work and 37 per cent said it is 'somewhat important'.

One-half of participating Year 3 to Year 6 students (49.2%) answered that they do 'well' or 'very well' at school, 43 per cent said they do 'OK' and four per cent said 'not so well'. A small group of students (4.0%) was unsure about their academic results.

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, almost two-thirds of participants (64.9%) answered that they rate 'above average' or 'near the top' in their school results. Around 28 per cent said they achieve 'about average'.

Five per cent of students reported that they rate 'below average' or 'near the bottom'. A small group of students (2.0%) were unsure about their school results.

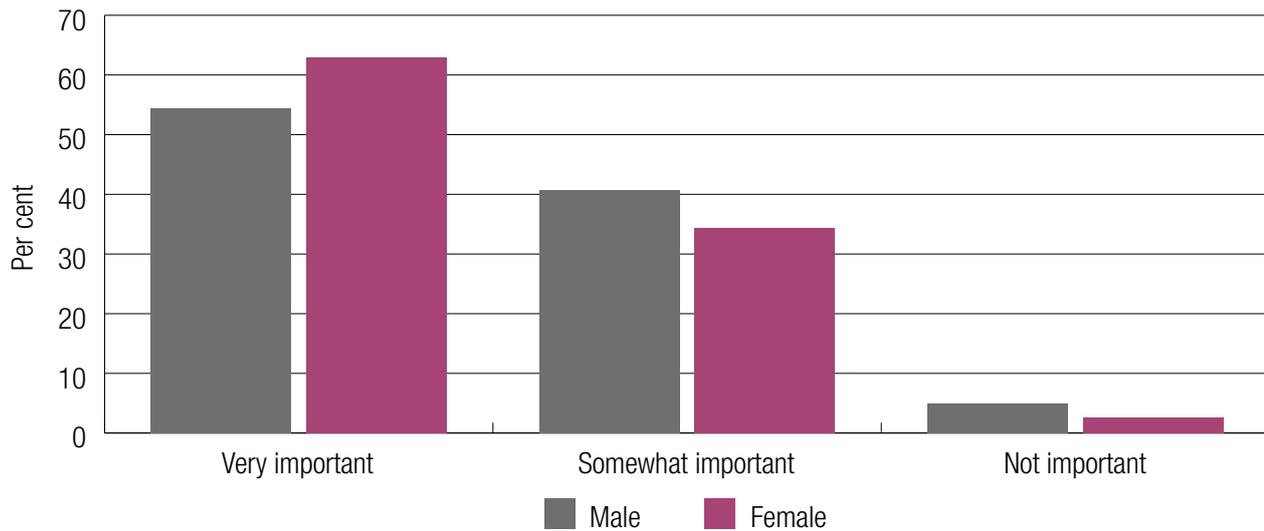
About 60 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 participants reported that at their school 'Students try and get the best grades that they can'. About 29 per cent were undecided about this and about one in 10 students (11.9%) disagreed with this statement.

Being proud of school work

Nearly all Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that it was either 'very important' (59.0%) or 'somewhat important' (37.4%) to them to be proud of their school work. The remainder – 3.7 per cent – answered that being proud of their school work is not important to them.

Female students were more likely than male students to say that being proud of their school work is 'very important' to them (63.0% compared to 54.4%).

Graph 2.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be proud of their school work, by gender



A higher proportion of metropolitan than regional Year 7 to Year 12 students said that being proud of their school work is 'very important' to them, however, the difference was not statistically significant (60.8% compared to 54.8%). There was also no difference found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to this question.

Table 2.5: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be proud of their school work, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|--------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Very important | 54.4 | 63.0 | 60.8 | 54.8 | 59.0 | 58.5 | 59.0 |
| Somewhat important | 40.7 | 34.4 | 36.0 | 40.4 | 37.7 | 31.7 | 37.4 |
| Not important | 4.9 | 2.6 | 3.2 | 4.8 | 3.3 | 9.8 | 3.7 |

3. Primary factors – The Foundations for engagement with school and learning

Quality interpersonal relationships have been identified through the consultation as the foundation for student engagement with school and learning. Relationships foster in students a sense of belonging and of feeling valued. Through relationships, students are more likely to develop patterns of persistence and motivation and have access to a support network.⁷⁰

When listening to students' experiences of school, the formation and maintenance of relationships with peers, teachers and other school staff emerge as powerful factors affecting students' engagement at school. In addition, the relationships students have with their own family and their views and opinions on school and learning are another critical factor for engagement.

Analysis of the data provided by students in the survey clearly indicates that students who have strong relationships with peers, teachers and their family are much more likely to do well against the selected engagement indicators of liking school, sense of belonging at school, attendance and academic achievement.

The quality of the relationships that students have with their teachers is particularly critical; students who report not usually getting along with their teachers are much less likely to do well against the selected engagement indicators than students who report usually getting along with their teachers.

The following chapter discusses findings from the student survey and group discussions that relate to students' relationships at school as well as the influence families have on school and learning.

3.1 Having friends and positive relationships with other students

Attendance at school expands the social connections of children and young people and friends and other students become an increasingly important part of their social world. From early childhood into adolescence, the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships is critical. Studies have shown that a lack of friendships is harmful to student's wellbeing and adjustment and that having a friend can work as a protective factor for less positive relationships with other students and within families.^{71 72 73} Social connectedness is consistently recognised as beneficial to healthy development, including physical and mental health, and has implications for adulthood.^{74 75}

Within the consultation, students were asked directly about the influence of friends and peers through the survey and also naturally referred to the two groups within the group discussions (generally using the term 'other students' rather than peers, though both terms were used by students). Throughout this report, the term 'other students' is used to reflect the voice of students, however where a survey question used the term 'peers' then this is used in the reporting of student responses.

Friendships and relationships with other students played differing roles in relation to engagement with school and learning. Friends were largely viewed as positive and as supporting engagement, whereas other students were noted as both contributors and detractors for engagement. In particular, students referred to the influence of other students on the social environment within the classroom and school, and how the behaviour of other students affected access to learning and support for learning.

Survey findings

- 83 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 85 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they like school because of seeing their friends.
- 78 per cent of all students reported getting along with the kids in their class 'most of the time' or 'usually'.
- 73 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that it is 'very important' to have a close friend in their class.
- Students who get along with the kids in their class 'most of the time' or 'usually' are more likely to have positive engagement outcomes (like school a lot, feel like part of their school, say being at school every day is very important, and achieve highly).

Getting along with friends and peers

More than four in five students (82.6% of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 84.5% of Year 7 to Year 12 students) said they like school because of ‘seeing/hanging out with my friends’.⁷⁶ This was the most popular response from students when asked about what they most liked about school.

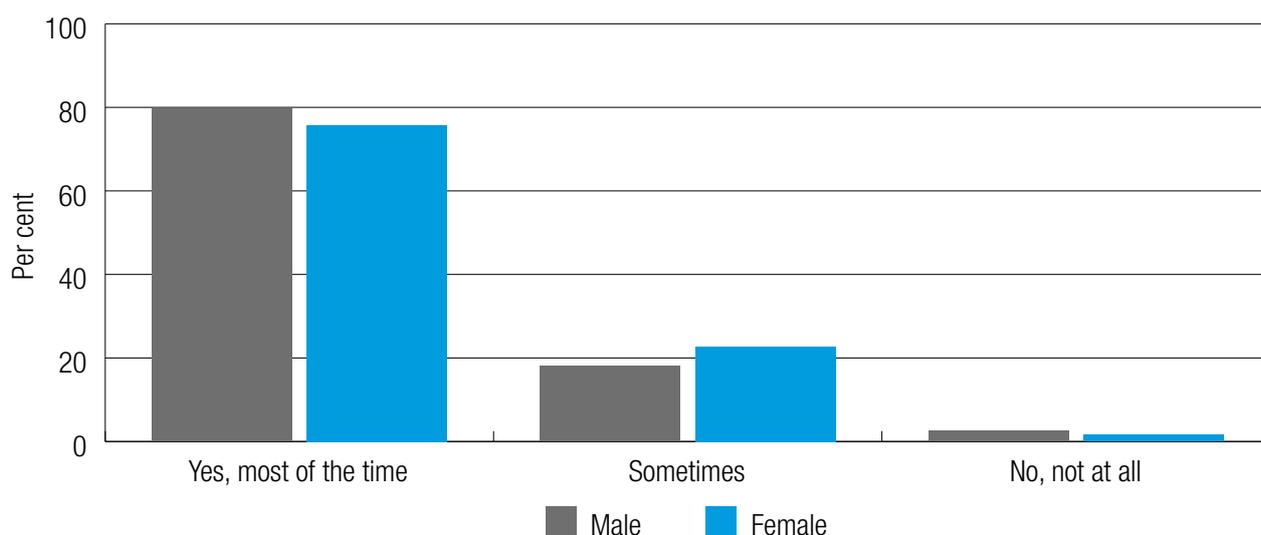
In Year 3 to Year 6, female students were more likely than male students to say this (87.3% of girls compared with 73.6% of boys). Male students on the other hand were more likely to name ‘sports’ as one of the activities they most liked about school (77.6% of boys compared with 60.3% of girls).

In Year 7 to Year 12, male and female students were equally likely to mention ‘hanging out with friends’ (85.6% of female students compared with 83.2% of male students) as their favourite activity at school and all students who described their gender as ‘other’⁷⁷ also said that this is what they most enjoy about school.

When asked about their relationship with the ‘kids in their class’ (peers), more than three-quarters of Year 3 to Year 6 students (77.3%) reported that they get along with the kids in their class ‘most of the time’, while one in five students (20.7%) said that they get along ‘sometimes’.

A small proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students – two per cent – reported that they do not get along ‘at all’ with the kids in their class.

Graph 3.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with peers most of the time, sometimes or not at all, by gender



In Year 3 to Year 6, male and female students were about equally likely to say that they get along with the kids in their class ‘most of the time’ (79.6% compared to 75.7%) and also ‘sometimes’ (18.0% compared to 22.7%).

There were no significant differences between regional and metropolitan Year 3 to Year 6 students in regard to this question.

Aboriginal students were significantly less likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to say that they get along with the kids in their class ‘most of the time’ (66.7% versus 78.4%) and more likely to say that they get along ‘sometimes’.

Table 3.1: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with peers most of the time, sometimes or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | All |
|-----------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|------------|----------------|------|
| Yes, most of the time | 79.6 | 75.7 | 79.1 | 74.7 | 66.7 | 78.4 | 77.3 |
| Sometimes | 18.0 | 22.7 | 19.1 | 23.1 | 29.2 | 19.9 | 20.7 |
| No, not at all | 2.5 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 2.2 | 4.2 | 1.7 | 2.0 |

For students in Year 3 to Year 6, relationships with friends were common themes within the open narrative questions of the survey. When asked about their favourite part of the school day, about one-quarter of students (23.0%) mentioned ‘friends’ or ‘seeing friends’ and more than one-half of students made a reference to recess and/or lunch – those times of the school day when students predominantly play and socialise with their peers:

“I really love seeing my friends.”

“Working with friends and doing a subject and being able to talk with friends while working.”

“Doing maths and being with my friends.”

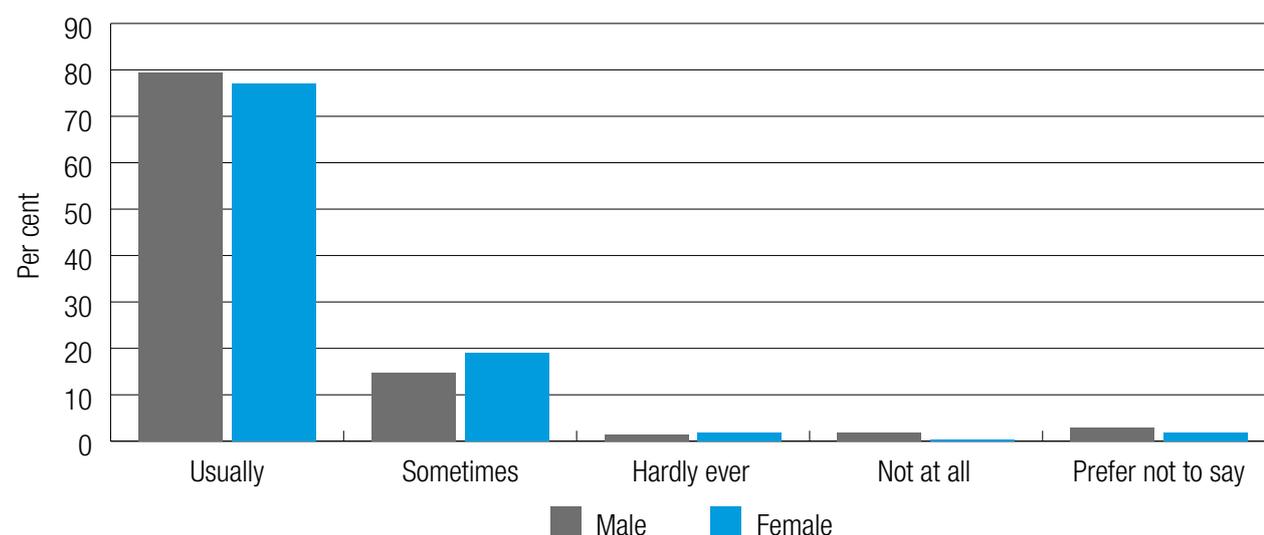
“Break times because I can see my friends, eat and get fresh air.”

Among Year 7 to Year 12 participants, four in five students (77.9%) reported that they ‘usually’ get along with their class mates (peers) while almost one in five (17.4%) said that they get along ‘sometimes’.

A small proportion of students – three per cent – reported that they get along ‘hardly ever’ or ‘not at all’. These students were more likely to say that having a close friend in class is not important to them.

A second small proportion of students – two per cent – ‘prefer[red] not to say’ whether or not they get along with their class mates. These students were more likely to feel that it is ‘very important’ to have a close friend in their class.

Graph 3.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with peers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by gender



Similar to the younger cohort, male and female students in Year 7 to Year 12 were about equally likely to say that they get along with their ‘class mates’ (peers) ‘usually’ (79.3% compared to 77.1%). There was also no significant regional difference.

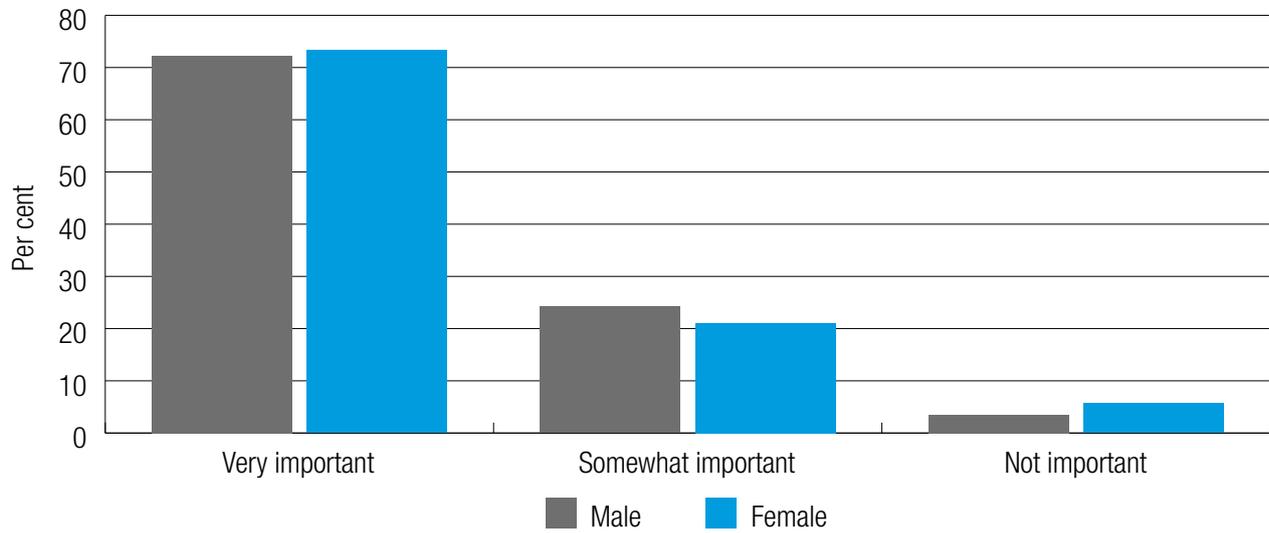
However the proportion of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students who answered that they ‘usually’ get along with their peers (54.5%) was significantly smaller than that of non-Aboriginal students saying the same (79.4%). Aboriginal students were also most likely to answer that they don’t get along with their class mates ‘at all’ or ‘prefer[red] not to say’.

Table 3.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with peers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|------------|----------------|------|
| Usually | 79.3 | 77.1 | 77.8 | 78.4 | 54.5 | 79.4 | 77.9 |
| Sometimes | 14.7 | 19.0 | 17.8 | 16.3 | 29.5 | 16.5 | 17.4 |
| Hardly ever | 1.4 | 1.8 | 1.3 | 2.4 | 0.0 | 1.7 | 1.6 |
| Not at all | 1.8 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 6.8 | 0.6 | 0.9 |
| Prefer not to say | 2.8 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 1.9 | 9.1 | 1.7 | 2.2 |

When asked how important it is to them to have a close friend or friends in their class, almost three-quarters of Year 7 to Year 12 students (73.1%) said that this is ‘very important’ while 22.2 per cent answered ‘somewhat important’. The remainder – almost five per cent – of students said that this is not important to them.

Graph 3.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to have a close friend or friends in their class, by gender



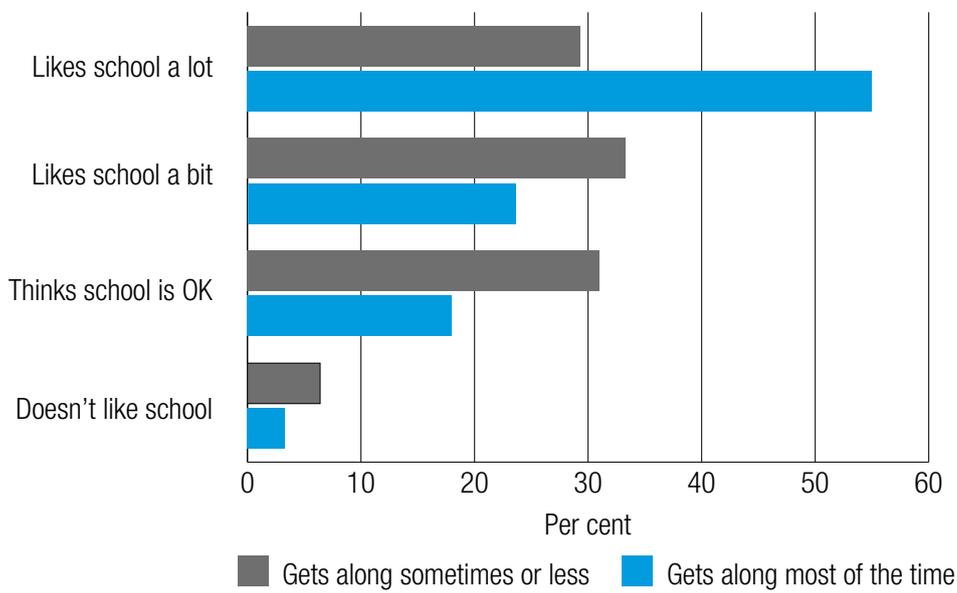
Students who get along with their peers – Year 3 to Year 6

Further analysis of the data and, in particular, comparison between how well students get along with their peers with how they feel about school, showed the significance of good relationships between students for a positive school and learning experience.

For Year 3 to Year 6 students, compared to students who said they get along with the kids in their class ‘sometimes’ or less, those who said they get along ‘most of the time’ were more likely to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (55.0% versus 29.3%).
- Students say they do ‘well or very well’ at school (53.1% versus 35.1%).
- Students say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (76.2% versus 68.4%).

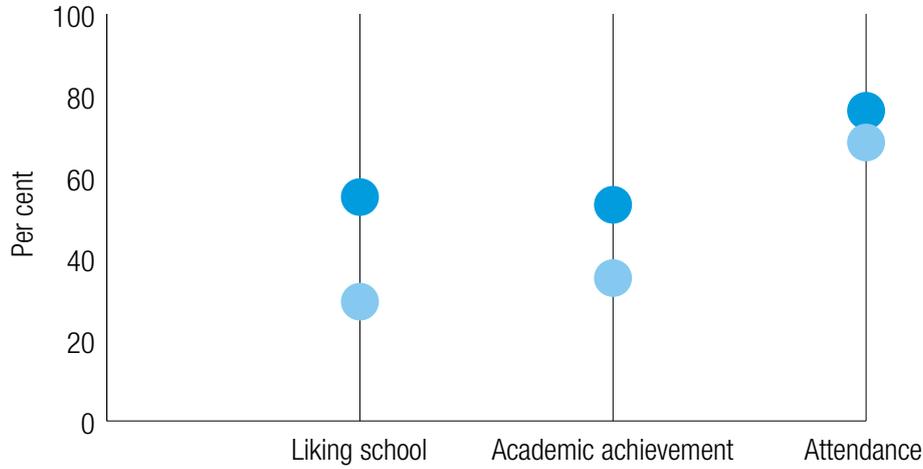
Graph 3.4: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school, by how well they get along with peers



The following graph shows results for Year 3 to Year 6 students who said they get along with their peers ‘most of the time’ and compares them to the results for students who said they get along ‘sometimes’ or less.

There are significant differences between the two groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.5: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who get along with peers most of the time or sometimes or less



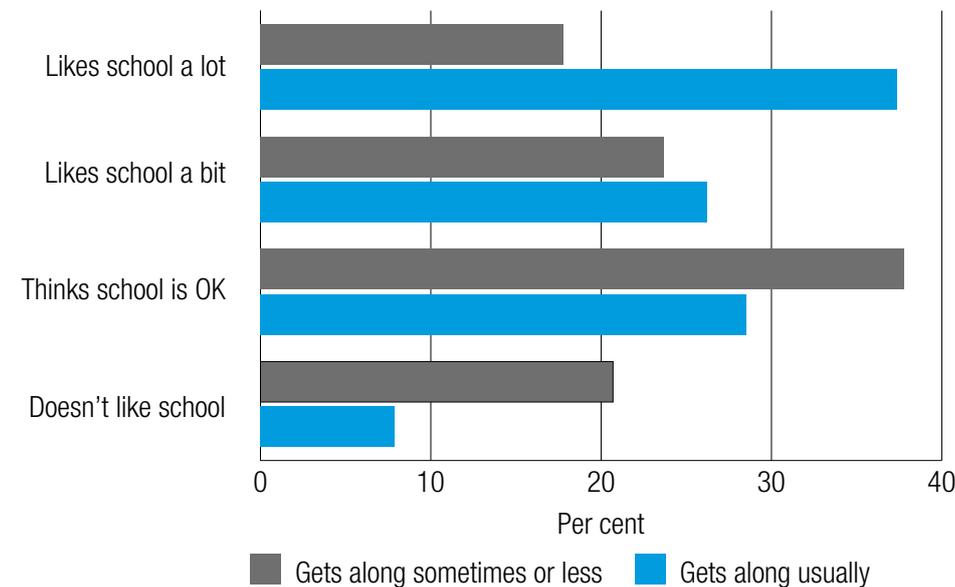
Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Students who get along with their peers – Year 7 to Year 12

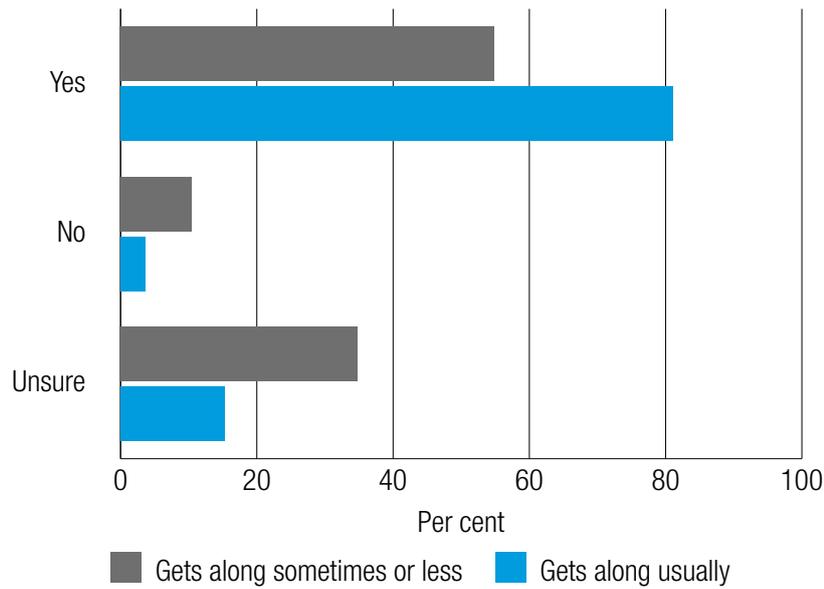
For Year 7 to Year 12 students, compared to students who said they get along with the kids in their class ‘sometimes’ or less, those who said they get along ‘usually’ were more likely to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (37.4% versus 17.8%).
- Students feel like part of their school (81.1% versus 54.8%).
- Students’ academic results are ‘near the top’ (29.8% versus 19.4%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (69.8% versus 56.3%).

Graph 3.6: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students who say they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or don’t like school, by how well they get along with peers



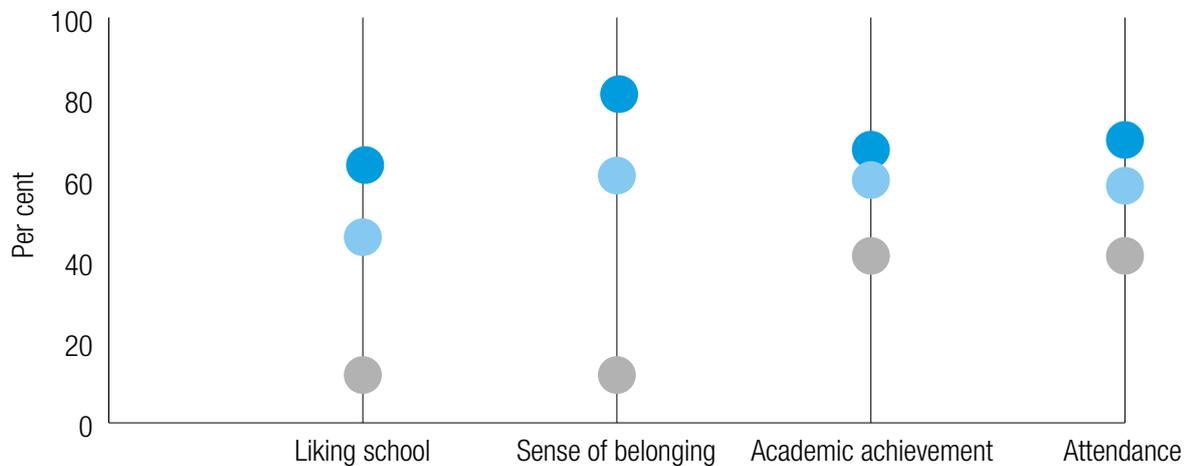
Graph 3.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel like part of their school, don't feel like part of their school or who are unsure, by how well they get along with peers



The following graph shows results for Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they get along with their peers 'usually' and compares them to the results for students who said they get along 'sometimes', and students who said they get along 'hardly ever' or 'not at all'.

There are significant differences between the three groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.8: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who get along with peers usually, sometimes or hardly ever/not at all*



*n<20

Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school 'a lot' or 'a bit', sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve 'above average' or 'near the top' in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day.

Relationships with friends and other students and feeling part of school

More than one-third of Year 7 to Year 12 students who said that they feel like part of their school named 'having friends' as the reason for why they felt this way. This was the second most commonly mentioned reason after 'teachers':

"Having friends and teachers that care about me. Not being bullied."

"Having friends who care about you and welcome you. Being valued by my peers."

"The way everyone [is] friends with each other and we all get involved in what's needed done."

Conversely, many of those students who were unsure about or felt like they were not part of their school mentioned friend(s), or the lack of friends, as the reason for why they felt this way.

The majority of such references related to 'not having friends', 'not getting along' or 'not fitting in':

"Not having a good amount of friends, people saying things about me etc. causing drama."

"People are always judging me, I don't have many friends to talk to."

"Don't fit in with most of my friends and I have a lot of ups and downs with a few people."

"I just feel like I don't fit in, and that nobody wants to be around me."

A small number of students who were unsure about, or did not feel like part of their school perceived other students as disruptive and non-contributing to a productive learning environment:

"Most people in my class stopping me from learning."

"Kids that are usually class clowns or brutes get in the way of learning [...] I feel very uncomfortable and every day I come it feels like torture or a waste of time."

"I am not like a lot of the other people in my school they all swear and graffiti desks and walls, and generally don't get as good grades as I do."

Group discussion findings

"Friends just make school a whole lot better and just lift you up in everything. They also make your social skills grow and they should be there for you and [you] for them." (Year 7 to Year 12)

From the perspective of students, friendships were an essential part of school and learning. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 described friendships as:

- critical for feeling happy, safe and accepted at school
- positively contributing to wellbeing, mental health and self-concept
- a protective factor against bullying
- an important role in academic, social and personal development
- an essential source of support, providing comfort and advice and someone to talk to and trust
- for students in Year 7 to Year 12, a source of encouragement for persistence and confidence with schooling.

As a social setting, school provided students with opportunities to socialise with others their own age and, as such, students' experiences of school were highly relational. Friendships in school made school enjoyable for many students, and more bearable for others. A lack of friendships meant that school was generally not enjoyable and, in many cases, a difficult experience.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 indicated overwhelmingly that it was important to have friends at school. In describing why friends were important, students often spoke about how friends influenced how they felt at school and when learning, and their attitudes towards school and learning. Positive friendships meant that students enjoyed school and were more motivated to attend, largely due to the anticipation of seeing friends, and better positioned to engage in learning. Through their relationships, students experienced school as 'fun', 'happy' and 'enjoyable'.

School without friends was perceived to be 'boring' and 'lonely'. Students expressed that without friends at school, they would feel depressed, scared, anxious and unsafe, leading to lower self-confidence and self-esteem, and less motivation to attend school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"They give you someone to look forward to and play with."</i></p> <p><i>"Friends make school enjoyable."</i></p> <p><i>"You can't have fun without friends."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't have friends you won't enjoy your school years."</i></p> | <p><i>"Friends give us company and make us happy and make it fun!"</i></p> <p><i>"They are important because they help make school enjoyable."</i></p> <p><i>"Makes school more bearable."</i></p> <p><i>"They make school more exciting and a little bit more fun."</i></p> |
| <p><i>"You might not enjoy school."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't have friends at school then you'll be lonely and coming to school won't be as fun."</i></p> <p><i>"School will be sad."</i></p> <p><i>"You will be very bored."</i></p> <p><i>"You'll be lonely and scared."</i></p> | <p><i>"You won't enjoy school."</i></p> <p><i>"Not interesting going to school."</i></p> <p><i>"School is bad and boring."</i></p> <p><i>"You can't laugh as much."</i></p> <p><i>"TORTURE."</i></p> <p><i>"You will feel alone and will not have as much fun at school."</i></p> |

Despite the significant role of friendships, some students provided an alternative view, suggesting friends were not necessarily important at school. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 described the sometimes variable nature of friendships, their individual preferences of how to spend their time and how friends were not essential for learning, which is why they attended school. Whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 described how friends can sometimes be a distraction from learning, a negative influence or may not be supportive.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"No, because they sometimes annoy/bother you."</i></p> <p><i>"No because you might have alone time."</i></p> <p><i>"No I like to work by myself."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes no, sometimes yes! Because I like going to the library."</i></p> <p><i>"No but it is nice to have friends."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't have friends you get lonely but you can read all the time."</i></p> | <p><i>"No, it is easier to get through school without distractions."</i></p> <p><i>"Not really – friendships change over time, it's important not to be antagonistic to other people, but having friends isn't that important."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes it depends because what if you might not have the best of friends that would want you to achieve something in life."</i></p> <p><i>"Depends on your friend because sometimes they can get jealous."</i></p> <p><i>"Friends can sometimes influence you to do wrong things and you might be carried away with them."</i></p> <p><i>"It's not important for your education but they are always there to help."</i></p> |

Some students perceived benefits to not having friends at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"If you don't have friends you won't get in trouble for talking."</i></p> <p><i>"It would be easy to work at school."</i></p> | <p><i>"Higher grades, but limited support."</i></p> <p><i>"You focus better at times. And you can be more of a focus for bullies. However, sometimes we need friends to help one another for school work."</i></p> <p><i>"Less distractions."</i></p> |

School as a social setting

School is a social structure in which children and young people are provided the opportunity to socialise with others their own age. As young people develop independence, their social networks expand, relationships outside the family become more meaningful and thus time spent with friends becomes more critical.

Similar to the results from the survey, group discussion responses indicated the social aspect of school was particularly important for students. Spending time with friends, within and outside of class, strongly contributed to student enjoyment, sense of belonging and acceptance at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Yes because you will have someone to play with which is fun because it will be better than just sitting there.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you are not lonely at school and you have people to play with.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you would have nothing to do if you didn’t have friends!”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can socialise with more people other than the teacher.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They’re good company.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can chill with your mates.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will have someone to hang out with at lunch.”</i></p> <p><i>“You want to have fun breaks between classes, which you need friends to do.”</i></p> |

While significant within school, students indicated friends were also central to their lives outside of school. Students made a clear connection between friendships and their wellbeing, at the present time and into the future.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Yes because you can make lifelong friends and if your relatives die – you can use them as your uncles or aunty. Also, when you get older, you can go to reunions and see what they look like in the future. And when your kids go to school, if they become friends it means that the legacy lives on and you can see each other more often.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because you usually have a better life with them.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you are not lonely and very sad because you can make lifelong friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Without them there wouldn’t be play dates.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it can affect your social life in the future.”</i></p> | <p><i>“So you can socialise out of school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Go out with them e.g. shopping.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lifelong friendships.”</i></p> <p><i>“Invited to parties.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends are important because they are a part of your life.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make memories.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can meet up with them after hours.”</i></p> |

Not having friends within school had implications for time at school, socialisation outside of school and their future. Feelings of loneliness, sadness and boredom were generally associated with a lack of friendships.

In particular, students referred to recess and lunch breaks as ‘boring’. These are times of the school day when students predominantly socialise with their friends and other students and, generally, this boredom was associated with feeling excluded and devalued⁷⁸, rather than a disinterest in school necessarily.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“You would be heart-broken.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’ll be boring and you will be lonely.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have nothing to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think you will be bored and get bullied.”</i></p> <p><i>“It will be boring because you will have no one to play with or talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will not have anything to do at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“You could get lonely and sad and nothing can help with loneliness.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Yes because you will get bored without them.”</i></p> <p><i>“If we don’t have friends [...] hard for us to tell our feelings.”</i></p> <p><i>“You always have someone to group with, unless you don’t because they excluded you and you learn they said something mean about you and they become friends with someone else and replace you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You sit in toilets at recess and lunch.”</i></p> <p><i>“I feel upset and have nothing to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“If I don’t have friends at school I have to sit alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“You resort to YouTube.”</i></p> |

With regard to their lives outside of school, students in Year 3 to Year 6 generally referred to implications later in life. Whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to their current lives, stating students without friends were likely to be left out of social activities, increasing their sense exclusion and isolation. The consequences of exclusion for young people were not enjoying school or life in general.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Your life gets lonely with no one.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will be very lonely later in life and bored at recess and lunch.”</i></p> <p><i>“You grow up with no friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“The world will end for your friendships.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you don’t become an old little man alone.”</i></p> | <p><i>“You won’t enjoy school without friends you won’t have fun, not just at school but also after school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Left out of parties/outings.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will have no mates and you will be forever alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“You hate your life.”</i></p> <p><i>“No friend in school might not have friends out of school.”</i></p> <p><i>“No social life.”</i></p> |

Students underscored the significance of friendships by suggesting students be proactive in developing positive relationships.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“You’d have to make some then!”</i></p> <p><i>“Make new friends at school because you can have someone to talk to and play with.”</i></p> <p><i>“You develop a system to create new friends.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Make some friends don’t be lazy.”</i></p> <p><i>“You go out and find some now! Join some sports or chess clubs.”</i></p> <p><i>“Go and hang out with other/new people.”</i></p> |

There are a number of skills that children and young people require to negotiate friendships. To some these skills come naturally, however for others, making friends or managing friendships can be a difficult process. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 articulated some of these challenges and a desire for support to develop friendships, as discussed further in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Yes but there is not much choice.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes but once you are friends it is hard to get new ones.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is especially helpful to have a friend at your new school!”</i></p> | <p><i>“More students should come so that some people in this school that don’t have friends can make friends.”</i></p> |

Belonging within the school environment

The experience of school for students across Year 3 to Year 12 was highly dependent on their relationships with their friends. Friends foster a sense of group belonging in a way that relationships with adults cannot, and through the consultation, students across Year 3 to Year 12 emphasised the importance of feeling accepted at school. Students clearly articulated how friendships positively contributed to their own self-concept and wellbeing, and their sense of safety and acceptance within school. A lack of friendships had a profound effect, with students more likely to experience bullying, to feel excluded and to have a negative self-concept. As such, relationships with friends strongly influenced student motivation towards and engagement with school and learning.

Feeling happy, safe and accepted

Students outlined how friendships had a significant impact on their wellbeing. Students most often defined the importance of friendships in relation to how these relationships made them feel. Having friends was associated with feeling ‘happy’, ‘positive’ and ‘good’. The anticipation of spending time with friends at school also meant they were more motivated to attend and generally enjoyed school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Friends are important because it makes at least two people happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“They make me feel good.”</i></p> <p><i>“They always make you laugh and make you feel like the only person alive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends are like a present you give to yourself.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They make you happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“To make your day happy, and have something to look forward to.”</i></p> <p><i>“They make you laugh.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you feel good.”</i></p> |

Through their friendships, students also experienced a sense of security, acceptance and belonging. This had profound effects on their wellbeing and attitudes towards school and learning. In explaining the culture of belonging created through friendships, students often described how it gave further purpose to school and made them feel comfortable attending and learning in school. The contribution of friendships to feeling comfortable and safe at school is discussed further in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Yes so they give you company.”</i></p> <p><i>“To bond.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling like you belong and are safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you feel comfortable when you go to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“To be part of a group.”</i></p> <p><i>“Stay together.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends are like family.”</i></p> | <p><i>“We feel that having friends at school is important because...everybody deserves to have social acceptance in our society today.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having friends at school gives people a sense of belonging.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, because if you don’t have friends you don’t feel welcome to school but if you have friends it makes it happier at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends help you feel like you are part of something more than something to educate.”</i></p> <p><i>“You don’t feel as judged or anxious and self-conscious.”</i></p> <p><i>“To make you feel like you fit in.”</i></p> |

For students in Year 7 to Year 12, feeling connected through friendships was a protective factor for mental health and wellbeing. Being able to share concerns and have people to make them feel better was important. Students are healthier when they have others to count on within an environment that supports their needs.⁷⁹

Year 7 to Year 12

“They can take your mind off stressful exams and gives you someone to talk to.”

“Help with mental health.”

“They take the stress away.”

“Mental health.”

Feeling unhappy, unsafe and excluded

A lack of positive relationships contributed to a range of negative emotions and experiences for students. Not having friends was associated with sadness, loneliness, depression, anxiety and exclusion. Exclusion can take many forms – from overt racism or bullying, to more subtle non-recognition or refusal of friendship.⁸⁰ Further, a sense of isolation made students feel unsafe, as discussed in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe. These feelings made school an unpleasant experience and subsequently students were less motivated to attend and engage in learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“It puts weight on your back and you get worried.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will be very sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“School might make you sad if you have no friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will be miserable.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would be by myself and be really lonely. I would hate coming to school.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Anxiety of being judged.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will be sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“You get depressed.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will feel alone and will not have as much fun at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel bad inside and you don’t enjoy anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being scared.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel lonely and sad and you become upset and miserable.”</i></p> |

Through relationships, children have reflected back to them who they are and how much they are valued.⁸¹ Students described how feeling isolated and alone can negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing, including their self-esteem, confidence, and perceptions of self. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 described feelings of worthlessness or not feeling valued, and some students described feeling angry.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“You’d feel so sad to see everyone else playing happily.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will feel lonely and you might get bullied. You will feel sad and might feel left out.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everyone hates you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You think you have to compete with others to get friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“It seems you’re the bad guy.”</i></p> <p><i>“You get excluded.”</i></p> <p><i>“We would all be enemies and life would be terrible.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will feel left out.”</i></p> <p><i>“You begin to lose confidence.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will be like an ant and no one will be kind and there will be no more kindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will feel like you have an empty hole.”</i></p> | <p><i>“You feel unwanted.”</i></p> <p><i>“They may suffer mental illness.”</i></p> <p><i>“You put yourself in a position where depression/anxiety takes over.”</i></p> <p><i>“You will probably be alone and might get mental problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel like the odd one out.”</i></p> <p><i>“You may feel depressed/sad and lonely and not as confident.”</i></p> <p><i>“Your emotions will be negative and you will start having bad self-esteem.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel insecure about yourself.”</i></p> <p><i>“Might not be as self-confident.”</i></p> <p><i>“You overthink everything you do.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel as if you aren’t good enough to have friends, and that decreases your self-esteem.”</i></p> <p><i>“You might feel left out.”</i></p> |

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 indicated how these negative feelings affected their engagement with school and learning. Some students described feeling less motivated to attend school or to learn. While others explained how feeling these ways influenced their behaviour and relationships with others. Generally, the students identified that not having friends made it more difficult for them to function in daily life. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular referred to the importance of friends for support so, unsurprisingly, a lack of friendships had significant and wide-ranging consequences.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"It makes you sad and unhappy you can't do anything."</i></p> <p><i>"You'll be not happy you won't be able to communicate much because you'll be too sad."</i></p> <p><i>"I would go crazy."</i></p> <p><i>"You get really sad and then you cry."</i></p> <p><i>"You would struggle at times."</i></p> <p><i>"You do nothing."</i></p> | <p><i>"You feel isolated from your peers, lonely. Motivating yourself is hard, you don't feel a part of anything."</i></p> <p><i>"Participating in group activities makes you anxious."</i></p> <p><i>"You feel lonely and everything is boring and harder to do."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel so sad and can't function."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel upset and have nothing to do."</i></p> <p><i>"A lower self-esteem can make you want to wag school if you don't have any friends."</i></p> <p><i>"You are lonely and gloomy and you would lose your self-confidence and it affects your education."</i></p> <p><i>"You will have depression and will be lonely and not eager to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Having no friends will affect your cooperation with others and affect your mental health, affecting your attitude and your grades."</i></p> |

A small number of comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to self-harming behaviour.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Feel alone and might get bad ideas about yourself and what to do."

"I will be lonely at school and have no one to talk my problems to. This can sometimes lead to suicide or cutting."

Learning as relational

"They are important because they can help you with learning. You need friends to survive through school!" (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students described how quality interpersonal relationships with friends supported academic, social and personal development. Relationships affected student level of comfort within the classroom, and consequently their behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement.

Friends and academic learning

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed that friends contribute positively to their academic learning and development by:

- creating a safe and comfortable environment
- providing assistance with learning
- promoting positive learning behaviours and individual strengths.

Throughout the consultation, students noted the importance of the learning environment to either facilitate or hamper their engagement with learning. Similar to the ways in which friends create comfort within the school, friends also contributed positively to the creation of a comfortable learning environment. When working with friends, students explained that they felt relaxed and stress-free, and found learning more enjoyable and easier.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Easier to learn.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can talk to them during class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Another reason is if you are doing group activities where you get to choose your group, you would want to be with people you like hanging out with. Aka friends.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Yes, because it makes the learning environment more comfortable and makes you feel safe and have someone to complain to about a bad teacher... etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are important because it makes learning more enjoyable and somewhat easier.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can have fun while learning.”</i></p> |

However, students in Year 7 to Year 12 did acknowledge sometimes friends can be a distraction to learning by talking in class, not contributing to a supportive environment or not supporting each other.

Year 7 to Year 12

“No because you are at school to learn and have fun learning and friends can distract you from your learning experience.”

“Not at all/sometimes/sort of/ (in class you don’t need friends because you’re supposed to listen and learn not talk).”

“It is NOT important to have friends at school because they can put you down and distract you from your learning.”

“Having friends distracts you.”

Learning with and learning from friends was a significant aspect of school, with students describing the role friends play in providing practical assistance with learning. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 emphasised receiving assistance when ‘stuck’ or learning ‘more’ or ‘better’, whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 more commonly referred to having someone to study with and receiving advice or help with specific problems.

Notably, students felt comfortable asking friends for assistance with learning, whereas their willingness to request assistance from school staff was highly dependent on their relationship with the staff member and the classroom learning environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Because if you get stuck on something they can help you out.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help me to learn more words.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can help you with homework etc!”</i></p> <p><i>“So when the teacher is gone when you need help your friends can help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you have someone to help you in class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because it teaches me a load of things.”</i></p> <p><i>“They teach me how to play footy.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help you for your maths test.”</i></p> | <p><i>“To bounce ideas off them!”</i></p> <p><i>“It can help the way you think about different situations in class or about activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Work together to solve work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe they will know stuff you won’t know.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help with assignments.”</i></p> <p><i>“Group study/notes sharing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because they help you to study properly.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can do homework with them.”</i></p> |

Furthermore, students in Year 7 to Year 12 described how friends contributed positively to their self-perceptions and behaviours in relation to learning. Encouragement from friends instilled motivation and self-belief in students, and the capability to succeed, and promoted persistence and resilience.

Year 7 to Year 12

“So they can encourage you to learn.”

“They can help you be persistent.”

“You will have more confidence and try harder to do new things and try harder at school.”

“Sometimes they can encourage you to learn.”

“They make you feel good about yourself.”

In contrast, learning without the support and reassurance from friendships made learning difficult. Generally, the feelings associated with not having friends – feelings of loneliness and sadness – and the subsequent associated emotional states are what made learning more difficult. The consequences of feeling upset, lonely, worried or anxious hampered students’ capacity to concentrate on or feel motivated about learning. Students also noted decreased levels of support available to students who did not have positive friendships.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <i>“Because you’d be lonely, sad, and not learn because no one helped you.”</i> | <i>“You will have depression and will be lonely and not eager to learn.”</i> |
| <i>“Then you won’t get any help when the teacher is gone.”</i> | <i>“Can’t think properly.”</i> |
| <i>“You won’t be able to concentrate because you’re really sad.”</i> | <i>“You may not be able to concentrate as well.”</i> |
| <i>“You have no fun: you need to have fun to learn properly.”</i> | <i>“Affects class work – no one to sit with or get help from.”</i> |
| <i>“Because if you don’t you can be really sad and lonely and that can affect your school work!”</i> | <i>“You will also not be able to get encouragement and help from the person next to you.”</i> |
| <i>“You would have no one to work with and play with.”</i> | <i>“No social or educational support/sympathy.”</i> |
| <i>“It will affect your school work and you won’t try as hard as if you had friends.”</i> | <i>“Less study partners.”</i> |
| <i>“You become sad and it will affect the way you learn.”</i> | <i>“You don’t have anyone to study/finish homework with.”</i> |
| <i>“You’ll be depressed and you won’t listen at school and you’ll be dumb.”</i> | <i>“You have no one to talk to when you are struggling with your work.”</i> |
| <i>“If you don’t have friends it makes you sad and affects your education.”</i> | |

Students went on to suggest that ultimately a lack of friendships would have a detrimental effect on academic achievement. This was supported by the results of the analysis of survey responses that found that for the majority of students, friendships had a positive impact on academic achievement.

One comment proposed students would receive higher grades, presumably in the context of less distraction as noted above, but also acknowledged a decreased level of support.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <i>“Because without friends you would get lonely and sad and that could have an impact on your school work.”</i> | <i>“Your grades might suffer.”</i> |
| <i>“You might not be very smart because you might not know an answer to questions, you don’t have friends to ask, so you don’t feel happy and not good at school.”</i> | <i>“You will fail.”</i> |
| <i>“You tend to have lower grades.”</i> | <i>“Demise of school results.”</i> |
| | <i>“Your grades might drop.”</i> |
| | <i>“Higher grades, but limited support.”</i> |

Friends and social and personal development

Beyond academic development, students made an association between relationships with friends and social and personal development. They discussed how social interaction developed and provided opportunities to practise 21st century skills⁸² such as teamwork, communication and cooperation. A lack of opportunities to interact positively constrained social and personal development.

Through social interactions students learn social skills and are also provided opportunities to practise these skills. This learning is cyclical, that is better social skills leads to better social interactions, which provides students with more opportunities to practise these social skills. Students stressed the importance of socialisation and how the skills and knowledge developed through socialisation are important for the establishment and maintenance of relationships and for their lives beyond school.

If students were not provided with opportunities to interact positively with their friends or other students, students felt their development of social skills would be constrained. In turn, students would experience isolation and would have implications for their future functioning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"It is important to have friends at school but it's not a priority. Friends boost your social skills but they don't improve your intelligence or your learning. They don't help your education but it's better to have them than without."</i></p> <p><i>"You can develop social skills and communication skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Friends at school are important because they help your social skills. They are people you can talk to. You won't be lonely."</i></p> | <p><i>"Because:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>networking</i> • <i>build confidence</i> • <i>improve people skills</i> • <i>have a support network."</i> <p><i>"Yes because socialising is important (can tell people your problems) (trust)."</i></p> <p><i>"Human interaction prepares you for adult life."</i></p> <p><i>"Is needed in the work place/world."</i></p> <p><i>"Develop social skills."</i></p> |
| <p><i>"If you don't have friends you will not learn to interact with other people."</i></p> <p><i>"You may not be very social and might find it hard to talk to people later in life."</i></p> | <p><i>"If you don't have friends at school you don't have the support you need. I feel that your confidence and social skills will drop."</i></p> <p><i>"Social skills are difficult to develop which will affect you for the rest of your life."</i></p> <p><i>"You don't develop social skills which will impact you later on."</i></p> <p><i>"They may have difficulties socialising."</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 also made an association between relationships and personal development. Interactions with a variety of students meant that they learnt about others and themselves, contributing positively to identity formation.

Year 7 to Year 12

- "Get to know about other cultures."*
- "You can think in a different way."*
- "Keeps you open minded."*
- "I think it is good to have like-minded people around you to help you grow."*
- "Lack of exposure to others opinions/differences = close minded."*
- "It's easy to become introverted and become a shy person if you're not exposed to the opinions of the world."*

Suggestions from students

From the perspective of students, the importance of friends for school and learning cannot be understated. Working or being with friends created an environment that facilitated engagement with school and learning. Friends were noted as supportive, or even essential, across many factors that strengthen engagement, including feeling safe and valued, for getting help with concerns, encouraging positive learning behaviours and helping with learning. As such, students' suggestions for changes to school focused on strategies that would enhance relationships and provide opportunities to spend time with friends, including greater collaboration through learning experiences, encouragement and opportunities for various groups of students to interact and longer lunch breaks.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"I would like to make everyone friends. And I would like to make a bigger playground so everyone can play on it."</i></p> <p><i>"I would change the time of recess and lunch because not everyone is a fast eater so they can't play with their friends."</i></p> <p><i>"See our buddies more often."</i></p> <p><i>"Having more maths time in class and seeing my friends more that are in different classrooms and working together on more projects as one ginormous class because I want to see my friends more and I love maths so that's why I want more."</i></p> | <p><i>"All the kids should get along because some of the kids just want to talk to the people that they know and I think they should try new things."</i></p> <p><i>"Allow IEC [Intensive English Centre] students and middle school students to hang out together."</i></p> <p><i>"Some kids don't get included."</i></p> <p><i>"More integration between international and national students. There's a big language barrier."</i></p> |

As a way to improve school, some students suggested other students needed to have more positive, productive and mature attitudes towards school and learning and practise pro-social behaviour. Some students suggested having new or different peers and removing students who did not want to be at school or who made school less enjoyable for others.

Students also suggested having activities or equipment in which interaction with peers or friends was not required would make school more enjoyable.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Good play mates."</i></p> <p><i>"Flying fox (fun activities you don't have to have friends for)."</i></p> <p><i>"The people."</i></p> | <p><i>"Attitude."</i></p> <p><i>"Students that refuse to do work."</i></p> <p><i>"Some kids don't really want to go to school."</i></p> |

Teaching students respectful and inclusive behaviour was proposed as a way to promote positive relationships.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"I would make a program teaching kids to all treat each other nicely with fun games because some treat each other badly and use violence to release their anger."</i></p> <p><i>"No put downs."</i></p> <p><i>"To make everyone have RESPECT!"</i></p> <p><i>"More cooperation."</i></p> <p><i>"Be nice don't lie about other people."</i></p> | <p><i>"How everyone treats each other."</i></p> |

Schools can play an important role in providing students with opportunities to interact and develop friendships, and also supporting those who may require assistance to navigate relationships with other students.

The significance of opportunities and support to interact with other students is underscored when considering responses from students to other questions within the consultation, in particular, responses that emphasised the importance of students proactively making efforts to make friends (as discussed in this chapter) and requests for support to help form and maintain friendships (as discussed in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues).

3.2 Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future

Teachers play an important role in the trajectory of students throughout the formal schooling experience. Positive relationships between students and teachers have a long-lasting impact and can contribute to students' academic and social development, enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and promote engagement with school and learning.^{83 84 85} For some students, their relationship with a teacher may provide the stability, responsiveness and support from one trusted adult, which is beneficial for healthy development.⁸⁶

Survey findings

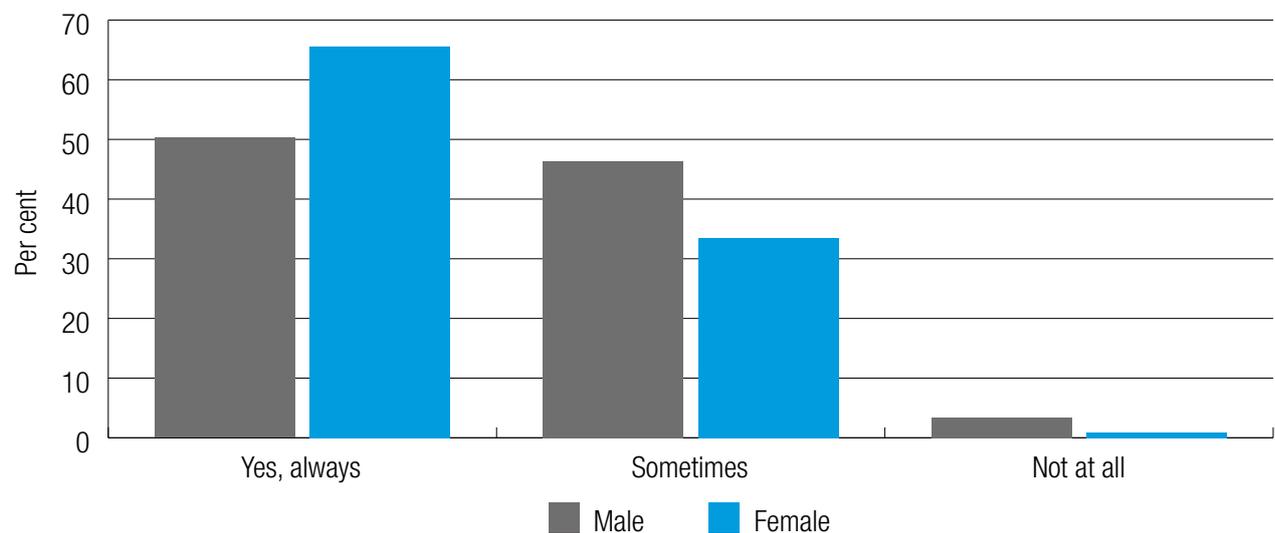
- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they 'always' get along with their teachers.
- 77 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'usually' get along with their teachers.
- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 39 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that their teachers care about them 'a lot'.
- One in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that teachers do not care about them.
- Students who 'always' or 'usually' get along with their teachers are more likely to have positive engagement outcomes (like school a lot, feel like part of their school, say being at school every day is very important, and achieve highly).

Getting along with teachers

Nearly 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they 'always' get along with their teachers while 39 per cent answered 'sometimes'. A few students (2.0%) said they do not get along 'at all'.

Among Year 3 to Year 6 students, girls were more likely than boys to say that they always get along with their teachers (65.6% of girls said this compared with 50.3% of boys).

Graph 3.9: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with teachers always, sometimes or not at all, by gender



Small differences were measured for Year 3 to Year 6 students in metropolitan areas and regional areas and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students but none of these differences were statistically significant.

Table 3.3: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with teachers always, sometimes or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, always | 50.3 | 65.6 | 60.1 | 57.8 | 59.9 | 53.4 | 59.2 |
| Sometimes | 46.3 | 33.5 | 38.6 | 39.3 | 38.4 | 42.5 | 38.9 |
| Not at all | 3.4 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 2.9 | 1.7 | 4.1 | 1.9 |

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, more than three-quarters (76.7%) of participants reported that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers while almost 20 per cent answered ‘sometimes’. A small proportion of students – 3.9 per cent – answered with ‘hardly ever’ or ‘not at all’.

Female students were significantly more likely than male students to say that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers (79.7% of female students said this compared to 72.3%). There was no significant difference between students in regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students were less likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to report that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers (65.1% compared to 77.4% of non-Aboriginal students) and more likely to report that they do not get along with their teachers ‘at all’ (7.0% compared to 1.3%).

Graph 3.10: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with teachers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by Aboriginal status

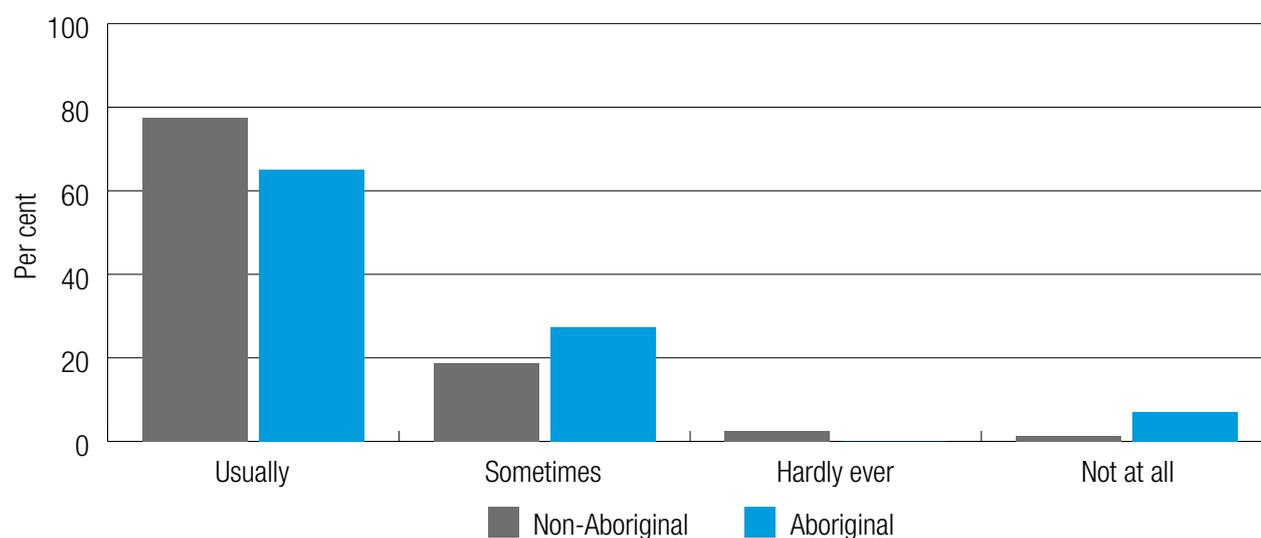


Table 3.4: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with teachers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Usually | 72.3 | 79.7 | 75.1 | 80.3 | 77.4 | 65.1 | 76.7 |
| Sometimes | 23.5 | 16.7 | 20.5 | 16.8 | 18.8 | 27.3 | 19.4 |
| Hardly ever | 2.5 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 2.9 | 2.5 | 0.0 | 2.3 |
| Not at all | 1.8 | 1.5 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 7.0 | 1.6 |

Do students feel that teachers care?

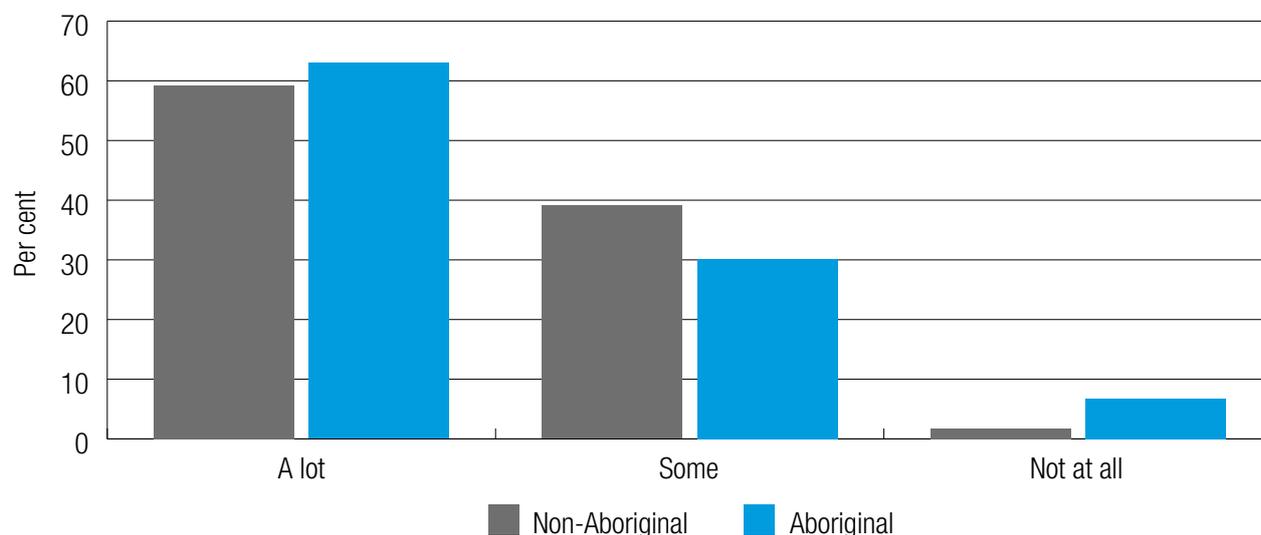
When asked how much they feel that teachers care about them, almost 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they feel that their teachers care ‘a lot’, 38 per cent said ‘some’ and about two per cent said ‘not at all’.

No statistically significant differences were measured between male and female students, students in different geographic areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Table 3.5: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| A lot | 57.4 | 61.4 | 61.0 | 57.8 | 59.2 | 63.0 | 59.7 |
| Some | 39.0 | 37.7 | 37.1 | 39.9 | 39.1 | 30.1 | 38.2 |
| Not at all | 3.7 | 0.9 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 1.7 | 6.8 | 2.1 |

Graph 3.11: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by Aboriginal status



Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, less than 40 per cent (39.1%) answered they feel people at school (like teachers, other school staff and the principal) care about them ‘a lot’. Over one-half (52.3%) said ‘some’ and about one in 10 students (8.7%) answered ‘not at all’.

Students in metropolitan areas were more likely than students in regional areas to feel that people at school care about them ‘a lot’ (41.0% versus 34.6%) and also ‘not at all’ (9.9% versus 5.8%).

There was no significant difference between male and female students and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to this question.

Graph 3.12: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by region

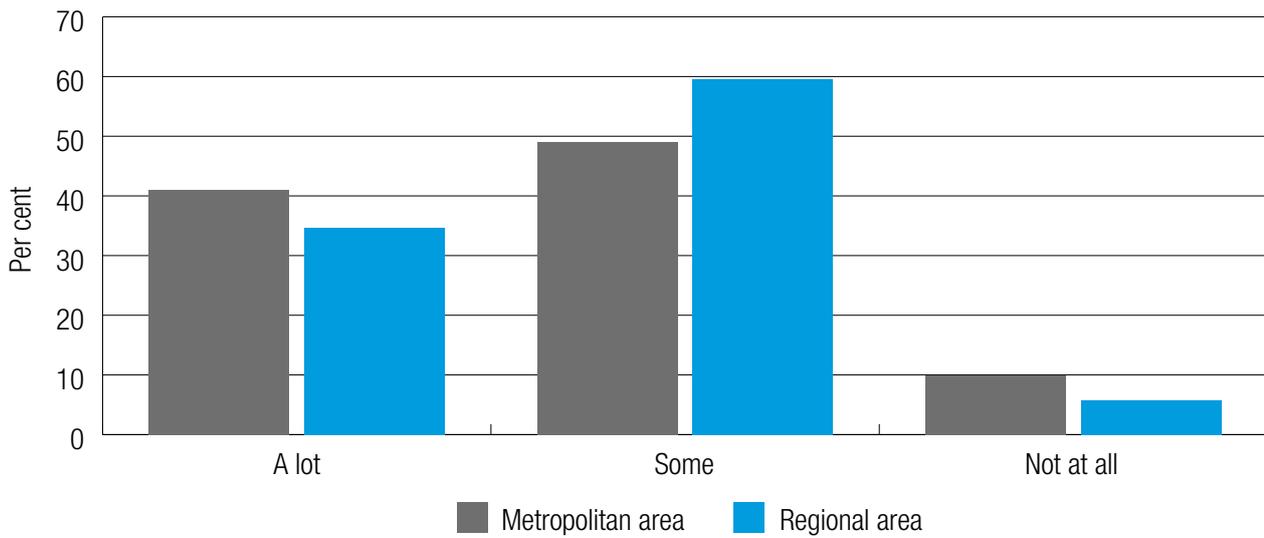


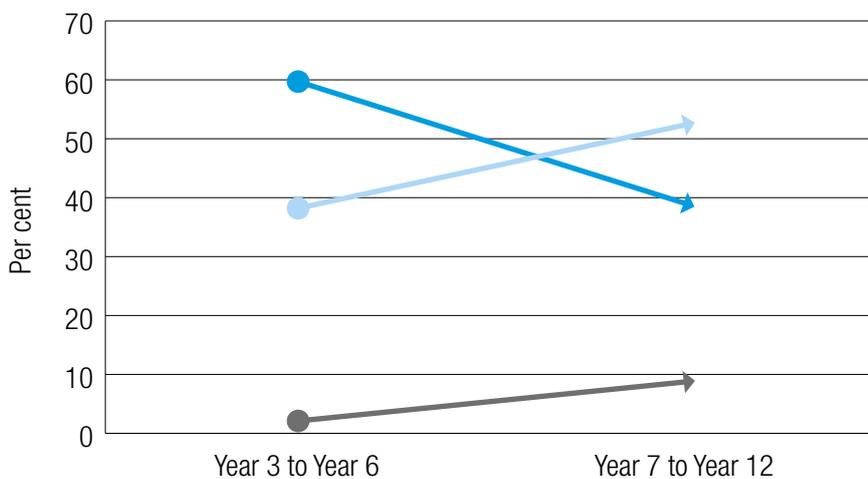
Table 3.6: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| A lot | 41.1 | 37.9 | 41.0 | 34.6 | 39.0 | 40.9 | 39.1 |
| Some | 50.5 | 53.3 | 49.0 | 59.6 | 52.0 | 54.5 | 52.3 |
| Not at all | 8.4 | 8.7 | 9.9 | 5.8 | 8.9 | 4.5 | 8.7 |

It is important to note that the proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that people at school care about them ‘a lot’ is significantly smaller than that of Year 3 to Year 6 students (39.1% compared to 59.7%) and that consequently the proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers do not care about them is larger (8.7% compared to 2.1%).

The survey results suggest that while there is no major shift from primary to high school in regard to the proportion of students who say they ‘always’ or ‘usually’ get along with their teachers, there is a notable change in students’ assessment of how much they feel that teachers care about them.

Graph 3.13: Change in the proportion of students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by year level



What students like about teachers

In the survey, students were asked to think about their teachers and then say what they liked about them. For Year 3 to Year 6 students, the most frequently mentioned personal quality was ‘helpful/helping/helps me’ (25%) followed by ‘fun/funny’ (24%) and then ‘nice’ (22%).

Male and female students largely gave similar answers with the exception that girls were twice as likely than boys to say that they like their teacher because he/she is ‘helpful/helping/help me’ (30% of girls mentioned this quality compared with 16% of boys).

Year 3 to Year 6 students saw teachers (rather naturally) as the most significant source of help. When asked what type of help students need at school, 54 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls said they would ask ‘my teacher to explain it.’

When Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked to think about teachers they like and to articulate what they liked about them, the most commonly mentioned personal characteristic or quality was ‘helpful/helping/helps me’ (26%) followed by ‘fun/funny’ (20%) and then ‘understanding/understand’ and ‘nice’ (12% respectively).

There was some difference between the genders, with female students being twice as likely than male students to say they liked their teacher because they ‘understand/are understanding’ (16% of girls mentioned this characteristic compared with 7% of boys). Female students were also more likely to say they liked their teacher because they were ‘helpful/helping me’ (28% of girls compared with 22% of boys).

When asked about what type of help Year 7 to Year 12 students need at school, 39 per cent of male students and 37 per cent of female students answered ‘talking to the teacher’, which was the second most popular answer after ‘more explanations’.

Students’ assessment of fairness in teachers

Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked about teachers’ fairness towards students. These questions were not part of the survey for Year 3 to Year 6 students.

A little less than two-thirds of students (62.8%) reported that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’ but one in 10 (8.7%) said that teachers ‘hardly ever’ treat students fairly.

There was little difference between students of different genders, in different geographic areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to their assessment of teacher fairness. It is worth noting however that among those students who gave their gender as ‘other’¹⁸⁷ not one respondent answered that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’. Most of these students in fact answered ‘hardly ever’. More research with a larger sample size of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex is recommended to further explore these issues.

Table 3.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying teachers at their school treat students fairly most of the time, sometimes or hardly ever, by selected characteristics

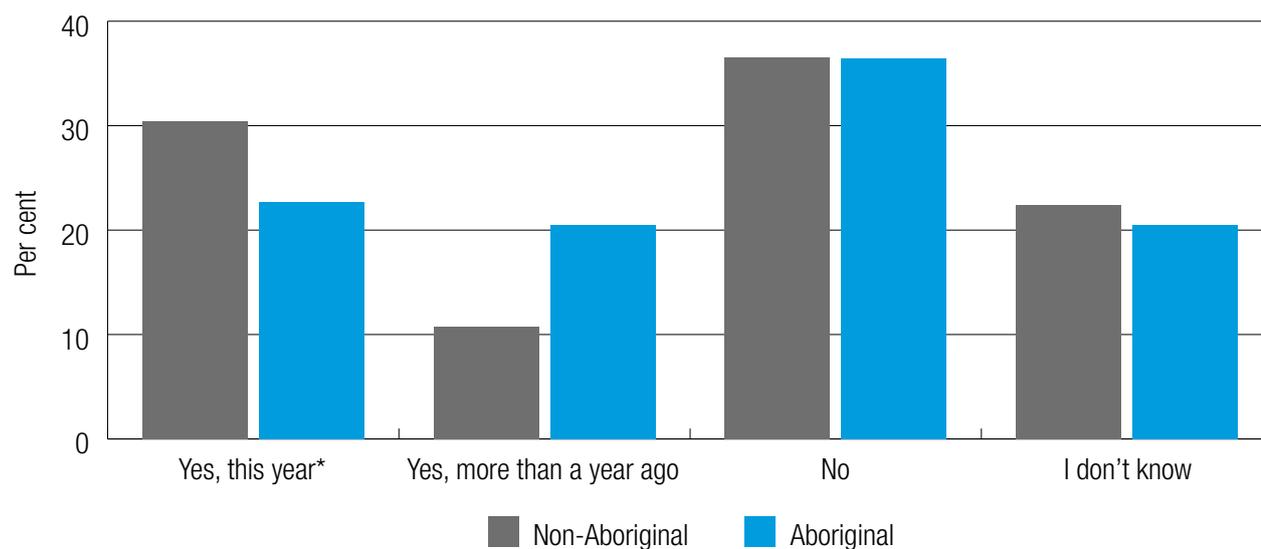
| | Male | Female | Other* | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------------|------|--------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Most of the time | 65.3 | 62.1 | 0.0 | 63.9 | 62.4 | 63.2 | 56.8 | 62.8 |
| Sometimes | 25.6 | 30.5 | 33.3 | 28.8 | 28.3 | 28.1 | 34.1 | 28.5 |
| Hardly ever | 9.1 | 7.4 | 66.7 | 7.2 | 9.3 | 8.8 | 9.1 | 8.7 |

* $n < 10$

When Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked if they had ever been treated unfairly, just over one-third (36.6%) answered in the negative. Almost 30 per cent of students said they had been treated unfairly ‘within the last month’ or ‘this year’, 11 per cent said ‘more than a year ago’ and 22 per cent ‘did not know’. There were no significant differences found between the genders and students in regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal students were the group least likely to say they had been treated unfairly by a teacher in the past month or year. Compared to their non-Aboriginal peers, Aboriginal students were more likely to say they had experienced unfair treatment more than a year ago.

Graph 3.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by Aboriginal status



* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

Table 3.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Other** | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|---------------------------|------|--------|---------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, this year * | 30.2 | 29.0 | 66.7 | 30.0 | 29.4 | 30.4 | 22.7 | 29.9 |
| Yes, more than a year ago | 10.9 | 11.8 | 0.0 | 10.8 | 12.5 | 10.7 | 20.5 | 11.3 |
| No | 36.1 | 37.2 | 16.7 | 37.6 | 34.1 | 36.5 | 36.4 | 36.6 |
| I don't know | 22.8 | 22.1 | 16.7 | 21.6 | 24.0 | 22.4 | 20.5 | 22.3 |

* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

** $n < 10$

Students who get along with their teachers and feel that teachers care about them – Year 3 to Year 6

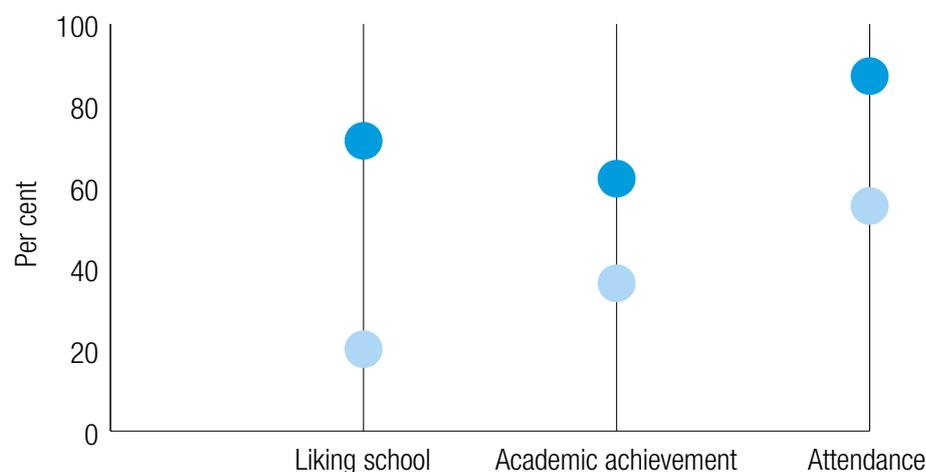
Compared to students who said they ‘sometimes’ get along with teachers, those who said they ‘always’ get along were more likely to give a positive rating of the engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (64.4% compared to 27.6%).
- Students report that they do ‘well’ or ‘very well’ at school (58.6% compared to 35.2%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (82.5% compared to 63.8%).

The following graph shows results for Year 3 to Year 6 students who said they ‘always’ get along with their teachers and feel their teachers care ‘a lot’ about them, and compares them, to the results for students who said they ‘sometimes’ get along with their teachers and feel that their teachers care ‘some’.

There are significant differences between the two groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.15: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who always get along with teachers and feel that teachers care a lot or get along with teachers sometimes and feel that teachers care some



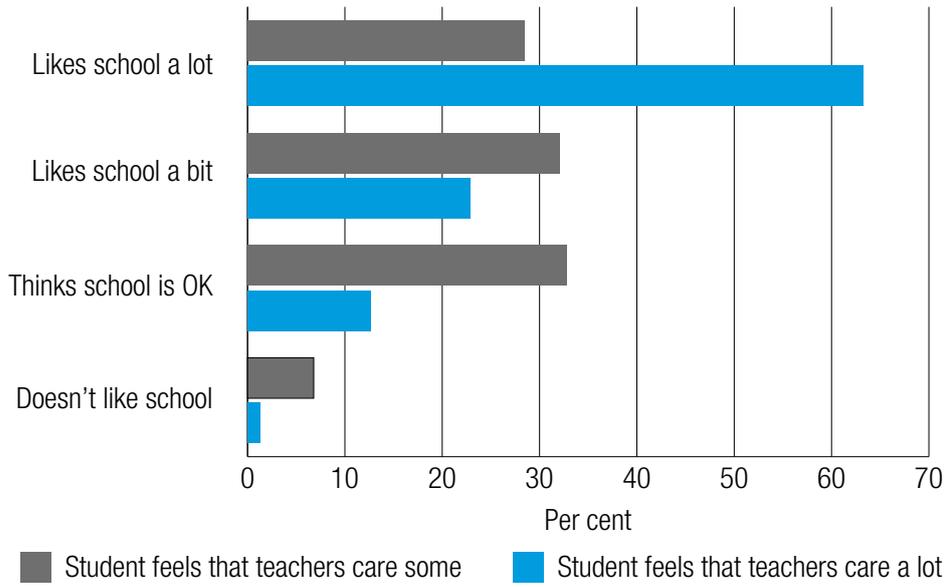
Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student said they always get along with their teachers but feel teachers care some or less) have been omitted in this graph.

Further analysis of the data and in particular comparison between how students feel about their teachers with how they feel about school, showed how significant a functioning and caring teacher-student relationship is in the context of achieving strong student engagement with school and learning.

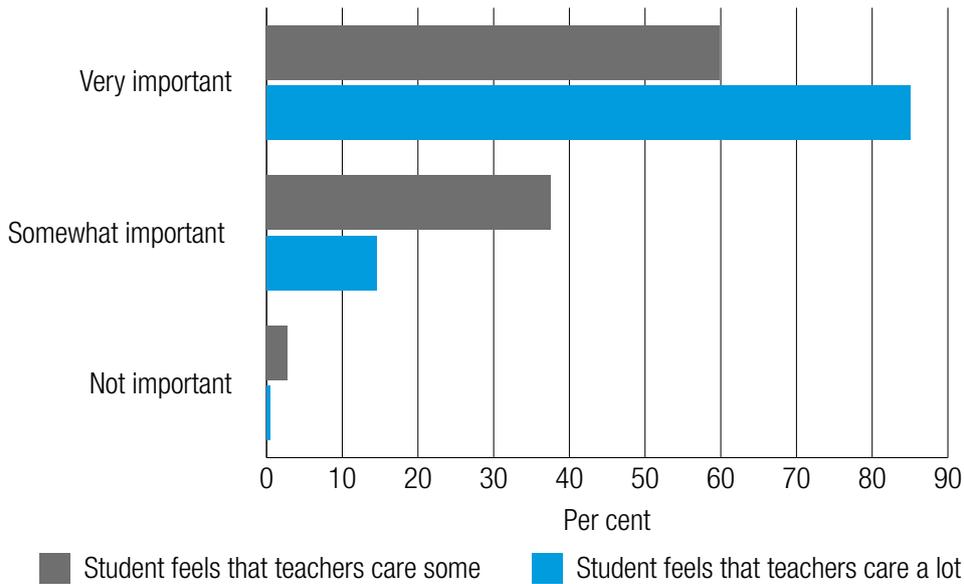
For Year 3 to Year 6 students, compared to students who said they feel that their teachers care ‘some’, those who said they feel that their teachers care about them ‘a lot’ were more likely to give a positive rating against the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (63.2% versus 28.4%).
- Students report that they do ‘well or very well’ at school (54.5% versus 40.8%).
- Students say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (85.1% versus 59.8%).

Graph 3.16: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school, by how much they feel teachers care about them



Graph 3.17: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be at school every day, by how much they feel teachers care about them



Students who get along with their teachers and feel that teachers care about them – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the results for Year 3 to Year 6 students, the analysis of data gained from Year 7 to Year 12 students equally showed a positive association between students' assessment of their student-teacher relationships and their rating of the engagement indicators.

Students who said that they 'always' get along with their teachers, who felt that people at school care 'a lot' about them and who said that teachers treat students fairly 'most of the time', were more likely than other students to like school 'a lot', to feel like part of their school and to say that coming to school every day is 'very important' to them.

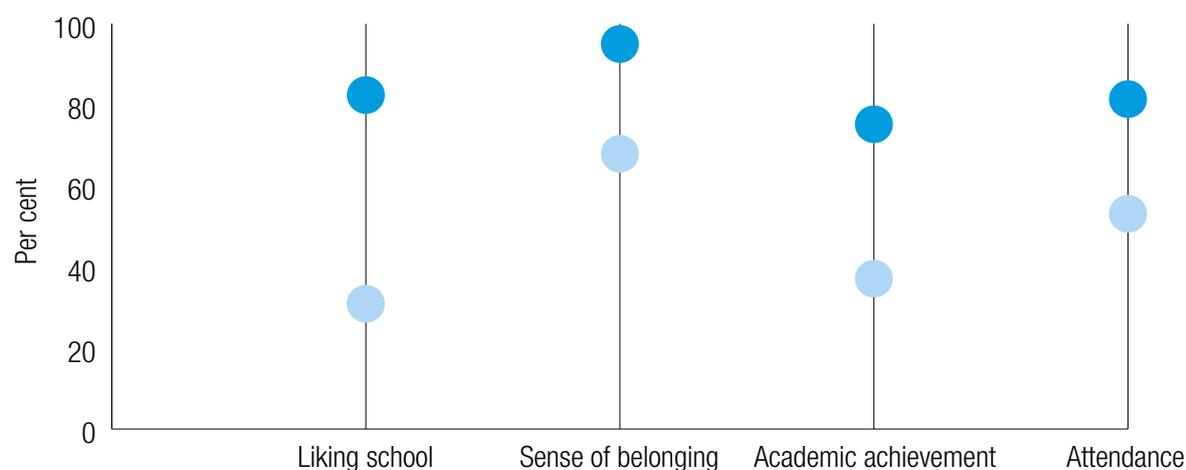
In particular, students who said they feel that people at school care 'a lot' about them were more likely than students who felt that people care 'some' to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school 'a lot' or 'a bit' (79.3% versus 50.9%).
- Students feel like part of their school (92.9% versus 70.5%).
- Students say being at school every day is 'very important' to them (79.9% versus 61.2%).
- Students' academic achievements are 'near the top' or 'above average' (72.0% versus 60.7%).

The following graph shows results for Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they 'usually' get along with their teachers and who also feel that their teachers care 'a lot' about them and compares them to the results for students who said they 'sometimes' get along with their teachers and they feel that their teachers care 'some'.

There are significant differences between the two groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.18: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who usually get along with teachers and feel that teachers care a lot or who get along with teachers sometimes and feel that teachers care some



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school 'a lot' or 'a bit', sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve 'above average' or 'near the top' in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student said they usually get along with their teachers but feel teachers care some or less) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“Teachers are more than just teachers, they are mentors, role models, a shoulder to lean on and best of all they’re the best type of resource for educational and life-long skills.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 clearly articulated the significant influence of teachers in relation to their experiences of school and learning. Positive relationships facilitated engagement with school and learning, whereas poor relationships contributed to negative experiences and impeded engagement. Students largely spoke of their relationships and experiences as highly dichotomous in nature, with this dichotomy being more pronounced in the responses from students in Year 3 to Year 6.

A multiplicity of factors contributed to positive relationships that encompassed teacher attitudes, classroom practices and personal qualities. Students desired teachers who embodied the qualities and practised the behaviours that made them feel comfortable and valued. That is, teachers who showed an interest in and encouraged students, were welcoming, and who created enjoyable learning experiences within an emotionally and physically safe learning environment.

“The teachers that I like would be the caring ones. My teacher cares for us and is a great educator. I have learnt a lot from her.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“We wouldn’t ever fall through the cracks because our teachers would never let us. Our teachers are the best.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When teachers worked in these ways they promoted emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement with school and learning. Students enjoyed school more, were motivated to learn, and felt comfortable at school and when learning. Some indicated that positive relationships also contributed to improved academic achievement and a positive future.

“They teach you lots (while being fun) to help you have a better future.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Our teachers care about us, our future and our education.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When quality interpersonal relationships with teachers did not exist, students perceived they were more likely to disengage from learning and school, feel targeted for discipline and not receive support for learning.

Teacher characteristics contributing to positive student-teacher relationships

“They are very friendly. Instead of a little kid you are just an equal that wants to learn. If they get straight to the point and give us working time. Firm but fair attitude helps us get along with teachers.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified teacher characteristics significant for positive student-teacher relationships. The characteristics students described referred to:

- interpersonal qualities or attitude towards students
- classroom practices, including pedagogy or teaching methods and behaviour management
- personal qualities and characteristics.

Students expressed clear views about the actions and characteristics of teachers, preferring those who worked to build relationships with students, made learning enjoyable, provided support for learning, were kind and had a sense of humour. Respectful, trusting relationships in which teachers showed interest and demonstrated understanding towards students meant that students were more likely to feel comfortable and engage in learning.

Only one comment from all group discussions stated that the student/s did not like any teachers: *“Don’t like any”* (Year 7 to Year 12).

Interpersonal qualities

“They help me with my work and listen to my ideas. If I got hurt they help me. The teachers give me different work from others if they think the work’s too easy.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The ways teachers communicated and interacted with students resonated strongly with them. Students consistently highlighted that teachers who communicated clearly, took an interest in students, understood and valued the perspective of students and who displayed mutual respect were preferred.

Teachers who took a genuine interest in students as individuals and as children and young people were important for positive relationships. Students said teachers demonstrated their interest in students and their welfare through their verbal communication (asking questions about their life, not just about school and learning, listening to the responses and making connections) and non-verbal communication (smiling and positive body language). Relatively small actions were noted and appreciated by students, including teachers who smile, who know their name, who greet them and say goodbye, and who proactively ask how they are. These actions made students feel valued and cared for within the school, and also made communication with teachers easier.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“He is easy to get along with and he is easy to talk to and he makes an effort to take an interest in you.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Name of staff] because she talks to me like a friend not as a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Compliments.”</i></p> <p><i>“Whole body listening: looking at person and your whole body is listening.”</i></p> <p><i>“The teacher pays attention to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because she treats me like I’m her son!”</i></p> <p><i>“I like [name of staff] in my school because he listens to you and is fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talks to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They listen to you.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Majority of teachers at my school. The teachers build an emotional bond/connection but still don’t cross the student/teacher boundary.”</i></p> <p><i>“She talks to me and not just about school, like her out of school life, we have a respectful relationship, it is also easy to communicate.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask [about] health issues, not just about marks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Care about personal things – make you feel noticed.”</i></p> <p><i>“They talk to you about other things not just school work. They include you in conversations and they smile.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are involved with you as an individual and encourage you and make learning fun.”</i></p> |

Having their voice heard mattered to students from Year 3 to Year 12 and contributed positively to student engagement in school and in learning. As such, teachers who sought the views of students, listened to their opinions and responded to their suggestions were highly valued. Relationships underpinned by mutual respect contributed to students feeling comfortable and valued at school. However, students in Year 7 to Year 12 also recognised that their lives beyond school would require active engagement on their behalf and therefore welcomed teachers who strove to develop these skills and treat them as young adults.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"They treat me how I would treat them."</i></p> <p><i>"They let me be myself in class. Teachers that I have respect me so I respect them."</i></p> <p><i>"She is nice and helpful and respects me."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me when I need it and I do jobs for them if they need it."</i></p> <p><i>"They help whenever I ask and they trust you with laptops. Also they can sometimes be humorous."</i></p> <p><i>"He is nice to everyone and he respects the students and is funny."</i></p> | <p><i>"Make use of your ideas and thoughts."</i></p> <p><i>"They give you responsibilities."</i></p> <p><i>"Mutual respect."</i></p> <p><i>"Tell you the truth."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] includes you in stuff."</i></p> <p><i>"That you [are] more like an equal rather than a lower person than them."</i></p> <p><i>"They treat you with respect and like you aren't a little kid."</i></p> <p><i>"They have a nice personality, they understand that student opinions matter."</i></p> <p><i>"Treat you like a friend not like you're a student/treat us like adults not kids, to help us when we leave school."</i></p> |

Students welcomed teachers who understood their perspectives and lives, and demonstrated concern for them. Empathy from teachers supported students to navigate and respond positively to concerns. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to the stress of navigating friendships and juggling academic demands, whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 highlighted various complexities and competing demands in their lives and referred to mental health concerns. When teachers understood students, students felt able to be themselves, increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem and feelings of acceptance at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"She understands everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me be confident about who I am."</i></p> <p><i>"They extend the due dates."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand some of the things you are going through because they were in primary school once."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help you with problems because they understand."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand if you are having a hard time with friends and how it impacts!"</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] because she always understands me."</i></p> | <p><i>"They understand how to manage the fun and serious times in class. They understand how we feel and help to maintain positive vibes."</i></p> <p><i>"Make us more confident about ourselves."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand you. They connect with you. They love you, care, support, encourage, like an older sister who protects us."</i></p> <p><i>"[My teacher] lets me see the Psych when my anxiety or my PTSD gets bad. She understands what I'm feeling."</i></p> <p><i>"Understands that we have other work."</i></p> <p><i>"Can relate to students."</i></p> |

Teachers who took a genuine interest and understood the lives of students were also noted as reliable and important sources of advice and assistance. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 valued teachers who understood them well enough to notice when something was bothering them and were proactive in providing support. Advice and support to find a solution to any issue, not just those directly relating to school and learning, was an important factor for students in Year 7 to Year 12.

Importantly, student perception of the trustworthiness of teachers influenced their level of comfort in discussing concerns and whether they valued the advice provided. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 defined various barriers to accessing help and support (as discussed further in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues), including fear, embarrassment and judgement. Teachers who demonstrated genuine interest in students allayed many of these concerns.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“They help me when I’m upset.”</i></p> <p><i>“They check in on you if something is bothering you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help with small problems, which makes a BIG difference.”</i></p> <p><i>“She cares for us when we get injured.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because when I get bullied she helps me.”</i></p> <p><i>“She helps and talks to us about the hard times.”</i></p> <p><i>“They tell jokes a lot, they help me understand things, and they are trustworthy.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher, because she helps me with a lot of things and I can trust her with my problems.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They try to help you when you are in a hard issue and they try to keep you happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“They understand my situation and are very caring. They’re there for me when I need it most. They understand us.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are there to help you with problems in and out of school.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are two teachers I get along with the most. They help me when I feel down. Sometimes we go to say hi and ask how they are.”</i></p> <p><i>“You know that you can trust them and if you told them something you know they wouldn’t tell.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain things very well to you, personally and you completely trust their advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“They sound down to earth and not like god and only take charge when you need [them] to.”</i></p> |

Classroom practices

“Each teacher has a fun and special way of teaching their students. I think that each student likes a different teacher because of the way they teach.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The classroom practices used by teachers influenced student perceptions of the teacher and learning. Students recognised the important role teachers have in creating enjoyable learning experiences, establishing classroom culture and providing assistance for learning. Throughout the consultation, students expressed a clear preference for learning that was interesting and meaningful, in a supportive learning environment and in which they received personalised assistance. Relationships between students and teachers, and subsequently engagement in learning, were enhanced when teachers worked to create the optimum conditions for engagement as described by students.

Students identified a variety of teaching methods that increased their engagement with learning. These included being ‘hands-on’, interactive and learning through games, strategies, excursions or incursions. Clear explanations from teachers were also essential for learning and contributed positively to student-teacher relationships and learning. Teaching methods that contribute to engaging learning experiences from the perspectives of students are explored in more detail in Chapter 4.3 – Teaching and learning that is interesting.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“She teaches things in a fun way and not a boring way.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher played learning games with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher made learning fun by doing real things with us in science, kind of like experiments, and let us use lolly snakes in maths and we could eat them after!”</i></p> <p><i>“Because she knows how to teach in different ways.”</i></p> <p><i>“She explains things well and it helps me learn stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain stuff right.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain things really easily.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They make class fun while teaching us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Proactive and engaging.”</i></p> <p><i>“Try new ways of teaching.”</i></p> <p><i>“They actually teach you not just give you worksheets.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make class fun but still educational.”</i></p> <p><i>“They make the lesson more upbeat.”</i></p> <p><i>“Can talk to you in a way you will understand and get along and can communicate their ideas in a way we will understand.”</i></p> <p><i>“They give me actual important information that helps me ace tests.”</i></p> <p><i>“The way [they] explain the question and if you still don’t understand they keep finding a way to explain it better to help you.”</i></p> |

Notably, teacher expertise and interest in the learning content was influential in student engagement in learning and their relationships with teachers. Students preferred teachers who knew and were passionate about their content area and who were passionate about teaching and learning generally. This was more commonly raised by students in Year 7 to Year 12, however, several suggestions for change from students in Year 3 to Year 6 related to teacher expertise.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“I’d get a trained scientist to teach us.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we get taught a different language the teacher needs to speak fluently and not get it off the internet.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Strong understanding of material in course.”</i></p> <p><i>“They’re passionate about teaching and what they teach.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are very enthusiastic about learning; make it fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivated to actively teach you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Enthusiastic and admit that they don’t know. Explains in multiple different ways.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need a real teacher not a fake one that gets stuff from the internet.”</i></p> |

Students felt better positioned to engage in learning in an emotionally-safe, positive, inclusive and supportive learning environment. Consistency and predictability in attitude and responses of teachers and the environments they created were significant in students feeling safe and comfortable to learn. Students felt comfortable in a well-managed environment conducive to learning when teachers were calm, with clear and consistent rules and expectations, and provided encouragement and support.

Fairness was a particularly important classroom practice for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students clearly disliked any perception of favouritism and those in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested teachers should have training so as not show favouritism or compare students. They suggested that it was helpful when teachers used the work of peers to showcase how to do something, but it was not helpful when used to show right vs wrong or put students down. Comparisons between students lowered their self-esteem, confidence with learning and sense of belonging.

High expectations, inclusive practice, encouragement and support for learning were significant teacher practices for engagement with school and learning. Students variously described how teachers enhanced their behavioural engagement through facilitating participation in learning activities, which also contributed to their sense of belonging at school, or assisted emotional engagement through encouragement and supporting students to do their best, and also developed their persistence with learning. Encouragement included the ways teachers spoke to students and their aspirations for them, and also rewards, such as free time, food or prizes – all contributed positively to student motivation.

Finally, support for learning contributed positively to student engagement and the relationships between teachers and students. Teachers who provided help for learning were valued by students as this enabled access to the curriculum, reduced anxiety and facilitated experiences of success. Students wanted teachers to be proactive and interested in providing individualised assistance. The willingness of teachers to help students outside of class was appreciated by students in Year 7 to Year 12.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| Fairness or no favouritism | |
| <p><i>"They're fair!"</i></p> <p><i>"They DON'T pick on me."</i></p> | <p><i>"Equality."</i></p> <p><i>"They are fair and care for each kid equally."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't show favourite students."</i></p> |
| Clear and consistent rules | |
| <p><i>"They are relaxed and not as many strict rules."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't get too frustrated."</i></p> <p><i>"They don't scream or yell. They are strict but nice. They don't give much homework. Explain thoroughly."</i></p> <p><i>"They are kind, they don't shout a lot and give you a second chance."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't shout and get angry easy."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] is amazing (doesn't be mean to us) (doesn't go off his head at one mistake) (he is chill) (doesn't yell at people) (listens) (kind) (doesn't overreact) (he lets us do what we want) (he answers questions)."</i></p> | <p><i>"He makes every lesson fun and isn't too strict unless he needs to be."</i></p> <p><i>"Laid back and not too crazy but sometimes you need a bit of nagging to get stuff done."</i></p> <p><i>"Chilled but serious."</i></p> <p><i>"They make a lot of jokes to distract from just learning. They don't punish you for things that are unimportant and don't affect you much."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers are funny and make learning more fun by not yelling at you all the time."</i></p> |
| High expectations, encouragement and inclusive practice | |
| <p><i>"My teacher likes to make sure everybody is doing the best they can."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher likes to make sure every single person is included and having fun."</i></p> <p><i>"It DOESN'T matter if you make a mistake."</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers I like make me like them because they are kind and encourage me to keep going. The ones that make it fun."</i></p> | <p><i>"The way they got people involved."</i></p> <p><i>"When it was a smaller group and your opinion was asked for."</i></p> <p><i>"Our teachers love their jobs, therefore they're always pushing us to the best of our abilities."</i></p> <p><i>"Constantly cheers me on, helping my anxiety."</i></p> <p><i>"They are encouraging and want you to get better."</i></p> <p><i>"Challenge you but leave the decision up to you if you will participate."</i></p> |

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| Support for learning | |
| <p><i>"I think we get along really well with them because they help you so much."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher helped us by sitting down and doing the work with us."</i></p> <p><i>"He helps us with our work and always comes to us when we get stuck."</i></p> <p><i>"They help when you ask for it."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you on a hard question that you can't work out."</i></p> | <p><i>"They know what's best for us and when we're struggling."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me when I get stressed when I start a test."</i></p> <p><i>"Offer help, even when not asked."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher will give private help to students who need it and give them extra time or less work if all or one students struggle with a task."</i></p> <p><i>"When I need help they are actually interested in helping me, not just looking bored and annoyed that I asked."</i></p> |

Personal qualities

"They are friendly, helping, protective and caring!" (Year 3 to Year 6)

The personal qualities that contributed to effective student-teacher relationships were clearly articulated by students. Teachers who were kind, happy, friendly and had a sense of humour, or who incorporated humour into teaching and learning, were viewed positively.

Teachers with an easy-going nature, who were calm, friendly and happy made students feel that school was enjoyable. From the perspective of students, these qualities made teachers more approachable and easier to talk to, and students felt teachers valued and cared for them.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"They care about you."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher that I like makes me get along by being kind to everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"Be really nice and caring because we're awesome."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you and are very friendly and happy."</i></p> <p><i>"At the start of the day, the teacher greets me with a big smile. The teacher is always funny and gets along with children really well."</i></p> <p><i>"They make sure you enjoy school."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher makes school fun."</i></p> <p><i>"Because she always smiles and is ready to have fun."</i></p> | <p><i>"My math teacher is my favourite because she's so nice and talkative and that certainly helps us get along with them as well."</i></p> <p><i>"They be nice and help."</i></p> <p><i>"They do sport that I like, and it is easy to make a conversation because they are nice people."</i></p> <p><i>"Always smiling."</i></p> <p><i>"Approachable."</i></p> <p><i>"Friendly, easy to talk to."</i></p> <p><i>"Our teacher is patient and calm."</i></p> <p><i>"Those teachers are not so 'in your face'."</i></p> |

A sense of humour made students feel relaxed and, when incorporated into lessons, humour made learning more enjoyable. Humour helped students to get along with teachers.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"They have a sense of humour."</i></p> <p><i>"Because she's fun and a funny person."</i></p> <p><i>"They become lively and make jokes to make us happy."</i></p> <p><i>"Tells interesting stories."</i></p> <p><i>"The thing I like about the teachers are they are funny, silly, forgetful."</i></p> <p><i>"I like my current teacher because she has a sense of humour and she does a lot of fun activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers make me laugh."</i></p> | <p><i>"They make you laugh."</i></p> <p><i>"Sarcastic."</i></p> <p><i>"Willing to joke when the time is right."</i></p> <p><i>"I like all my teachers because they are funny and cool."</i></p> <p><i>"Get along with most of my teachers because they are not all serious and like to have a laugh."</i></p> <p><i>"They make jokes as well as teaching us."</i></p> <p><i>"They have a good sense of humour."</i></p> |

Relationships with teachers and experiences of school and learning

"Because they can help when in need. They give us advice. They protect you from getting bullied, they support and encourage you. They teach you new things and make you achieve your goals." (Year 7 to Year 12)

Student's experiences of school and learning were highly relational. Relationships with teachers influenced a range of aspects, including the environment, student learning, student behaviour, and whether students felt supported. For students across Year 3 to Year 12, the link between their relationships and experiences were highly dichotomous. That is, getting along with teachers contributed strongly to positive experiences, whereas not getting along with teachers meant more negative experiences. Generally, for students in Year 3 to Year 6, poor or antagonistic relationships with teachers were associated with increased likelihood of 'getting into trouble'. While there were a few comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 in this vein, they were more likely to refer to the influence of relationships on their feelings of comfort at school or in the classroom, which in turn influenced learning behaviours and motivation.

For the majority of students, quality interpersonal relationships with teachers were viewed as important. Positive relationships were defined by teachers using effective communication, having a positive attitude towards students, being student-focused, creating interesting learning experiences and providing help as required. Through these relationships students described being more motivated to be at school and to learn. The amount of time spent at school was acknowledged by students in Year 3 to Year 6 and therefore underscored the importance of getting along with teachers. They explained if everyone gets along then school is 'easier' for students and teachers and everyone is 'happy'. Year 7 to Year 12 students were also cognisant that student-teacher relationships affected teachers as well.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"If you don't like your teacher it makes school difficult."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you see your teacher almost more than you see your parents so they are a big part of your life. If your teachers like you it means they will scream and yell less and that makes school more enjoyable."</i></p> <p><i>"So they have an easier job."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if you can't agree with them you can't learn. It's important you have a friendly relationship. Because they're going to be someone you'll need to work with throughout your time at school."</i></p> | <p><i>"[It's important to get along with teachers] So you enjoy school."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can enjoy your classes with them more and learn more too."</i></p> <p><i>"You have to come to school so if you like your teacher you will enjoy coming."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because you can help them and they can help you."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can have more fun with them (i.e. jokes, etc)."</i></p> <p><i>"Respect teachers more."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are just human like us."</i></p> |

Some students indicated it was not important to get along with teachers and gave a variety of reasons, as detailed below. Some students referred to qualities and practices of individual teachers, and particularly attitude towards students, as influencing their relationships. While others simply stated that it was the role of teachers to teach rather than to get along with students. A few comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 indicated they did not get along with any teachers.

Through the consultation students highlighted that when teachers were antagonistic or in conflict with students, students were less likely to attend or engage in school or learning because they did not feel safe, motivated or respected, or feel respect for the teacher. The notion that academic achievement may be influenced by relationships was a concern for some students.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Because you can still graduate and get good scores in stuff without being friends with them."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you have friends to hang out with."</i></p> <p><i>"No, they give you homework."</i></p> <p><i>"NO NO but not too sure."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes."</i></p> <p><i>"It shouldn't affect your grade whether they like you or not."</i></p> <p><i>"It's not important because not all teachers are nice."</i></p> <p><i>"Depends who they are otherwise NO!"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes but not if they hate us, well, prac students anyway."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are no fun."</i></p> <p><i>"It just doesn't happen."</i></p> | <p><i>"NO!!"</i></p> <p><i>"There are some teachers that don't get along with the students in our school. Some even don't care."</i></p> <p><i>"We don't know because we don't get along with teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they don't all respect you (students) the way we are meant to respect them (some)."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are acquaintances."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they're here to teach you not to talk to."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't have to get along with them but don't disrupt the class/not forced to like them (no)."</i></p> <p><i>"Only with some teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Because it is more important to learn than have a relationship with your teacher."</i></p> |

School environment

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also made a clear connection to positive relationships, the creation of a safe and comfortable environment and their learning. Students described the characteristics of a supportive and cohesive learning environment in which they felt capable of learning and acknowledged how relationships with teachers effected the learning environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"They make us all become friends and help us get along with each other."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can work well in the classroom."</i></p> <p><i>"Because then you can work with them easier."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you do not want to get into a fight with your teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can talk to them nicely."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you will get angry at the teachers and say things you will regret."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because then they can help you learn better and make you feel confident and have more education."</i></p> | <p><i>"Because maintaining a healthy relationship increases your overall happiness and allows you to feel comfortable talking to them."</i></p> <p><i>"Allows for a good and safe environment to learn in."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along with your teachers, you may feel too uncomfortable, sad, stressed out etc. to learn and perform to your best ability."</i></p> <p><i>"It allows students to feel happier, safer, more comfortable and makes learning easier."</i></p> |

Learning

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 acknowledged the critical role of teachers for learning. Many comments related to the importance of getting along with teachers because teachers provide education for students.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Because they are teaching to help you and others.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they can teach me things I don’t know. So they can teach you lots of stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because they give you education.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They try to give you good education for your future.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is easier to learn if you get along with the adults teaching you. Also, if they know you dislike them they will dislike you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, I think that having a good relationship with a teacher impacts learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you need to create a bond/relationship with those who we spend majority of our time with. We need to feel comfortable in order to learn and receive the best type of learning for our future/education.”</i></p> |

Critically, students emphasised the significant influence of positive relationships on their learning. They recognised that positive relationships were underpinned by clear communication, which translated to a number of benefits. Teachers had a better understanding of the student and their learning needs, enabling them to tailor teaching as required. For students, it also meant they felt comfortable approaching the teacher for assistance, as discussed further in Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Because you can understand them better and it will help you learn better.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because they can teach you better.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it affects your learning and they need to help you when you need it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t you will have trouble understanding them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then they might understand you better.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Because if you have a strong healthy relationship with your teacher it’s easier to communicate with him/her and allows the student and teacher to explain and understand task and information given.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then teachers know you better and can cater to your learning style.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it makes it easier to communicate with them if you have an issue or problem.”</i></p> |

Relationships with teachers strongly contributed to student behaviour and disposition towards learning. Students described being motivated and engaged with learning and practising learning behaviours, such as being attentive in class and completing homework, when relationships with teachers were positive. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also described feeling less anxiety when learning when relationships were positive.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Yes because then they don't ask you difficult questions."</i></p> <p><i>"So they won't target you so you can learn better and they can help you."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if you don't [get along with your teacher] you won't know what to do because you won't want to listen to them."</i></p> <p><i>"If you fight/argue with your teachers then you might spend more time arguing then and effecting your friend's learning opportunity."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along with your teacher it's going to be hard to communicate with them and get along but if you like them you can ask for help and feel safe!"</i></p> | <p><i>"You are more attentive with people you get along with."</i></p> <p><i>"You might not want to learn or come to school/class."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if you dislike the teacher it can affect your learning and your view on the subject."</i></p> <p><i>"Easier to learn if you respect them."</i></p> <p><i>"Gives you more motivation to do well."</i></p> <p><i>"It affects your learning and motivation to focus and study."</i></p> <p><i>"It means that they can encourage and get you interested in your learning."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you're more likely to pay attention if you like the teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"You are looking forward to class."</i></p> <p><i>"If you resent the teacher then you will resent the subject."</i></p> <p><i>"It can make learning a lot easier and a good relationship with your teacher can make you want to strive harder to achieve higher marks."</i></p> <p><i>"You have more motivation to listen and learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because then you would want to learn and ask questions."</i></p> |

For students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular, student help-seeking behaviour was enhanced by positive relationships. Students felt comfortable and willing to ask for assistance when required and were confident in the predictability of teacher responses and that their questions were welcomed.

Year 7 to Year 12

"So you aren't afraid to ask for help."

"If you don't get along with them, they might not help you, but if you do get along with them, they are more approachable to ask for help."

"So that you have the courage to work + ask questions to them."

"So you don't feel awkward when you ask a question."

The perceived level of support for learning provided by teachers was also influenced by student-teacher relationships. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 remarked that teachers were more likely to provide support if the student-teacher relationship was positive, with poor quality relationships resulting in reduced provision of help and support. However, students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt teacher support was also influenced by student interest and effort in the subject or learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"It means that if you have a good friendship with your teacher, she/or he might give you extra tips, also if you are really stuck, she will/ or he will give you some help and a tip for later on the same question."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if you're not kind to them they won't help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you don't want to let them not like you or they won't help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because then if you don't understand then you can ask her/him and they listen."</i></p> <p><i>"If you're naughty and silly, but you want help but they don't take you seriously."</i></p> | <p><i>"They will help you with your school work even when you don't need it they will always be there for you."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers are more likely to help you (out of their way) if they feel you're someone that wants to be interested in the subject."</i></p> <p><i>"To get more help in understanding the subjects and getting more information about the topics."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you learn extra."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they can support you in class."</i></p> |

Finally, students made an association between relationships and academic achievement. The power of teachers in relation to grades was noted by students and they felt strongly that relationships should not affect achievement. Some students highlighted that "it shouldn't affect your grade whether they [teachers] like you or not" and "you can still graduate and get good scores and stuff without being friends with them." However, the majority of comments intimated that positive student-teacher relationships contributed to higher achievement in school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"You will not get a good report."</i></p> <p><i>"You will do better in school."</i></p> <p><i>"You will do better in class if you like your teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"So you get good grades."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you can be a suck up and get an A."</i></p> | <p><i>"Yes, because if you don't then they will give you bad grades."</i></p> <p><i>"They will also not care how well you do at school."</i></p> <p><i>"Get good grades/behaviour grade (yes)."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along well with them it could affect your grade."</i></p> <p><i>"You won't fail."</i></p> |

Beyond academic achievement, students also expressed a clear connection between relationships with teachers and a good education and future.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"Yes because you will get a better life ahead."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they help you improve your education and be a better person."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers can help you get a better future so you get a better opportunity."</i></p> | <p><i>"Teachers are more than just teachers, they are mentors, role models, a shoulder to lean on and best of all they're the best type of resource for educational and life-long skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Also, getting along with teachers is good for learning how to get along with workmates."</i></p> |

Interactions with teachers

Students felt strongly about equality and fairness and were attuned to differing teacher practices towards students. They explained it was not beneficial for student-teacher relationships when students were treated differently by teachers and, for some, having poor relationships with teachers meant a student was more likely to be judged, picked on or treated unfairly.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Because they might be mean to you if you hate them."</i></p> <p><i>"So you're not on your teacher's bad side."</i></p> <p><i>"So then they don't give you the so called 'evil eye'."</i></p> <p><i>"It is important to get along with your teachers so you won't get into trouble and you won't get suspended."</i></p> <p><i>"So you don't get detention."</i></p> <p><i>"So that you don't get in trouble for things that you didn't do."</i></p> | <p><i>"If you don't get along they'll think less of you."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, because it's great to get along with your teacher so that they don't pick on you without any reason."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers will downgrade students or exclude students in discussions between students."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if not they might be harsh on you because they don't like you."</i></p> <p><i>"Because otherwise they will teach you different and give you lots of punishments."</i></p> <p><i>"More detentions if you don't get along with them."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are the ones who teach us and who can get us in trouble and build a bad reputation."</i></p> |

There were a range of benefits associated with having positive relationships with teachers. Students described an increased level of trust, responsibility, autonomy and voice, which made them feel valued. Further, students in Year 7 to Year 12 perceived greater understanding and leniency from teachers.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"If you do get along with your teacher they will be nice to you."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they will listen to you and you get rewards."</i></p> <p><i>"So you get certificates."</i></p> <p><i>"Give us freedom to do things on our own."</i></p> <p><i>"Rely on you to be responsible!"</i></p> <p><i>"So they trust you."</i></p> | <p><i>"You can get extension easier."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because they won't be so hard on you. When you don't finish work. Also they won't get so angry."</i></p> <p><i>"Because the teachers will favour you in class."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes so you can convince them to doing things you want them to do for your class."</i></p> <p><i>"Trust and responsibility is given/built."</i></p> <p><i>"Get picked for important things."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they give us free time."</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

“Teachers who care about us, not just the school work.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When asked to consider what they would change about their school, students articulated a desire for ‘better’ school staff.

Students wanted school staff who were enthusiastic, responsive, qualified, helpful, approachable, and who employed engaging pedagogy and treated students fairly and equally. Such behaviours helped students engage in learning and feel comfortable at school rather than practising disruptive behaviour as a result of boredom, frustration or feeling uncomfortable or incompetent. Many students already had teachers who acted in these ways, as such comments often referred to having more teachers like this or more time with preferred teachers.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“[...] Only the nice teachers can stay e.g. [name of staff] can stay.”</i></p> <p><i>“More teachers like [name of staff].”</i></p> | <p><i>“More teachers like [name of staff]; understands students, makes learning interesting – [name of staff]; gets along with students – [name of staff]; because he makes school work fun and gives homework – [name of staff] – because he is really engaging and fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bring our old principal back please!”</i></p> |

Students described the ways in which staff acted that did not promote engagement. This included yelling or using a raised voice, being rude, mean, overly strict or racist, showing favouritism and bullying.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“I would get rid of all the very mean teachers who are very disrespectful to the students.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change my teacher because she is not very nice to the students and favours some.”</i></p> <p><i>“For the teacher to respect everyone the same.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not to have racist teachers and principals because some people think it’s not fair.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make the teacher nicer and kinder to the children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers should want to come and eat with us and shouldn’t be allowed to go somewhere no limits.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change the teachers because I would want them to help students when they’re hurt and crying.”</i></p> | <p><i>“The teachers and principal should be nice and not racist to everyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“We shouldn’t feel anxious as we walk into a certain class with a certain teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“The thing I would like to change is the teachers because some of them are racist and they favour other students.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers need to treat students equally.”</i></p> <p><i>“If the teacher didn’t get worked up about little things.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Principal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We need someone who personally knows us and is ALWAYS nice.</i> • <i>Don’t come in guns blazing.</i> • <i>Don’t tell me I’m on drugs.”</i> |

While the vast majority of students spoke of positive and productive relationships with teachers, some students in Year 7 to Year 12 stated that they experienced bullying from teachers and emphasised that this should not occur.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Teachers keep hands to themselves.” (Facilitator discussed this comment with the group of students who explained this meant the teacher pushing or pulling a student’s arm to prompt or move students, such as when lining up).

“[Name of staff] is strict but can be rude and sometimes bully us.”

“Teachers treating you poorly:

- *yelling*
- *pushing*
- *slapping (once).”*

To ensure they were working with school staff who embodied qualities and enacted practices that facilitated engagement, students in Year 3 to Year 6 suggested removing school staff they did not like, making school staff nicer and more respectful, ensuring preferred school staff were employed full-time and enhancing school staff stability (through limiting the use of relief teachers, frequent changes in relief teachers and school staff leave). As a way to improve how students and teachers got along, students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested improved qualifications for teachers and school employment practices.

Ways to build relationships – the perspective of students

“Children learn better and teachers teach better if they like each other and are friends.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students were asked for their suggestions on how to improve the relationships between students and school staff. As identified throughout the report, the vast majority of students already had positive relationships with school staff and acknowledged the ways in which staff worked to build relationships, support student learning and future aspirations.

Comments to improve relationships largely related to the characteristics that contributed to positive student-teacher relationships as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The majority of comments from students suggested relationships with school staff would be improved by school staff demonstrating care and respect towards students and showing interest in their wellbeing. This included teachers having conversations with them about more than school work, being consistent, supportive and approachable, and treating all students fairly.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“When you say things like ‘Good Morning’.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers should give us more attention because then we can get along easily.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being respectful and helpful so all the staff and students can like each other and agree with each other’s decisions.”</i></p> <p><i>“We can get along if the teacher is nice, caring and fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“By being happy.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Always be interacting in a friendly matter.”</i></p> <p><i>“Speak cheerfully.”</i></p> <p><i>“Addressing student’s needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers need to care about the students and try to help them at all times.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t abuse the power they have over students.”</i></p> <p><i>“Certain teacher/s who make me dislike school. There is only 1 or 2 but they don’t treat pupils and have unpredictable behaviours.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not so strict!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t yell at us if we don’t do anything wrong just because you’re having a bad day.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they say they will do something they should actually do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers shouldn’t be allowed to lose their temper at students for little things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Treat every student fairly!”</i></p> |

For students in Year 7 to Year 12, demonstrating care and respect meant recognising and supporting their emerging desire for autonomy.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Make sure teachers and students both understand how important mutual respect is.”*
- “Allow students to be more independent with learning.”*
- “Don’t put us on the bench.”*
- “Teachers should not look down on us and treat us like our parents expect them to treat us. We always respect them so we just ask for the same in return.”*
- “Don’t treat us like lesser beings.”*
- “Don’t assume all students want to cause problems.”*
- “Understanding that they both have opinions, that may be different. They don’t treat us like little kids and we don’t treat them rudely.”*
- “Don’t hold grudges against students when they did something stupid 3 years ago.”*

Students also suggested school staff work in ways that create the optimal environments for engagement. That is, school staff who were relaxed, lenient and consistent, designed effective learning experiences, worked to understand students and provided encouragement with regard to learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Some of my ideas are that students don’t like teachers that yell all the time so if the teachers don’t yell all the time it will be better.”</i></p> <p><i>“To talk and know how they work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Giving students a chance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Positive reinforcement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Well the teachers go crazy when we ask a question.”</i></p> <p><i>“Explain the instructions clearly.”</i></p> <p><i>“They tell more jokes.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Not bombarding us with unnecessary tasks, if you can see we aren’t finishing/doing all the work, reflect and try to understand why.”</i></p> <p><i>“Finding ways to interact with students during the learning process.”</i></p> <p><i>“Actually teach us not just give us heaps of worksheets and be lazy = students don’t know how to do and the teacher gets angry.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get teachers that aren’t only good in their field, that are good at teaching too.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can teach us in a way that we understand not how they know.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be open to giving help, and don’t use fear.”</i></p> <p><i>“Take you out in the sunshine so you’re not always in a dark room.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have more engaging yet still educational activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers could give rewards for children so that students work hard.”</i></p> |

Students clearly articulated a desire to be more involved in the decisions regarding their learning and the school more generally as this demonstrated the school and teachers valued and respected students. Students explained their relationships with school staff would be improved if they felt accepted, when participation was enabled and their ideas utilised. Several suggestions were put forward as to how students could be supported to voice their ideas, such as through discussions about ways to change the school or the focus of learning and within employment processes for school staff.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"They have to accept us the way we are."</i></p> <p><i>"Listen to other people's ideas because some people think their ideas are the best but other people's ideas could be better."</i></p> <p><i>"To listen to them and respect their rights and maybe make friends with them."</i></p> <p><i>"I think we could have a talk with our teacher about what we like in a teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers should listen to kids for their ideas."</i></p> | <p><i>"Let the students have a voice."</i></p> <p><i>"Make a student be a teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"More student involvement in learning decisions (more co-operation)."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers listen to students' point of view."</i></p> <p><i>"Respect other values/cultures ideas."</i></p> <p><i>"Have regular school meetings and everyone has to have a suggestion."</i></p> <p><i>"Have a few interviews and find out their teaching styles... etc."</i></p> <p><i>"Understanding the student's point of view."</i></p> <p><i>"Get kids to interview them (sensible ones)/get example lessons for students then get feedback/employ or don't employ them."</i></p> |

Critically, students recognised that they also had an active role to play in the development of positive relationships. They referred to a range of student behaviours that would support positive relationships, including being polite, friendly and demonstrating mutual respect.

Students noted that the attitudes and behaviours of some of their peers needed to change – with students showing more respect towards teachers, particularly when teaching. To support this, students felt teachers needed to respond appropriately when students were being disruptive in class.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Be nice to the teachers so they will be nice to you."</i></p> <p><i>"Treat people the way you want to be treated."</i></p> <p><i>"By buying your teacher a present."</i></p> <p><i>"Students not arguing back at staff or teachers. Because students get annoyed or angry at teachers but it makes it worse if students argue back with them."</i></p> | <p><i>"The students are rude to some of the teachers and they have to be thankful for all the teachers do for us, they even help us at lunch time."</i></p> <p><i>"A bit more support from the students, not degrading teachers before they even do anything to them."</i></p> <p><i>"Students should behave better/respect others and not distract people during class time."</i></p> <p><i>"Students should behave and try and get along with staff and teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Respect from students."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't kill their teaching buzz."</i></p> <p><i>"Get rid of the annoying/naughty kids!"</i></p> <p><i>"Not call out in class (students)."</i></p> |

Students felt that collaborative activities could support the development of quality interpersonal relationships between school staff and students. A range of activities were put forward that enabled time spent together and collaboration, including talking, introductory lessons, ice-breaker activities or quizzes, morning teas or lunches, tutoring, sports, competitions, activities such as excursions, camps or plays, and extracurricular activities such as clubs, socials and projects.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“A class at a time could meet with the teachers and staff for tea.”</i></p> <p><i>“There could be a session where we get to know each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some ideas maybe to have a student, teacher and staff ‘fun’ day to help build relationships.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fun activities that include everybody.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some ideas to improve the relationships between students and teachers are maybe doing some more fun events like going to the beach as a class doing fun stuff as a group.”</i></p> | <p><i>“By interacting outside of class.”</i></p> <p><i>“You talk to each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“For all they know they might actually like someone that they never originally talked to. So they could just get along with them anyway.”</i></p> <p><i>“More whole school activities when everyone can get involved.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not staff morning teas – school morning teas.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a school meeting where students go to their favourite teachers and talk about getting along.”</i></p> <p><i>“Student vs teacher games to show everyone’s skills and talents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers not in their staff rooms all day, and instead come and play with us and bond with us because we are awesome and why not?”</i></p> <p><i>“Combine classes so we get to interact with other students and teachers (even if it’s only for a day).”</i></p> <p><i>“By holding school events that get every year group to co-operate with other years allowing them to mingle (remove segregation and increase culture).”</i></p> <p><i>“Team bonding/building games fun, comfortable and healthy environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could organise teacher-student meetings as right now we only really have meetings with our parents about our school work. This way we could talk about our outside-of-school life.”</i></p> |

3.3 Families who are involved and interested

There are a variety of ways the home environment can contribute to engagement with school and learning. Factors include family circumstances (family structure, family functioning, etc.), caregiver circumstances (caregiver education, employment, health, etc.), family member expectations for students and attitudes towards school and learning. Notably, a number of social and economic factors influence the capacity of families to provide a rich home learning environment. Family processes and practices are strongly related to students’ academic, social, emotional and behavioural outcomes and studies have shown that when schools and families collaborate to support student learning, student outcomes are improved.^{88 89 90}

Survey findings

- 55 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that someone in their family ‘often’ asks about their homework or school work and 86 per cent said their family comes to school events.
- 50 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family ‘often’ asks about their homework or school work and 66 per cent said their family comes to school events.
- 86 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 76 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that their family says it is very important that they go to school every day.
- Students whose families attend school events and ‘often’ ask about school work or homework are more likely to achieve better engagement outcomes (like school ‘a lot’, feel like part of school, achieve highly in their school results and say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them).

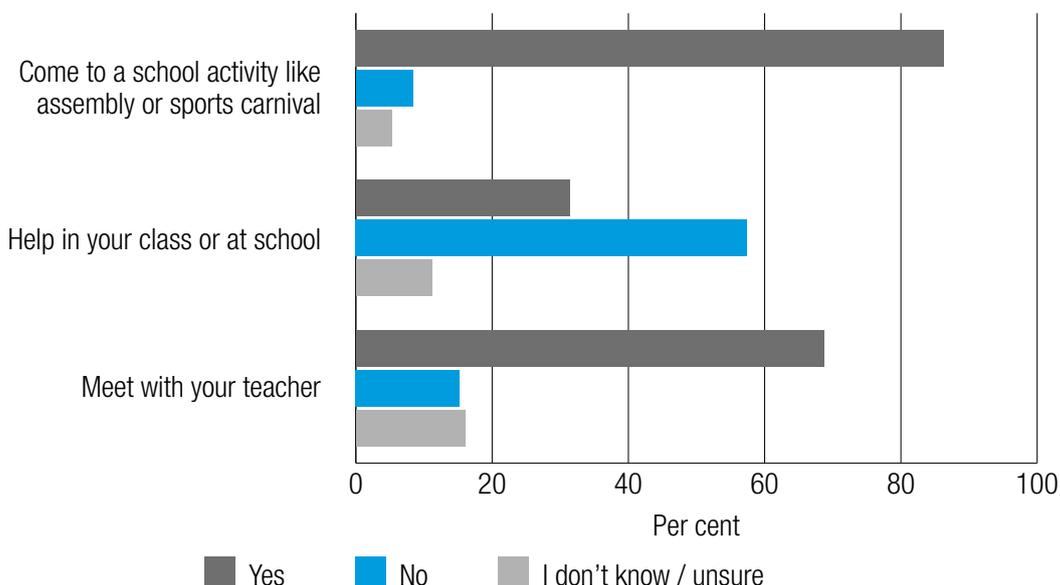
Families’ involvement with school

Students were asked a range of questions about their family’s involvement with school. Nearly all Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that someone in their family asks about their school work either ‘often’ (54.7%) or ‘sometimes’ (41.9%). Around three per cent of students said that no one in their family does this.

When asked about help with homework, one-third of Year 3 to Year 6 students said that their family provides help with homework ‘often’ (33.3%), while almost one-half answered ‘sometimes’ (45.6%). Around five per cent of respondents said they do not get any help from their family. The remaining students (16.3%) answered that they either don’t get homework or don’t need help.

The majority of Year 3 to Year 6 students also reported that someone in their family comes to school activities such as an assembly or school carnival at least once per year (86.3%), and two-thirds said that someone in their family meets with their teacher (68.7%). A smaller proportion of students (31.4%) answered that someone in their family helps in their class or at school.

Graph 3.19: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students answering yes, no or unsure to family being involved in their school, by various activities



Notwithstanding the fact parent involvement generally declines in high school, more than three-quarters of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family asks about their homework or school work either ‘often’ (49.6%) or ‘sometimes’ (27.2%). Around 20 per cent of students answered ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ with the remainder (5.0%) saying this was not required.

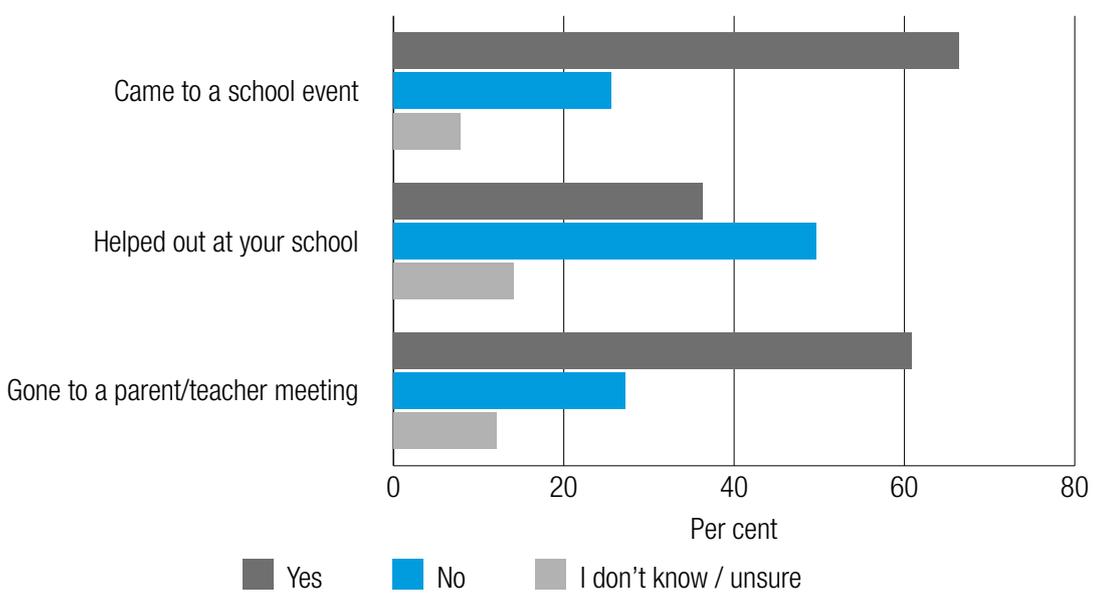
A total of 60 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that someone in their family helps them with their homework ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’, while 10 per cent of students answered that they do not require help. The remaining 30 per cent of students said that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ receive help with homework from someone in their family. These students did not select that help is ‘not required’ thereby indicating a possible need for help.

Table 3.9: Proportion of students saying someone in their family asks about or helps with their homework/school work, by frequency

| | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | Not required |
|--|-------|-----------|--------|-------|--------------|
| Asks you about homework/school work | 49.6 | 27.2 | 11.9 | 6.8 | 4.6 |
| Helps you with your homework/school work | 28.8 | 31.9 | 17.1 | 11.6 | 10.6 |

Around two-thirds of Year 7 to Year 12 students (66.4%) reported that someone in their family came to at least one school event in the current school year, and 60 per cent said that a family member went to at least one parent/teacher meeting. More than one-third (36.3%) reported that someone in their family has helped out at their school at least once in the current year.

Graph 3.20: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students answering yes, no or unsure to family being involved in their school, by various activities



How important is regular attendance to families?

Students were also asked if their family says it is important that they go to school every day: 86.4 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students answered ‘yes’ to this question and 11.0 per cent said ‘sometimes’. There was a small proportion of students (2.6%) who said that their family does not say it is important that they go to school every day.

There was no significant difference between male and female students, students in regional and metropolitan areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how important regular school attendance is to their families.

Table 3.10: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying their family says being at school every day is important, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes | 84.0 | 88.2 | 84.4 | 89.5 | 86.4 | 87.7 | 86.4 |
| Sometimes | 11.7 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 8.9 | 11.2 | 8.2 | 11.0 |
| No | 4.3 | 1.3 | 3.3 | 1.6 | 2.4 | 4.1 | 2.6 |

Nearly all Year 7 to Year 12 students answered that it is either ‘very important’ (76.3%) or ‘important’ (21.9%) to their parents or the people who look after them that they go to school every day.

There was no significant difference between male and female Year 7 to Year 12 students, students in regional and metropolitan areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how important regular school attendance is to their families.

Table 3.11: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, important or not important to their parents or the people who look after them that they go to school every day, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|--------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Very important | 76.1 | 76.6 | 77.1 | 74.5 | 76.6 | 70.5 | 76.3 |
| Important | 22.1 | 21.6 | 20.6 | 25.0 | 21.8 | 22.7 | 21.9 |
| Not very important | 1.8 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 0.5 | 1.6 | 6.8 | 1.8 |

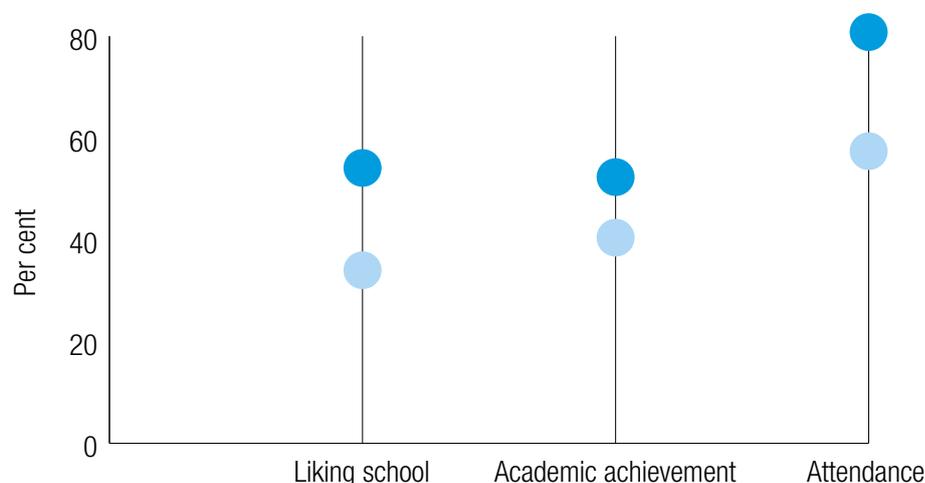
Students with families who are involved and interested – Year 3 to Year 6

Students who said that their family ‘often’ ask about school work and participate in school activities were more likely than students who said their family ‘sometimes’ asks about school work and does not participate in school activities to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (54.1% versus 34.0%).
- Students say they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results (52.3% versus 40.4%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (80.8% versus 57.4%).

The following graph shows results for Year 3 to Year 6 students who said that their family ‘often’ asks about school work and attends school activities (for example comes to an assembly or a school event) and compares them to the results for students who said that their family ‘sometimes’ asks about school work and does not attend school activities (such as above).

Graph 3.21: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who say their family ask about school work often and participate in school activities or students who say their family asks about school work sometimes and does not participate in school activities or students does not know



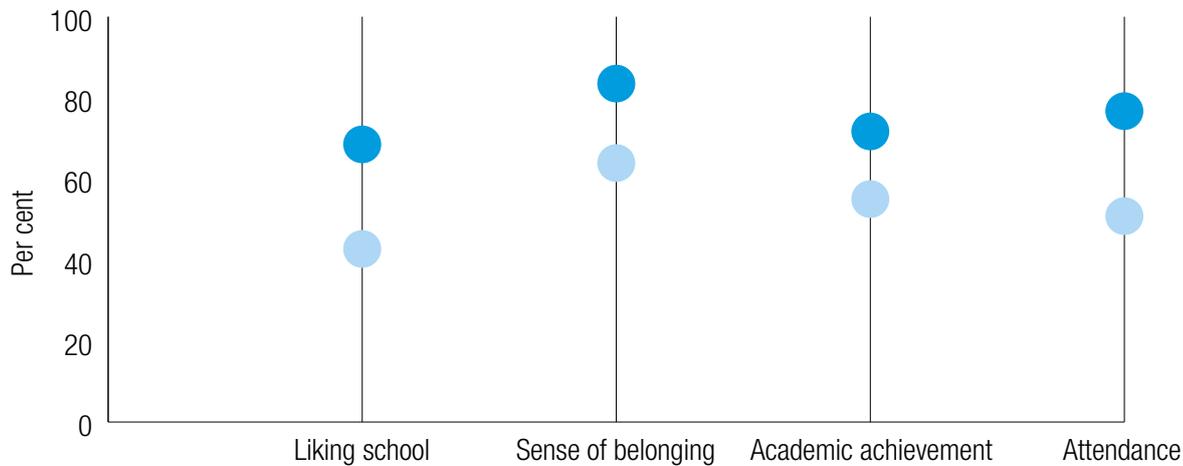
Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. family asks about schoolwork often but does not participate in school activities) have been omitted in this graph.

Students with families who are involved and interested – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, students who said that their family ‘often’ ask about homework or school work and participate in school activities (for example comes to an assembly or school event at least once in the school year) were more likely than students who said their family asks about school work ‘sometimes’ and does not participate in school activities to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (68.5% versus 42.7%).
- Students feel part of their school (83.5% versus 63.9%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (76.7% versus 50.8%).
- Students’ academic achievements are ‘near the top’ or ‘above average’ (71.7% versus 55.0%).

Graph 3.22: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who say their family ask about school work often and participate in school events or who say their family asks about school work sometimes and does not participate in school events



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. family asks about schoolwork often but does not come to school events) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“They help kids at school by helping you with homework or just supporting you. Some parents help by bringing them to places (school).” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The attitudes and behaviours of family members were a significant influence on student engagement with school and learning for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students described the varied ways in which family members acted that were both supportive and unsupportive of their engagement, noting that a range of factors came into play that also enabled or constrained family member actions.

Family members were noted as generally helpful for engagement with school and learning when they:

- provided resources and a home learning environment that supported education
- demonstrated that they valued the student and education through showing interest and encouraging learning progress (not just academic achievement)
- provided practical, emotional and academic support or assistance
- directly participated in school activities or communicated with the school.

Across these areas, family members were noted as acting in ways that were helpful and unhelpful, with the exception of showing interest in the student and in education. For example, family members were helpful when they participated in school activities but could also be a source of embarrassment. Students wanted family members to show an interest in them and their learning. They explained that family members demonstrated their interest through asking questions about them, what they were learning and how they were feeling about school. When family members engaged with students in these ways, students felt valued and that their learning and school was important. Critically, this was not about family members knowing the answers to homework questions, but about spending quality time talking and listening to the student.

Comments from students indicated how family members largely influenced their emotional engagement with education or created environments within the home that either enabled or hindered engagement. However, practices and circumstances in the home environment can play out at school, influencing cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement.

Readiness for learning

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 acknowledged families as providing a range of practical supports that enabled and promoted readiness for learning. Families were identified as providing food and transport, paying for school fees and supplies such as stationery and uniforms, and providing structure (for example, enforcing healthy sleeping patterns). Families were not helpful for school and learning when this practical support was not provided.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"They can take you to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Pack your lunch and your bag."</i></p> <p><i>"Cook food and clean and take you fun places!"</i></p> <p><i>"Get you out of bed in the morning! (in the cold)."</i></p> <p><i>"They provide school stationery."</i></p> <p><i>"She goes to work every day and buys me things for school."</i></p> <p><i>"They can give you a good breakfast and feed you."</i></p> <p><i>"They give \$4,000 for Year 6 schooling."</i></p> | <p><i>"Drive you to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Clean your clothes."</i></p> <p><i>"Provide food when studying."</i></p> <p><i>"Put a roof over my head."</i></p> <p><i>"Support us for travel, supplies, money for residential times, funding."</i></p> <p><i>"Make sure they get sleep."</i></p> <p><i>"Support – Centrelink should pay single parents more money so they can buy more clothes and equipment."</i></p> <p><i>"They pay for our school fees, excursions/incursions and school stationery."</i></p> |
| <p><i>"Not paying for education."</i></p> <p><i>"Feed you bad food e.g. McDonald's because they have so much advertising. They are also so junky it is hard to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes not bring lunch at all and you sit in class when you are supposed to be listening you are thinking about how hungry you are."</i></p> <p><i>"Not buying you school supplies e.g. shoes, pencils."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't pay notes to the school."</i></p> <p><i>"Not making yummy breakfast."</i></p> <p><i>"When there is no toilet paper."</i></p> | <p><i>"Don't provide their child/children with the right resources. e.g. books."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't provide food when studying."</i></p> <p><i>"Kicking you out of the house."</i></p> <p><i>"Being cheap."</i></p> <p><i>"Not giving you lunch and dinner."</i></p> <p><i>"Not buying me pens = teachers getting annoyed when I ask for a pen."</i></p> <p><i>"Not cooking dinner."</i></p> <p><i>"No cash."</i></p> <p><i>"Not paying fees."</i></p> |

For some families, financial constraints made supporting school readiness challenging. Being aware of family financial stress affected how students felt towards school and learning. While families were generally noted as supporting readiness for schooling, students in Year 7 to Year 12 described a range of ways in which schools can support school readiness, including the provision of healthy food and for school supplies, such as uniforms and stationery.

"Kids with financial issues at home have difficulties keeping up with school standards i.e. uniforms, teachers should support kids that struggle with uniforms, equipment, etc." (Year 7 to Year 12)

"Decrease pressure on children e.g. not involving children in personal problems like financial help or problems going on." (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students who were attending boarding schools also noted the financial support, in particular, from families and how financial stress sometimes restricted their participation in activities outside of school in comparison to other students.

An environment for wellbeing

“Be helpful, be supportive, loving, caring and help you with learning.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“My mum helps me prepare for big tests like NAPLAN. My dad helps me to make sure I’m kind. My siblings help me doing my homework.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Families can be a big impact in people’s lives and hurt and make people happy.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The home environment can have a powerful effect on a child or young person’s wellbeing. Through the group discussions students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified the characteristics of, and behaviours within, positive and problematic home environments for engagement in school and learning.

Positive environments that are supportive of school and learning were described by students across Year 3 to Year 12 as environments in which they felt happy, cared for, understood and supported. For students in Year 7 to Year 12, support also included for their decisions. The ways in which families provided encouragement and support is discussed in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. Positive environments were characterised by calmness, kindness, displays of affection, encouragement and were responsive to student needs.

Disruptive environments for doing well with school and learning were described as uncaring, chaotic, stressful, unpredictable and lacking communication. Students described how the actions of family members or circumstances within the home environment affected them emotionally – with students feeling upset, hurt, unloved or hated. These feelings made it difficult to engage with school and learning and had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

For students living away from their families, such as those in boarding schools, communication was particularly important as they could not physically spend time with family members. As such, when phone calls were unanswered, not made or unable to be made, students felt their families did not care about them. For these students, financial pressures can place tension on phone communication. Students explained that relatives taking them out on the weekend alleviated feelings of homesickness.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Being kind.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working as a family. Supporting one another helps build a stronger education for the child, because feeling loved can encourage the student to do better in school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you laugh.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hug you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Comfort you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They love you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Stay calm.”</i></p> <p><i>“Never shout.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Be loving towards all family so kids can concentrate on work and not depression.”</i></p> <p><i>“To encourage them to try new things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Safe environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be honest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Supportive in all your choices.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be positive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents who care.”</i></p> <p><i>“By helping them out and giving them love!!”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“Don’t spend time with you and don’t really care about what you do or help with anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Never keep calm.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families might have got angry at student which makes the student sad and have a bad day. Support the student because if they have a bad day they won’t learn as much.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can hurt your feelings.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could have been bullies and want to bully you!”</i></p> <p><i>“They could be abusing you and you could have a hard time at school from it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t love or care about you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You could struggle at school because they [family members] aren’t nice.”</i></p> | <p><i>“If parents favour one child over another child and not support children equally.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hate.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your mum has a boyfriend and you don’t like them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get angry over the smallest problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Caring more about themselves than the child.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not making time to spend with their children and build stronger relationships with them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Speaking aggressively to kids – being very strict.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not caring about their children’s education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not loving them.”</i></p> |

For students across Year 3 to Year 12 positive environments were also characterised by family members spending quality time together. There is a distinction between the quantity of time available and the quality of the time used.⁹¹ While family members may have a limited quantity of time available (in hours and minutes) students valued quality time, particularly when the time was spent to support their learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Help you do your homework and spend lots of time with you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make time for us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Spend more time learning together.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sit down with us and we can work things out together.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Spend more time with kids [so] they don’t feel like they are being rejected [would help with school and learning].”</i></p> <p><i>“By not making time to spend with their children and build stronger relationships with them [is unhelpful to school and learning].”</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 noted the quantity of time available to family members sometimes impeded on their ability to provide support for learning. They recognised that other family members, such as younger siblings or family members with disability, or work demands may require more time of people.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Spend too much time on little siblings.”

“If you have a death/disabled sibling or family member in the family.”

“Being so involved with their own work and lives that they don’t support the kids enough.”

“Family problems – (relationships) (work life).”

Finally, students identified a range of problems within families, such as drugs, alcohol and family violence, which had an impact on how students felt about coming to school and their capacity to concentrate on or engage with learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Fighting because the kid would be sad and angry at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“My family will not help by fighting and talking loud plus playing music.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fighting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Drugs (drinking) (smoking).”</i></p> <p><i>“Drink driving.”</i></p> <p><i>“Big fights (swearing) (violence).”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents fighting and not co-operating with each other or the child.”</i></p> | <p><i>“If family fights a lot or drinks/drugs it can be a bad influence on their children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pre-existing social issues – drugs/substance abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“Influence of drugs or booze.”</i></p> <p><i>“Divorced parents!”</i></p> <p><i>“They may be fighting and might have a lot of work to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“Broken households.”</i></p> <p><i>“Beating you up.”</i></p> <p><i>“Abusive parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad background and home life – abuse.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kicking you out of the house.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not fix problems that are at home that you try to fix by yourself.”</i></p> |

An environment that promotes learning

“Creating learning space.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“And encourage you to do your best. They could make rewards for getting good marks and studying. Make homework a fun time to talk to you about the importance of doing well in school.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The home environment can reinforce the value of education through family members contributing to an environment that is conducive to learning. This includes creating space and time in which students can concentrate on their learning and also providing structure to support learning.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 described environments that are not supportive of learning such as those where families (and pets) were noisy or created distractions – either actively or passively. These distractions made it difficult for students to concentrate and complete their work. Students explained it was important for families to ‘be considerate’ when they were working at home.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Cat sitting on homework when doing it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Family can be noisy when doing homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Your sibling wants to play with you when you’re working.”</i></p> <p><i>“My dad watches TV when I do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Loud music or party.”</i></p> <p><i>“By yelling at you when you are doing school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be not considerate.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Siblings (distraction) (ask too many questions).”</i></p> <p><i>“Create too much noise.”</i></p> <p><i>“Distracting from homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Playing loud music when trying to do homework. P.S. they have crappy taste in music!”</i></p> <p><i>“Talking loud when you’re trying to study.”</i></p> <p><i>“Preventing you from doing your work.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can be a distraction from studies.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pestering for no apparent reason.”</i></p> |

Structure was generally seen to support learning for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to the negative implications of structure (as noted below), however, students in Year 7 to Year 12 acknowledged enforcing dedicated time for learning as important and helpful.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Force their kids to go to school.”

“Make you do your homework.”

“Push you to do work.”

Students explained how household responsibilities or expectations of attendance at events reduced the time they had available for work. Students wanted family members to appreciate their competing demands.

A lack of structure or not enforcing study at home was noted as detrimental to learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Sometimes they don’t give you time for your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“They clog you up with lots of chores.”</i></p> <p><i>“Embarrassment!!! Chores taking up homework time. After school activities that also take up homework time that children don’t necessarily want to do. Not doing the dishes with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you do jobs and you don’t have time to do your homework – get in trouble by teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keeping kids up late and the effects are not concentrating.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let you stay up on technology late at night.”</i></p> <p><i>“No organisation.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Letting the children do anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other activities like taekwondo and horses.”</i></p> <p><i>“Watching TV/Playing games.”</i></p> <p><i>“Buying you PS4/games.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make you put out the trash.”</i></p> <p><i>“Jobs around the house.”</i></p> <p><i>“Piling child with household duties and also expect homework to be completed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Pre-set agenda of household responsibilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have to go out when you have assessments or homework.”</i></p> |

As they developed greater autonomy within their lives, students in Year 7 to Year 12 described positive environments as characterised by structure, balance and understanding. Students valued when family members enforced time to be spent on school work and engaged in their learning, but equally important was time to support their wellbeing, including free time, time alone or time to spend with friends. Wellbeing and breaks from learning were important to enable students to concentrate and feel motivated about studying – as discussed further below and in Chapter 4.8 – Feeling physically and mentally well. Communication and understanding from family members facilitated the creation of such environments and students felt it supported their learning.

Inflexible and forceful environments were noted as unhelpful, and having a negative influence on student health and wellbeing, and subsequently learning.

| Year 7 to Year 12 | |
|--|---|
| Ways families are helpful for school and learning | Ways families are not helpful for school and learning |
| <p><i>“Understanding how their child feels.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talk to them and make them feel comfortable.”</i></p> <p><i>“In some cases, leave the students alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not grounding them for everything.”</i></p> <p><i>“Understand that the school system has changed since they have been at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give us space.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give them a little freedom to hang out with their friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give kids time to study or be with friends alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not always talk about school.”</i></p> <p><i>“By supporting them and giving them time to self.”</i></p> <p><i>“When the kids finish their homework they can do whatever they want to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could be strict on their children and school work.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They keep telling me to study.”</i></p> <p><i>“Strict parents because they pressure you to succeed/ study more often.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families can often force or push students with their work which can create stress to the student. This can cause health problems to the student and also make them rush the work or incomplete their task. Families also might give wrong advice to the student causing friend problems or get the child into trouble. This will ruin reputation for the student caused by the family.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might apply too much pressure on their child causing them to stress which may lead them to not concentrating.”</i></p> |

Students expressed a desire for independence and increasing but manageable levels of responsibility for their learning. They felt that within a positive environment, family members would support them to manage their demands. Young people want to have a sense of control over their lives and to solve problems on their own, knowing that supportive adults are there to provide assistance as required.⁹²

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Only help when asked, but also check if they need help. If they say no don’t try to help.”*
- “Take an engaged view in the learning of their kids but let them work at their own pace and let them figure it out.”*
- “Showing compassion and trusting us.”*
- “Letting us explain ourselves.”*
- “Allowing you to be independent.”*

Involvement and interest in the student and their learning

“Families can help encourage children in their learning and social groups. They can talk to students about how they went at school on that day and how they are going with their friends and teachers. They can also ask if the student has any homework or schoolwork that they need help or could be struggling with.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Families were identified as an important overall influence on how students felt about coming to school and learning. Through their values, attitudes and expectations, families communicated to students the perceived importance of education. These factors influenced student engagement – while also noting the pivotal and complementary role of friends and teachers as outlined in Chapters 3.1 – Having friends and positive relationships with other students and 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future respectively.

The value of families taking an active interest in their learning (and life more generally) was a common theme identified by students across Year 3 to Year 12. They described that families show their interest through proactively asking about school, learning and how they feel and, critically, listening to their responses. To students, this active interest meant that family members cared about them and their learning.

The actions of family members resonated strongly; students explained that when families did not show an active interest, it demonstrated the family member/s did not care about them, their wellbeing, their education or their future.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“They show interest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Asking them how they feel about their work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask about your day.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask you how you did in test and other activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask if you need help with your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talk with them.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Talk more to them and make sure they are OK.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have an interest in what their kids are doing in school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Check up on them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask about their day.”</i></p> <p><i>“Families can make a difference by asking simple questions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Care and make an effort to understand what is happening in your child’s schooling life (and out of their life/socially).”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“Not encouraging their children, not helping at all, not doing anything about their school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Just dump their kids at school and not care about what they are doing.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t spend time with you and don’t really care about what you do or help with anything.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not helping or even caring about how their kids feel at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might not be interested.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not listening to their kids when their kids are telling them what they did at school.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They don’t ask them how they’re doing at school and if they are being bullied or not.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not caring for their child’s education.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they don’t come to school events or talk about what you’re doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don’t care about your education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not listening to their child.”</i></p> <p><i>“Only asking if you’ve done your homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“By not asking if their kids are OK and by trying to find out about the wrong stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“By ignoring the kids.”</i></p> |

Further, some family members indicated through their actions that they did not value education, actively discouraged students or did not support school work or attendance.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“By saying ‘Boo homework schoolwork!’”</i></p> <p><i>“Not letting them read and write.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Some families don’t even help them and tell them to go watch or do something else rather than doing their work and then they can do whatever you want.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discouragement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Restrict the learning/recreational activities that their children take part in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t motivate them to achieve their best.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might despise of the idea of school and that will have an impact on the child’s life.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not valuing education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having other priorities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being a good influence.”</i></p> |

There were a range of perceived benefits to receiving encouragement for school and learning from family members. Students outlined that encouragement developed self-confidence, motivation, resilience and determination in school, learning and extracurricular activities. Promoting these capacities in children and young people is important for school and beyond. Self-confidence, resilience and determination enable students to navigate academic difficulties which, for some, may be experienced in a classroom on a regular basis. The active interest and encouragement from family members motivated students to attend school and to try their best to do well.

Low expectations, negative comments or ‘put downs’ from family members were discouraging and hurtful for students, and not helpful for how they felt about school attendance and learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Families encourage kids to learn and are happy when they do well.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to try their hardest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keep trying.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support their kids to go school by telling them that their good.”</i></p> <p><i>“Give positive comments.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gives ‘talks’ so you want to do good and so you behave.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Encourage kids to not give up.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivate them to do well in school.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can give moral support to communicate with their child.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to be better at school and not just sit around and let their kids do nothing.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can encourage you to participate in school activities (e.g. plays, competitions, etc.).”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“By not encouraging their children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Say bad things about your work.”</i></p> <p><i>“No good comments.”</i></p> <p><i>“They criticise you when you did nothing wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teasing brothers and sisters.”</i></p> <p><i>“Saying their kids are stupid.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Say you’re not good enough.”</i></p> <p><i>“Say you can’t succeed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Call you lazy/procrastinator.”</i></p> <p><i>“Telling them they are stupid and extremely dumb.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very low expectations.”</i></p> |

While students generally appreciated the encouragement provided by family members, they explained family members' aspirations and expectations could also be a source of stress. Expectations related to academic achievement and other aspects of their lives, such as future career paths, extracurricular activities, family or social lives. Expectations that were "overly high" (Year 7 to Year 12 student), perceived as unattainable or not in areas of interest to students translated to pressure, anxiety and stress. Students feared disappointing their family members and this affected their self-confidence and self-esteem.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Pressure you too much."</i></p> <p><i>"You may get hurt if you don't get an A+ on everything."</i></p> <p><i>"They DO NOT understand mistakes."</i></p> <p><i>"Want to get you into a good school e.g. [name of school] by making you do homework until 10pm at night and 5am in the morning."</i></p> <p><i>"They expect too much."</i></p> <p><i>"They might push you, when you don't want to be pushed."</i></p> <p><i>"Put too much pressure on sporting events."</i></p> | <p><i>"They might pressure them too much (e.g. have high expectations, making the students feel that they cannot keep up with them)."</i></p> <p><i>"Pressure excellence making someone stressed or anxious not to disappoint."</i></p> <p><i>"Their expectations can seem unattainable."</i></p> <p><i>"They want their kids to have high grades at school."</i></p> <p><i>"Expect too much: job + school + social life + family + sleep."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't expect me to be the 'the perfect student' while pushing me to do more out of school."</i></p> <p><i>"Understand that each teacher marks differently in one class I could get an 8 and another a 6 (IB system)."</i></p> <p><i>"Not accept if you don't get good grades."</i></p> |

In addition, comparisons to peers or siblings were unhelpful for learning and self-esteem. When family members made these comparisons, students felt their own identify and capabilities were not valued. Students wanted their family members to understand their individuality and their strengths.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Comparing you to your friends and saying they are better than you."</i></p> <p><i>"When they cheer on someone else."</i></p> | <p><i>"Compare us to other kids."</i></p> <p><i>"Using other people as examples of who we should be like."</i></p> <p><i>"Pressure/excessive expectations – different for each child."</i></p> <p><i>"Comparing them to other people."</i></p> <p><i>"Always comparing to other children and family members."</i></p> <p><i>"To not put them down to be like their older siblings."</i></p> |

While high expectations from family members were generally seen as a positive influence for school and learning, students were careful to temper comments with provisos such that expectations must be related to the student's ability and interest, and facilitated by support from family members.

Students wanted family members to believe in them and support them to achieve academically, however, they also wanted these adults to celebrate and promote their success. This included acknowledging their personal learning progress (as opposed to academic grade) and their effort. For students, simultaneously emphasising learning progress and academic achievement alleviated some of their experiences of feeling pressured to succeed, and encouraged persistence and resilience.

For students in boarding facilities, family encouragement and reminders that they were acting as role models for their communities positively influenced the way students felt about school and of being away from home.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Tell you things like never give up or do your best."</i></p> <p><i>"They will [tell you] you're smart no matter what."</i></p> <p><i>"They support you no matter what."</i></p> | <p><i>"Knowing their child's ability not what someone else can do."</i></p> <p><i>"Supporting children and not minimising kids due to their ability."</i></p> <p><i>"Do not force kids to do subjects not desired."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't put children down if they do bad at an assignment or test."</i></p> <p><i>"Encourage them to do homework and strive to be the best that they can be."</i></p> <p><i>"Appreciate their efforts."</i></p> <p><i>"Have high expectations but also have an understanding behaviour."</i></p> <p><i>"Understand how different each individual student can be."</i></p> |

Recognising their individuality also played out for students in Year 7 to Year 12 with regard to their choices and future pathways from school. Students wanted family members to recognise and support their decisions, and to acknowledge that school prepares students for a variety of pathways.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Forcing child to do all hard subjects e.g. physics and chemistry."

"Not supporting child decisions."

"Making it seem like school is the only aspect of them and that if they don't succeed to senior students they are a failure."

"Being disappointed if they don't go in the direction you want them to go in or decide to change where they want to take themselves/can't achieve what you expect."

"Family ideas of what career you should have."

"Not understanding academics isn't everyone's number 1 priority."

Providing academic and emotional support

“Helping when they need help for homework and bullies because sometimes students can be depressed about school.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Comments related to the provision of academic ‘help’ or ‘support’ were the most common response to the question ‘In what ways can families help kids do well at school and learning?’ Family members were also noted as important providers of emotional support; as someone to count on, to talk to and as promoters of behaviours that supported wellbeing.

Academic support

Helping with homework, assignments and topics difficult to understand emerged as a strong theme of the ways in which families support school and learning. Students explained they required help when they were ‘struggling’ and ‘with understanding’ the work. Assistance from family members included providing explanations of words, topics or tasks, using resources such as the internet to find more information, providing tips for study, and help with solving tasks, preparing for tests and with specific subjects.

Students wanted family members to show an interest in their learning by moving beyond asking if students have homework to questions focused on what they are learning about and if they needed assistance.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Explain and encourage their children and talk them through the task and how to work it out.”</i></p> <p><i>“They let them work out the work with a little help.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help you do homework with you and they can explain different things you don’t know.”</i></p> <p><i>“They talk to me about learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“My parents try their hardest to help me with my spelling.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They can help them do their work with them and help them if they don’t know some meanings or spelling. They can [...] help their children do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask if they need help – give advice and/or help them.”</i></p> <p><i>“To help them if they are struggling with any school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Interacting and asking about what they are learning about, if they don’t understand they help in some way; researching or memory.”</i></p> <p><i>“Using internet to help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Constructive criticism.”</i></p> |

Beyond assistance with prescribed work or homework, students indicated families supported school and learning by providing additional opportunities or resources for learning. The most common suggestion, particularly from students in Year 7 to Year 12, referred to hiring a tutor. However, families were also noted as creating learning tools and learning opportunities, discussing topics in more detail, and encouraging learning behaviours, such as reading. It was also helpful if a family member was a teacher.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Maybe if kids are worried about how well they are doing parents could give them tutoring or giving them special workbooks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Making them do worksheets.”</i></p> <p><i>“Do more homework with them because these days we don’t get homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teach them things at home.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having a meeting with you and teach you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can make you read at night.”</i></p> <p><i>“Home schooling your children.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Help child, where help is required e.g. get a tutor, allow child to develop ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“They teach you the things you didn’t understand at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hire a tutor.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discussing more advanced knowledge about a topic they’re learning about.”</i></p> |

Students largely felt supported by family members. Some acknowledged a range of social and economic factors that made the provision of support for learning challenging for family members. Several students spoke of competing responsibilities, such as work commitments and requirements to travel, or domestic responsibilities such as caring for other family members. Whereas others highlighted family members may not have the requisite knowledge or skills to provide assistance, or that their parents' own experiences of schooling may influence their capacity or level of comfort to provide assistance. Some students felt that family members did not prioritise education or support for learning.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 identified support for homework and homework programs provided through schools as useful for students, particularly when support was not available within the home environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Too busy for kids (BOO)."</i></p> <p><i>"Because their parents might not be well educated."</i></p> <p><i>"They might forget things."</i></p> <p><i>"It can make it hard because they don't get much education from their parents/carers so they don't do as well but they get extra support from teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Embarrassment, chores and pressure and also parents work so they can't always help with homework, pressure or worries."</i></p> <p><i>"My mum and my dad go to work a lot sometimes I miss them."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes it hard for kids to get the help they need because their parents might not know much about school work and the kids don't know what to do."</i></p> | <p><i>"They may not care about school or are too busy to help."</i></p> <p><i>"Always busy with work or travelling."</i></p> <p><i>"Might not be able to help with homework/classwork."</i></p> <p><i>"Being so involved with their own work and lives that they don't support the kids enough."</i></p> <p><i>"They cannot be helpful with school things that they do not know."</i></p> <p><i>"If a family member is away, they can't give the support for them."</i></p> <p><i>"Not setting aside time."</i></p> |

The actions of some family members were deemed as not helpful because they did not provide assistance for learning, and homework in particular. Students expressed frustration if they perceived family members had availability to provide assistance, lacked interest or ignored their request of assistance.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"When they don't help the student work out the problem."</i></p> <p><i>"Ignore you and abuse you and be mean and horrible and don't help with homework."</i></p> <p><i>"They will tell you to do your homework by yourself."</i></p> <p><i>"They ignore you! When you ask them to help you."</i></p> <p><i>"Not telling their children how to do stuff."</i></p> | <p><i>"They don't help them and don't remind them to do their homework."</i></p> <p><i>"Not bothering to assist with homework or revision when asked."</i></p> <p><i>"Telling you to work out a hard question by yourself."</i></p> <p><i>"Not being helpful at home with schoolwork."</i></p> <p><i>"Not be bothered and just leave the kid to figure it out on its own."</i></p> |

The provision of assistance with learning is an extension of family members showing interest in student's education. While generally students appreciated assistance, they expressed frustration when describing some of the ways family members' well-intentioned actions were not useful for school and learning. This included completing the work for students, making explanations too difficult, providing incorrect information or disagreeing with the student's work and dismissing or destroying student work.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"They don't understand the question."</i></p> <p><i>"Take over."</i></p> <p><i>"Make it too hard to understand."</i></p> <p><i>"Wrong advice."</i></p> <p><i>"When they do it their way so it makes it harder."</i></p> <p><i>"Stick nose in lessons."</i></p> | <p><i>"Want to help you (too much)."</i></p> <p><i>"By not getting the question."</i></p> <p><i>"Clingy – try to help without actually being helpful."</i></p> <p><i>"Doing the work for them."</i></p> <p><i>"When they are interfering with my homework and I am concentrated."</i></p> |

Emotional support

Students identified families as an important source of emotional support. They felt family members were reliable sources of support and advice who were genuinely concerned with their wellbeing. Families were helpful to talk to about concerns and, through these relationships, students explained that they were taught or modelled skills and strategies to respond to the challenges they were facing. The development of social and emotional skills equips students to understand and manage their emotions and the behaviour that emotions can provoke.

Family members also encouraged behaviours that support wellbeing, and this was particularly pertinent for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Actions included promoting breaks from learning, or encouraging students to participate in sport, spend time with friends or to have days off. Students in boarding facilities indicated they felt better when family members in town took them out for the weekend. This range of supports enabled students to be emotionally ready and able to concentrate on their learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"They give advice."</i></p> <p><i>"Talk to them if they are finding things hard."</i></p> <p><i>"When you are having a hard time at school to do with friends, or teachers, your family will always help you! And support you!"</i></p> <p><i>"You can tell them your troubles."</i></p> <p><i>"Listen to you and not yell at you when you complain about teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"If your parents teach you about words it can help you with teasing."</i></p> <p><i>"Always be there to help your siblings or children if they need it."</i></p> <p><i>"If you've done too much work they can let you go outside and ride your pony in the bush!"</i></p> | <p><i>"Parents letting you see friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Sporting activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Having breaks from work."</i></p> <p><i>"Balances between things."</i></p> <p><i>"Allowing them to have days off school, within reason, if they need mental health days."</i></p> <p><i>"Take you to a sports game to keep you healthy."</i></p> <p><i>"They are someone to talk to if you are struggling."</i></p> <p><i>"Listening to the students and paying attention to what's happening around them."</i></p> <p><i>"Take away kids from stressful learning environment to relax which can help with learning."</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular referred to the past experiences and knowledge of family members as useful.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Families should always be there if needed to help their kids in anyway required and share advice/past experiences."

"Parents or family members that are older will have more knowledge and experience of what younger kids go through."

"Relatable."

"Parents know a lot."

However at other times, students felt family members did not understand their situation – underscoring the importance of friendships, particularly for emotional support and understanding.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"They don't understand the pressure that some kids have because they might be behind at their work."</i></p> <p><i>"My family sometimes just say: don't listen to the bully, but they don't understand that it isn't that simple."</i></p> <p><i>"When they don't understand what I'm going through."</i></p> <p><i>"If you've had a bad day and when you get home they start yelling at you!"</i></p> | <p><i>"Use their experience and apply it to our experience."</i></p> <p><i>"They themselves might not understand the importance of school and grades."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't understand that school isn't the same as when they went."</i></p> <p><i>"Parents being older they don't understand your issues."</i></p> |

Direct participation in school

The participation of family members in school activities or operations could be both helpful and unhelpful for engagement in school and learning. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 described a wide array of ways that families can be involved in schools, including classroom activities, school operations, such as the canteen, coaching, Parents and Citizens/Friends (P&C/P&F) and fundraising, or specific events, such as excursions, sports carnivals and discos. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to family involvement through attending parent/teacher meetings and school events. Through their participation in these events, family members demonstrated their support for students and for education.

When family members did not participate in school activities or meet with their teachers students indicated it was not helpful for school and learning. As above, students perceived a lack of support through the level of participation of their family members.

However, students acknowledged barriers to family participation, such as work schedules.

"Parents make kids school lunches so when they go to work they may not be able to help out." (Year 3 to Year 6)

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"With family coming to school and help children."</i></p> <p><i>"Support them in education by going to their class or school event, because knowing that someone is supporting you can help you do better in school work."</i></p> <p><i>"Be there for them at sporting events."</i></p> <p><i>"To help in class for one day."</i></p> | <p><i>"Coming to parent-teacher meeting."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help them by coming to school and checking up on them to see how they're doing."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting involved in our schooling."</i></p> <p><i>"Parent-teacher days."</i></p> <p><i>"Participate in school functions/events/activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Be involved in school."</i></p> |
| <p><i>"Not go to school."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't meet their teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Not coming to parent meetings and assemblies."</i></p> <p><i>"Not supporting the carnivals."</i></p> <p><i>"By not helping out at events."</i></p> | <p><i>"Not being involved with kids school work."</i></p> <p><i>"If they don't come to school events or talk about what you're doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don't care about your education."</i></p> <p><i>"Does not want to help."</i></p> |

Although family involvement in school was generally perceived as positive, some involvement was deemed problematic by students. They described feeling stressed or unsupported when there was a disjuncture or disagreement between family members and others at school. This disjuncture made it difficult for students to get the help and support they needed as they felt constrained by competing loyalties.

Family members were also a source of embarrassment. Students referred to family members enforcing rules, discussing personal or irrelevant topics with teachers and dress sense.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Parents don't like who you're playing with."</i></p> <p><i>"They might disagree with what you do at school!"</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers give us too much homework so our family doesn't like them because I became STRESSED."</i></p> <p><i>"Your parents might not like your teacher so they might make you stressed and not happy."</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe if you have out of school commitments your parents make you go to all the time, you don't have enough time for school work. And your teachers don't always approve."</i></p> <p><i>"Dress choices."</i></p> <p><i>"At sports carnivals cheering loudly."</i></p> <p><i>"By telling off kids that are doing things wrong."</i></p> | <p><i>"Sharing a bad opinion as it's not helpful to the situation."</i></p> <p><i>"Parents/siblings on bad terms with teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes during parent-teacher meetings they don't believe you."</i></p> <p><i>"Embarrassment."</i></p> <p><i>"Yelling at people when they won't move out of the way! (at school)."</i></p> |

Family communication with the school was generally seen as beneficial, particularly when family members were advocating for the student. For students in Year 3 to Year 6, communication with school was mostly related to bullying and learning, whereas for students in Year 7 to Year 12 communication with the school was focused on learning. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also indicated that parents were able to provide teachers with information that would support the student at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Talk to teachers if the work that the student is doing is too hard or easy."</i></p> <p><i>"Asking the teacher where they could improve."</i></p> <p><i>"They come to school and make friends and your child will come school."</i></p> <p><i>"They talk to the teacher about problems at school and try to help fix them."</i></p> <p><i>"Your parents can have a talk to principal if you are getting bullied."</i></p> | <p><i>"Communication with the teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"Families can get involved and maybe talk to teachers more. Help you out with study."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting parents and teachers to talk to get a better understanding."</i></p> <p><i>"Go to the parent/teacher meetings to see if they need any extra help."</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

Families were a significant influence on student motivation and engagement with school and learning. Students valued time spent with family members and felt this was sometimes hindered by too many or competing school commitments and time spent completing homework or assignments. Students suggested greater connections between home and school could be made through learning activities. Reducing school commitments and consideration of the timing of assessment pieces were also suggested to enable students to spend more time with family.

“Less school time so that we can [have] more time with family.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Put on performances for families or old people’s homes (school plays/musicals).” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Having less homework. We spend most of our day in our room doing homework. Homework isn’t needed because we spend 6+ hours at school learning so why add more hours? We should spend the time we have with family.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 were clear about the ways families can provide a home environment that supports learning. This included having positive relationships, structure, promoting wellbeing and an interest in the student and their education. Students recognised the influence of the home environment and felt better supported when the connection between home and school environments were harmonious.

“Parents need to discipline also.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“Speak to your parents if you are having an issue.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

“Meet up at home so that parents understand the personalities.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The descriptions from students on ways in which families support or hinder engagement provide valuable insight into the areas where positive change is possible – in the ways families support students and also how systems support families. Critically, students identified schools as essential in meeting the needs of students when support was not available or not consistently available within the home environment. This included providing food, transport, school resources and learning support, as well as social emotional support.

4. Secondary factors - The Accelerators for engagement with school and learning

The secondary factors or accelerators are used to describe more specific influences on students' engagement that have emerged through the consultation. In the survey and the group discussions, students identified a range of factors that influence their feelings towards school, their willingness to attend and their ability to engage in learning and achieve well academically.

The information gained from students in the consultation shows evidence of a complex interplay whereby foundations influence student engagement directly but also, and perhaps more critically, through a range of secondary factors that accelerate the level of students' engagement with school and learning. These secondary factors – or accelerators – have two sub-categories: firstly, factors that relate to the way that content is developed and delivered and, secondly, factors that relate to the student and the management of their physical and emotional health so that a focus on learning is maximised.

The data provided by students through the survey strongly supports two findings:

- 1) Students who have strong relationships with peers, teachers and their family are much more likely to do well against the range of accelerating factors identified through the consultation.
- 2) Students who rate highly on any of the accelerating factors are much more likely to do well against the selected engagement indicators of liking school, sense of belonging at school, attendance and academic achievement.

It is important to consider that not all accelerators weigh equally for all students and that some factors can compensate for others. Additionally, the list of factors described in the following chapters is not exhaustive and further research is recommended to explore possible other factors and their relation to each other.

4.1 A positive and fair classroom environment

The social and emotional learning environment and the physical environment significantly impact student learning, engagement, attitude and wellbeing. Calm, supportive and well-managed environments encourage engagement with learning. The design of the physical environment and the features within can facilitate or constrain social interactions and effect concentration.⁹³ Student behaviour, engagement and achievement are supported through effective classroom environments.⁹⁴

Survey findings

- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they ‘always’ get along with their teachers.
- 77 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers.
- Almost two-thirds of Year 7 to Year 12 students (63%) reported that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’.
- The same proportion of students (63%) reported having been treated unfairly by a teacher at least once in the past.

Students’ assessment of fairness in teachers

Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked to assess teacher fairness towards students through a number of statements. These statements were not part of the survey for younger students.

A little less than two-thirds of students (62.8%) reported that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’ but one in 10 (8.7%) said that teachers ‘hardly ever’ treat students fairly.

There were no significant differences found between male and female students, students in regional and metropolitan areas or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to their assessment of teachers’ fairness towards students (see also Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future).

Table 4.1: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students who said teachers at their school treat students fairly most of the time, sometimes or hardly ever, by selected characteristics

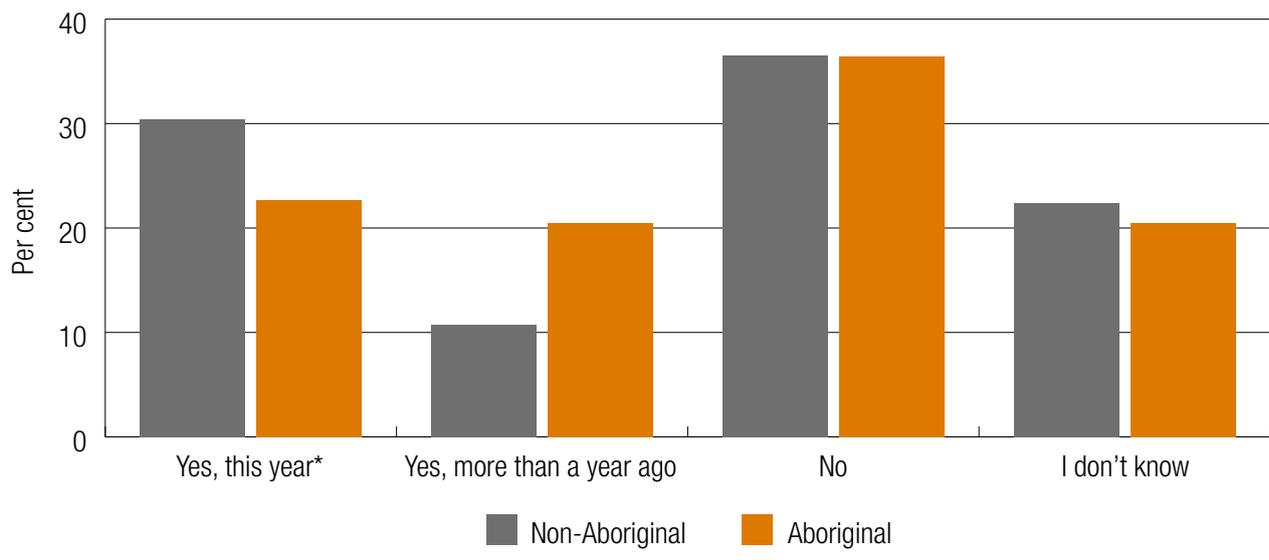
| | Male | Female | Other* | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------------|------|--------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Most of the time | 65.3 | 62.1 | 0.0 | 63.9 | 62.4 | 63.2 | 56.8 | 62.8 |
| Sometimes | 25.6 | 30.5 | 33.3 | 28.8 | 28.3 | 28.1 | 34.1 | 28.5 |
| Hardly ever | 9.1 | 7.4 | 66.7 | 7.2 | 9.3 | 8.8 | 9.1 | 8.7 |

* $n < 10$

More than one-third of Year 7 to Year 12 students (36.6%) said they had never been treated unfairly, while 30 per cent said they had been treated unfairly ‘within the last month’ or ‘this year’. Again, there was no significant difference found between the genders or students in regional and metropolitan areas in regard to this question.

Aboriginal students were the group least likely to say they had been treated unfairly by a teacher in the past month or year. Compared to their non-Aboriginal peers, Aboriginal students were more likely to say they had experienced unfair treatment more than a year ago.

Graph 4.1: Proportion of students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by Aboriginal status



* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

Table 4.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Other** | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|---------------------------|------|--------|---------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, this year* | 30.2 | 29.0 | 66.7 | 30.0 | 29.4 | 30.4 | 22.7 | 29.9 |
| Yes, more than a year ago | 10.9 | 11.8 | 0.0 | 10.8 | 12.5 | 10.7 | 20.5 | 11.3 |
| No | 36.1 | 37.2 | 16.7 | 37.6 | 34.1 | 36.5 | 36.4 | 36.6 |
| I don't know | 22.8 | 22.1 | 16.7 | 21.6 | 24.0 | 22.4 | 20.5 | 22.3 |

* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

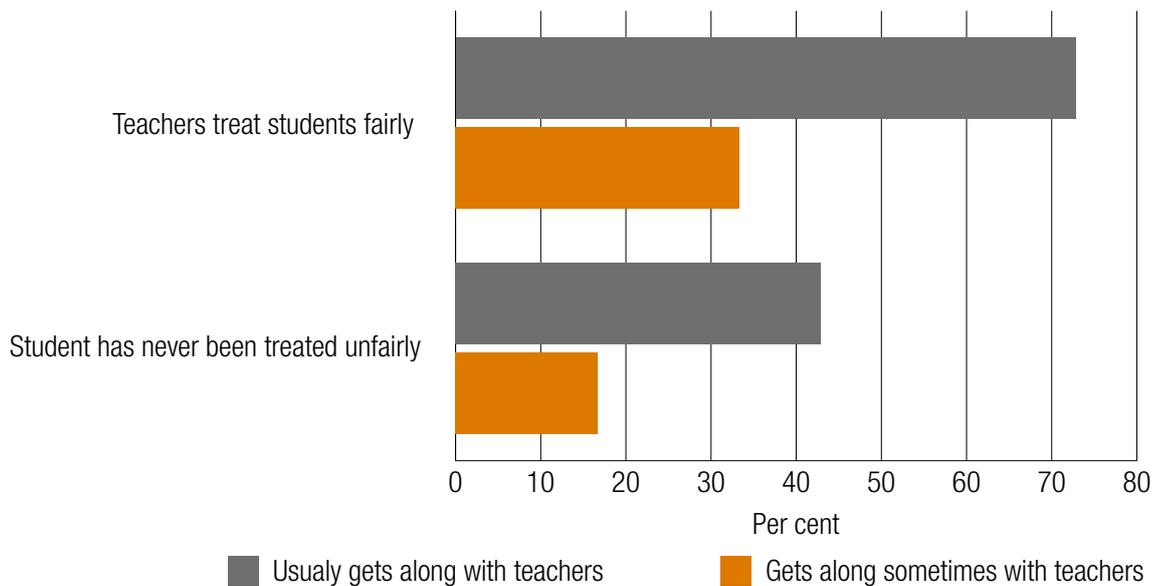
** n<10

Students who get along with teachers – Year 7 to Year 12

For Year 7 to Year 12 students, compared to students who said they get along with their teachers ‘sometimes’, those who said they get along with their teachers ‘usually’ were more likely to highly rate teacher fairness:

- Students say that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’ (72.8% versus 33.3%).
- Students say they have never been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) (42.9% versus 16.7%).

Graph 4.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing with selected statements about teachers, by how well they get along with teachers



Students who feel they are being treated fairly – Year 7 to Year 12

Year 7 to Year 12 students who said that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’ and who have also never been treated unfairly were more likely than students who said teachers treat students fairly ‘sometimes’ or less and who also said they have been treated unfairly in the past to give a positive rating on the following engagement indicators.

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (49.8% versus 12.5%)
- Students feel part of their school (89.8% versus 58.9%)
- Students say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (80.9% versus 50.6%).

No significant association was found between students’ perceptions of teacher fairness and their academic achievement.

Group discussion findings

“It’s hard for some kids to learn. If the student’s teacher does not explain the work. If a classroom is not organised, if students don’t calm down after a particularly physical activity.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The physical and social environment in which students are learning has implications for their emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke strongly about the social and physical environment in which they are expected to learn and identified a range of factors that facilitate and discourage engagement with learning. Largely, factors related to the relationships with teachers, friends and peers that contributed to the social environment. Students valued a calm and well-managed environment that enhanced behaviour and created a feeling of safety for learning, which contributed positively to learning progress.

Student comments also related to changing the physical infrastructure of the school to create an inviting and enriching learning environment. For some students this meant having access to resources that were functional and supported their learning. For others it meant more interesting playgrounds to enable them to be active at lunch time. Others wanted access to nature or designs that accounted for the weather.

Students had various suggestions as to how the environment could be improved to support them, their learning and their experiences of school, and they wanted opportunities to contribute to the development of the school environment. Providing students with the opportunity to have a say in the creation of a learning environment that best suits their needs promotes engagement with school and learning, and promotes autonomy and responsibility for learning. Additionally, creating physically and emotionally inviting and safe environments from the perspective of students contributes to the development of child safe organisations.⁹⁵

Social environment

Quality classroom social environments contributed to student wellbeing and learning. Such environments were characterised by support, kindness, positivity and where there were no judgements. Relationships with and behaviours of teachers and other students were critical in creating this environment. In particular, teachers influenced this environment through relational practices and through classroom management. Teachers treating all students fairly and working in ways to include all students were important factors in this regard. When students felt comfortable and safe they explained they were able to concentrate on learning, felt more confident and not worried about making mistakes.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Because it was a safe place to learn about new things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not annoying other people learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be kind and friendly.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be friendly to them because they can learn what is right and what is not right!”</i></p> <p><i>“If all the kids will be quiet.”</i></p> <p><i>“People stop bullying other kids.”</i></p> <p><i>“Letting other people work in peace.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked when [my teacher] was here and I worked a lot and I loved the safe environment I was in.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Smaller classes, make it more enjoyable and easy to focus.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being able to express thoughts and beliefs without being judged or oppressed.”</i></p> <p><i>“Including each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“How fair the teachers are. Staying on topic when talking.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being surrounded by positive people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling safe and comfortable in the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fun, happy environment whilst still doing work – (not feeling like you’re in jail).”</i></p> <p><i>“Where there is no interruptions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Quiet and stable learning environments.”</i></p> |

Feeling calm and ready was important for learning. Students described various strategies that support calmness for learning; this included breaks, being physically active, pets, friends, meditation, nature, music, sleep and familiar objects such as toys. Students were less likely to be able to emotionally or cognitively engage in learning if they were feeling anxious or worried, regardless of whether the source of their anxiety or worry were the consequences of pedagogy, curriculum content, or concerns with family, other students or school staff.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“All the fun things we do during lunch and recess [helps kids like learning].”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe have two to three minutes of chat time between lessons.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they get a break.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they have to be inside for too long [makes it hard to learn].”</i></p> <p><i>“When they’ve got a pet.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Sport was really enjoyable</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>being physical and not sitting around in a chair forever</i> • <i>different uniform/comfortable</i> • <i>sport helped relax me.”</i> <p><i>“When there is breaks between each class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sport and recreational activities to give us a break from the dullness of a long maths class.”</i></p> |

Classroom environments that were characterised by fear, negativity, hostility, lack of control, rowdiness, people yelling or distractions were not seen as conducive to learning. The behaviour of other students and teachers influenced classroom dynamics and student sense of safety and comfort in the classroom. Bullying and intimidation from other students and teachers were noted as negatively affecting this and are discussed further in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future and Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“When people yell at you for getting an answer wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“A bad state of the classroom – others stay away from those who need extra help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Unhappy learning environment.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Being with negative people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being a part of the class/activity (not participating).”</i></p> <p><i>“In school conflict.”</i></p> <p><i>“Aggressive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hard to concentrate sometimes.”</i></p> <p><i>“Keeping quiet.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hostile school environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids don’t fit in.”</i></p> |

General distractions, such as outside noise and the behaviour of other students, were commonly described by students as a factor that made it difficult to learn. Students indicated that disruptions from other students impinged on their own right to learn and their ability to engage in learning. The behaviours described were largely low-level disruptive behaviour, such as talking out of turn, being rowdy or noisy, moving around and interfering with property, rather than aggressive and anti-social behaviour.^{96 97} Such behaviour affects teacher temperament and ability to teach, and the learning of students.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“If people make lots of noise and talk to them because some people listen to the noise and they get off track which stops them learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have no interruptions in class from other students.”</i></p> <p><i>“It makes it hard for some kids to learn because the teacher has to stop between a lesson to deal with naughty people.”</i></p> <p><i>“When kids are being silly and calling out.”</i></p> <p><i>“When kids call out and don’t listen to the teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other kids frustrating other kids.”</i></p> <p><i>“When kids steal our stuff (like pencils and things like that).”</i></p> <p><i>“Lock down.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Loud classroom.”</i></p> <p><i>“Loss of concentration.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes I know it’s hard to learn when the environment is loud, noisy and distracting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other people distract you with useless information (e.g. cat memes).”⁹⁸</i></p> <p><i>“Some people’s classes are extremely disruptive which make it hard to learn. Most of the time, it’s people gossiping when they should be doing it at break/lunch time.”</i></p> <p><i>“When people muck around.”</i></p> <p><i>“Poor behaviour.”</i></p> <p><i>“Distractions in the class such as people being loud and disruptive.”</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 saw that responsibility for managing the classroom environment lay with the teacher. However, students explained that sometimes teachers could not, or chose not to, enforce classroom rules and to manage the environment.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Relief teachers or just normal teachers who can’t control the class.”

“When other kids are misbehaving and teachers don’t do anything about it.”

Students valued teachers who used positive behavioural management and were responsive when other students were disruptive. Such practices supported student engagement with learning, feelings of safety within the classroom, student wellbeing and facilitated relationships with teachers. Teacher practices are discussed further in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

Physical environment

The design of physical environment can play a large role in creating social learning spaces that promote and facilitate interactions between students and teachers and participation in classroom activities. Students noted the physical environment as influencing their level of concentration and, on occasion, ability to work. Within the physical environment students discussed the physical space, availability of resources and external elements, such as the weather.

Students had a preference for learning outside or in open classrooms that allowed natural airflow. Students explained that working outside should not only be relegated to sports, but enjoyed opportunities to be outside such as reading under a tree. Music was another factor that generally supported concentration in class.

Reliable resources for learning were essential for students. Their comments referred to whether schools were enabled with resources and, if available, whether resources were used.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Soft seat."</i></p> <p><i>"Music."</i></p> <p><i>"I would change the weather when it's cold."</i></p> <p><i>"I would change technology and make it have no problems."</i></p> <p><i>"Because it is outside."</i></p> <p><i>"Silence."</i></p> <p><i>"Computers and paper with websites and people to explain things."</i></p> <p><i>"Work charts."</i></p> <p><i>"Dictionaries."</i></p> | <p><i>"I liked the environment and air."</i></p> <p><i>"Outdoor activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Listening to music in class because it helps me concentrate."</i></p> <p><i>"When we work outside (I don't like classrooms)."</i></p> <p><i>"Able to listen to music during study."</i></p> <p><i>"Open window/breeze."</i></p> <p><i>"Great facilities (learning area)."</i></p> <p><i>"When they take us outside and let us sit spaciouly, so we aren't under everyone's skin."</i></p> |

The seating arrangement in the classroom was also an important factor for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Students preferred to have a choice in their seating arrangement as this enabled them to sit with friends or in positions to minimise distractions, such as the front of the class. Seating plans can be used as a form of control or behavioural management or used to provide students with choice and empower them to make decisions for their learning. Through the consultations, students explained that when they are able to sit with their friends they felt at ease and therefore able to concentrate on learning.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Sitting at the front of the class so you don't get distracted."

"No seating plan."

"Where they sit."

While generally noted as positive, there were some comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 indicating being outside and music can be distractions to learning. These differing opinions underscore the importance of involving students in creating learning environments that work for them. Disorganised classrooms and a lack of resources were also noted as unhelpful.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Music distracts people."

"Messy classrooms – I cannot concentrate with a messy or noisy class."

"Big classrooms (lots of people)."

"Cold classroom."

"Bad internet."

"Lack of resources."

"Not having a seating plan."

Suggestions from students

Learning within a safe, calm, supportive and functional environment was significant for engagement in learning. Students referred to the behaviours of other students and teachers as critical for creating a learning environment that supported engagement. As such, their suggestions for change related to modifying disruptive student behaviour, school staff enforcing behaviour management and working with school staff to create a positive learning environment. These suggestions are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future and Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"People stop disrupting class."</i></p> <p><i>"More nice people."</i></p> | <p><i>"I would like to have classes to separate the 'disruptive' students from the 'focused' students."</i></p> |

Several strategies were also put forward to promote calmness for learning. These included breaks, pets or animals, meditation, friends and nature.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Meditation to refresh us."</i></p> <p><i>"More nature."</i></p> <p><i>"More free time because our brain gets relaxed for more hard work."</i></p> <p><i>"10 minutes of reading time after recess/lunch to calm everybody down."</i></p> <p><i>"More time at lunch because we can waste our energy."</i></p> <p><i>"Work outside because you get fresh air."</i></p> <p><i>"Be allowed to bring teddies into school because you might get sad and teddies cheer you up and you can bring them everywhere."</i></p> <p><i>"Bring in pets (to calm down and distract from problems)."</i></p> <p><i>"Pets improve health and education."</i></p> | <p><i>"Pets in class."</i></p> <p><i>"Headphones and food in class."</i></p> <p><i>"Nap time."</i></p> <p><i>"Would probably have music in school."</i></p> |

Classrooms and resources that were functional, comfortable, inviting and that contributed positively to the social environment were requested to promote engagement with learning, ensure hygiene (as noted in Chapter 4.8 – Feeling physically and mentally well) and increase feelings of safety at school (as noted in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe).

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Make the school class chairs more comfortable."</i></p> <p><i>"I want more sport time and 21st century classrooms because they are more comfy."</i></p> <p><i>"Bigger classrooms and book-boxes."</i></p> <p><i>"Working clocks."</i></p> <p><i>"Library not to have the music room [in it]."</i></p> | <p><i>"Open plan learning spaces – creating a more relaxed environment for students (couches, bean bags, etc.)"</i></p> |

4.2 A supportive classroom environment

Students require different levels and types of support to assist them with their learning and to enable their ongoing engagement with education. Teachers or school staff proactively provide support for learning through embedding support within learning experiences, in response to student requests or as additional programs. Teachers who create a classroom in which students feel comfortable to make mistakes and do not fear negative repercussions facilitate engagement.⁹⁹

Survey findings

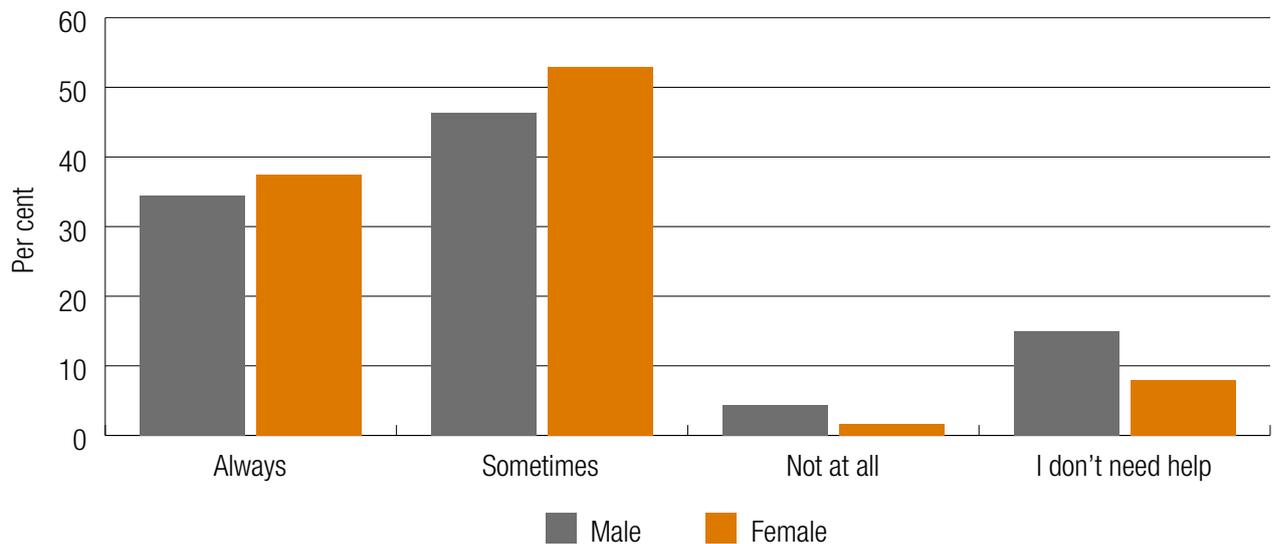
- 36 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they ‘always’ get the help they need to do their school work. 50 per cent answered ‘sometimes’.
- 46 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that they ‘usually’ get the help they need to do their school work. 38 per cent answered ‘sometimes’.
- 11 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they ‘hardly ever’ or ‘never’ get the help they need.

Do students get the help they need?

Just over one-third of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they ‘always’ get the help they need to do their school work. One-half answered ‘sometimes’ and around three per cent of students said ‘not at all’. The remainder – 11.0 per cent – answered that they do not need help.

Girls were somewhat more likely than boys to say that they get help ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ (90.4% versus 80.7%). Boys on the other hand were more likely to report that they do not get help ‘at all’ (4.3% versus 1.6%) and significantly more likely to say that they do not need help (15.0% versus 8.0%).

Graph 4.3: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they get the help they need to do their school work always, sometimes, not at all or they don’t need help, by gender



A higher proportion of students in regional areas than metropolitan areas reported that they ‘always’ get the help they need but the difference was not statistically significant (38.7% versus 34.5%). Students in metropolitan areas, however, were significantly more likely to say that they do not need help (13.4% versus 7.3%).

Aboriginal students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to report that they ‘always’ get the help they need with only one in four Aboriginal students saying this (26.0% compared to 37.2%). Most Aboriginal students answered that they get help ‘sometimes’ (63.0%).

Table 4.3: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they get the help they need to do their school work always, sometimes, not at all or they don’t need help, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Always | 34.4 | 37.5 | 34.5 | 38.7 | 37.2 | 26.0 | 36.2 |
| Sometimes | 46.3 | 52.9 | 49.5 | 51.1 | 48.9 | 63.0 | 50.1 |
| Not at all | 4.3 | 1.6 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.7 |
| I don’t need help | 15.0 | 8.0 | 13.4 | 7.3 | 11.2 | 8.2 | 11.0 |

When asked what type of help students need, the most commonly mentioned answer for Year 3 to Year 6 boys and girls was ‘my teacher to explain it’ (57.8% of students said this) followed by ‘more time to complete my work’ (38.5% of mentions).

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, less than one-half (45.7%) of respondents reported that they ‘usually’ get the help they need to do their school work while 38 per cent answered they get help ‘sometimes’. One in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students (10.7%) said they ‘hardly ever’ or ‘not at all’ get the help they need. The remainder – six per cent – answered that they do not need help.

There was no significant difference found between the genders or students in regional and metropolitan areas.

However, a significantly smaller proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students reported they ‘usually’ get the help they need (34.1% compared to 46.5%).

Graph 4.4: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they get the help they need to do their school work usually, sometimes, hardly ever, not at all or they don’t need help, by Aboriginal status

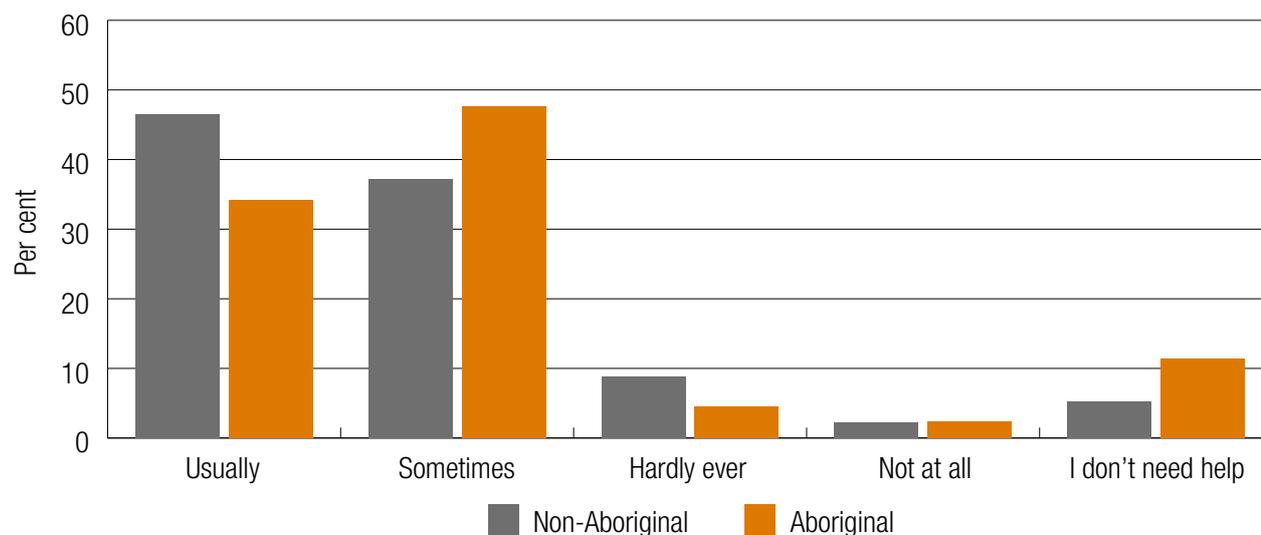


Table 4.4: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they get the help they need to do their school work usually, sometimes, hardly ever, not at all or they don't need help, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Usually | 45.3 | 46.5 | 45.8 | 45.7 | 46.5 | 34.1 | 45.7 |
| Sometimes | 36.8 | 38.6 | 37.7 | 38.5 | 37.2 | 47.7 | 37.9 |
| Hardly ever | 8.4 | 8.2 | 8.3 | 9.1 | 8.8 | 4.5 | 8.5 |
| Not at all | 1.8 | 2.6 | 3 | 0.5 | 2.2 | 2.3 | 2.2 |
| I don't need help | 7.7 | 4.1 | 5.3 | 6.3 | 5.3 | 11.4 | 5.6 |

When asked what type of help students need, the most commonly mentioned answer for both male and female Year 7 to Year 12 students was 'more explanations' followed by 'more time to complete tasks or assignments' and 'talking to the teacher'.

Table 4.5: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they require help, by type of help

| Type of help | All |
|--|------|
| More explanations | 65.3 |
| More time to complete tasks or assignments | 41.7 |
| Talking to the teacher | 38.0 |
| Tutoring | 15.0 |
| I don't need help | 11.4 |
| Other help | 7.3 |

All Year 7 to Year 12 survey participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that at their school 'Teachers go out of their way to help students'. More than 60 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed with this, 26 per cent were unsure and 13 per cent disagreed.

Students who get along with teachers

Compared to students who said they get along with their teachers 'sometimes', those who said they get along with their teachers 'always' (Year 3 to Year 6) or 'usually' (Year 7 to Year 12) were more likely to say that they get the help they need to do their school work:

- Year 3 to Year 6 students say they 'always' get the help they need (48.5% versus 19.3%).
- Year 7 to Year 12 students say they 'usually' get the help they need (53.6% versus 22.7%).

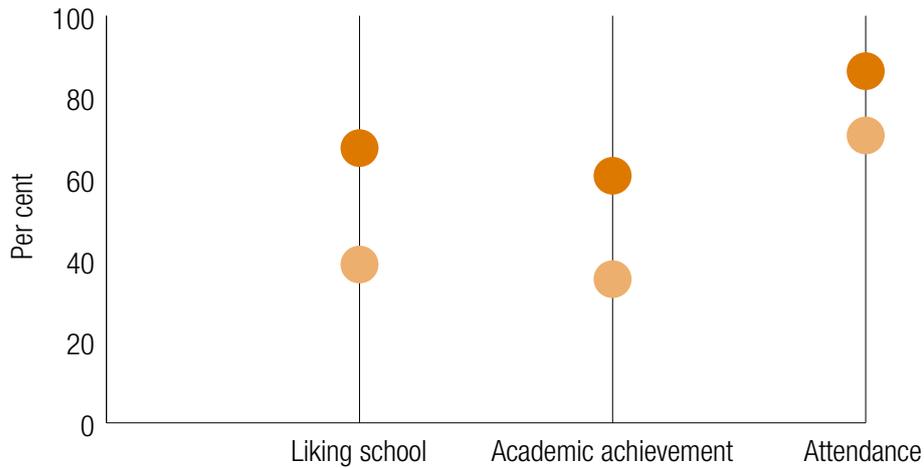
Students who get the help they need

Students who said they 'always' (Year 3 to Year 6) or 'usually' (Year 7 to Year 12) get the help they need to do their school work were more likely than students who get help 'sometimes' to positively rate other aspects of their school experience. Most importantly they were more likely to achieve higher academically.

For Year 3 to Year 6 students:

- Students like school 'a lot' (67.5% versus 38.9%).
- Students say they do 'well or very well' in their school results (60.7% versus 35.3%).
- Students say being at school every day is 'very important' to them (86.4% versus 70.6%).

Graph 4.5: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they get the help they need always or sometimes

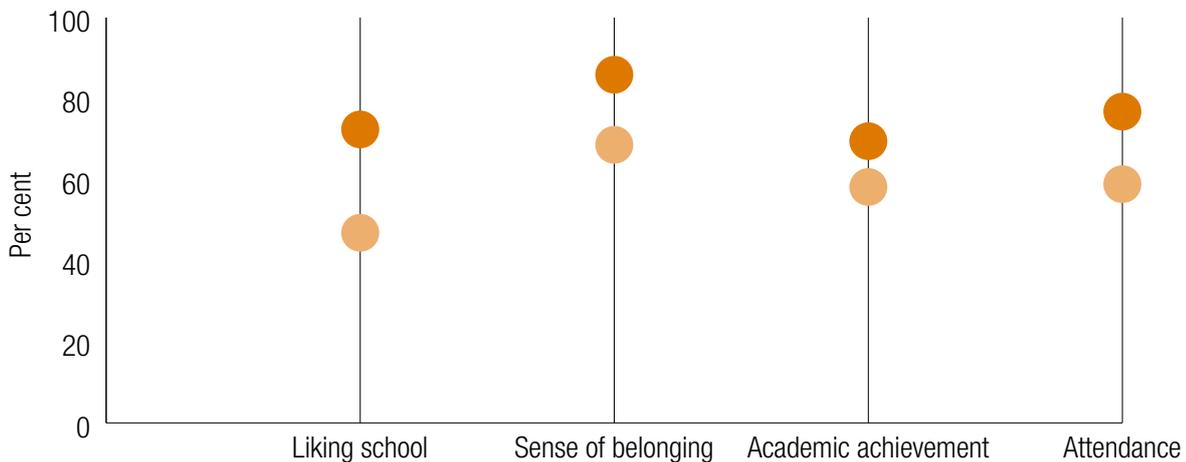


Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school 'a lot', academic achievement includes students who said they do 'well or very well' in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day.

For Year 7 to Year 12 students:

- Students like school 'a lot' or 'a bit' (72.4% versus 46.9%).
- Students feel part of their school (85.9% versus 68.6%).
- Students achieve 'above average' or 'near the top' in their school results (69.5% versus 58.2%).
- Students say being at school every day is 'very important' to them (76.8% versus 58.9%).

Graph 4.6: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they get the help they need usually or sometimes



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school 'a lot' or 'a bit', sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve 'above average' or 'near the top' in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is 'very important' to them to be at school every day.

Students who ‘don’t need help’

It is important to take a closer look at those students who said that they ‘don’t need help’ (11.0% of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 5.6% of Year 7 to Year 12 students).

Year 3 to Year 6 students who reported not needing help were less likely than students who ‘always’ get the help they need to say that they like school ‘a lot’ (38.8% versus 67.5%), and more likely to say that they don’t like school (11.7% versus 0.8%).

Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they don’t need help were also less likely to say that they always get along with their teachers (44.7% versus 79.3%).

In regard to academic achievement, however, Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they don’t need help were more likely than students who ‘always’ get the help they need to report achieving ‘well or very well’ in their school results (75.0% versus 60.7%).

Table 4.6: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/don’t like school at all, by whether they get the help they need to do school work

| | Always | Sometimes | Not at all | I don’t need help |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|------------|-------------------|
| Likes school a lot | 67.5 | 38.9 | 28.6 | 38.8 |
| Likes school a bit | 20.7 | 31.4 | 19.0 | 21.2 |
| Thinks school is OK | 11.1 | 25.8 | 33.3 | 28.2 |
| Doesn’t like school or not at all | 0.8 | 3.9 | 19.1 | 11.7 |

Similar to Year 3 to Year 6 students, Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they don’t need help were more likely than students who said they ‘usually’ get the help they need to report achieving results that are ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ (89.5% versus 69.5%).

However, unlike the younger cohort, Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they don’t need help were:

- about equally likely as students who ‘usually’ get the help they need to say that they like school ‘a lot’ (39.5% compared to 44.7%)
- equally likely to report positive relationships with teachers (92.1% of students not requiring help ‘usually’ get along with teachers compared to 89.7 per cent of students who ‘usually’ get the help they need).

Table 4.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/don’t like school at all, by whether they get the help they need to do school work

| | Usually | Sometimes | Hardly ever or not at all | I don’t need help |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Likes school a lot | 44.7 | 20.9 | 19.2 | 39.5 |
| Likes school a bit | 27.7 | 26.0 | 12.3 | 31.6 |
| Thinks school is OK | 23.5 | 38.8 | 38.4 | 21.1 |
| Doesn’t like school or not at all | 4.2 | 14.3 | 30.1 | 7.9 |

Group discussion findings

“Kids need help when they struggle at home or at school.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When discussing the help and support students need, the overwhelming majority of comments from students across Year 3 to Year 12 referred to support for learning and to increasing interest in learning. Students articulated a variety of strategies to support learning progress and interest in learning, including changes to pedagogy, the social environment, teacher and student behaviours and the need for school and learning to be inclusive of the diversity of students.

Students described the varying ways in which friends, peers and school staff supported learning. Critically, relationships with others affected students’ level of comfort when seeking help for learning. They explained that:

- quality interpersonal relationships with friends and teachers facilitated, promoted and provided support for learning
- positive and supportive classroom environments and relationships encouraged help-seeking behaviour.

“We need to know that there are people who care if we pass or fail.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

There were many difficulties students faced in accessing support for learning. The accessibility and availability of support systems often complicated student’s ability to receive help that met their needs. Within the classroom, students noted that the behaviour of other students affected the availability of teachers. They also discussed how the perceptions of friends, other students and teachers, the practices of teachers, or feelings of stress and pressure sometimes precluded them from requesting help with learning. Finally, the cost, location or availability impeded or prohibited some students from getting help and support. Many of these barriers were also discussed by students regarding support more generally – as discussed in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues.

“We should have a good access to education and support.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students provided suggestions for overcoming some of these barriers. Their suggestions are detailed throughout and at the conclusion of the chapter.

Types of support for learning

Pedagogical changes and additional assistance were common themes among students across Year 3 to Year 12 in response to the question, ‘What help or support do kids need?’

Variety in teaching methods, with an emphasis on active pedagogies, was noted by students as a way to make learning more interesting and thereby facilitating engagement. The suggestions from students mirrored the strategies discussed in Chapter 4.3 – Teaching and learning that is interesting – that is, learning that was hands-on, interactive, tailored to their needs and interests, and in which they had options or choice were more likely to engage students. Breaks from learning, clear explanations and encouragement and recognition were also important strategies for concentration, persistence and motivation. Students were better positioned to engage in learning when they found the experience interesting and understood what they should be doing.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Being interactive and having someone to help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“A teacher who explains the work well will help all the students understand and not worry about what they have to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they know that the day has fun things planned for the day.”</i></p> <p><i>“When it’s more interactive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Group discussions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need a good amount of time to finish their work because some people are a bit slow.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They need to explain it more than once.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers who understand different learning types (visual, writing etc.).”</i></p> <p><i>“Different methods for learning to suit all students e.g. visual for students who learn visually.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers to make the lessons more interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Interactive games to help us learn because they make the class fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need to learn in an active way.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement to do well in work.”</i></p> |

Additional assistance that met the different needs of students was frequently identified by students across Year 3 to Year 12. Suggestions included tutoring, specialised sessions or programs within the school, additional school staff and tailored or individualised support. Students recognised that tutoring opportunities could be provided by private tutors, their friends or other students and could be both formal and informal. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 said they would welcome specialised sessions for tests or assignments and homework programs provided by the school. Additional and specialised teachers, including Aboriginal Teacher Assistants and assistants for students with disability, were also noted. Language assistance or translators would support students moving from remote communities and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Send them a personal teacher to help them out.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some kids need tutoring because they are not the best at learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might need a tutor so they can get good grades and learn more about stuff and not just learn stuff from the teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“If kids have missed out on a lot of school and they are falling behind it’s good for teachers and even other kids to help them get back up there.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Tutoring: learning support – cheaper (one-on-one) – specialised programs – included with school.”</i></p> <p><i>“More support teachers to help the struggling students.”</i></p> <p><i>“More helper teachers to stand at the back of the room and help us with individual stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“Someone always checking on you and your work so if you get the question wrong they can help you with it.”</i></p> <p><i>“One-on-one time with other upper school students.”</i></p> |

Enablers to support for learning

“If I don’t understand the work I will get help from them [family members] and if they don’t understand it I will get help from my teachers.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Quality interpersonal relationships and supportive classroom environments created situations in which students felt help was readily available and comfortable in seeking help.

Friends and teachers were both noted as providing direct support for learning and promoting persistence with learning. Learning both with and from friends was significant for students – and is discussed further in Chapter 3.1 – Having friends and positive relationships with other students. Students preferred teachers who were approachable and readily provided support for learning. When teachers were proactive and interested in providing assistance, students explained it supported their learning, reduced anxiety, facilitated experiences of success and contributed to positive relationships. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 acknowledged and appreciated the willingness of teachers to provide help to students outside of class. The challenges for teachers in providing assistance to everyone in the class were also noted by students, with reference to the number and diversity of students in a class and disruptive behaviour of other students. The ways in which teachers provide support for learning is discussed further in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Yes because they [friends] could make you happy and they can help you with work.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they can help you in class.”</i></p> | <p><i>“They will help you with homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can help your friends/classmates with work.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“They [teachers] help you if you don’t know what to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“She helps me with things when I am stuck and helps me understand things better.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Good teachers: help you in all areas – need different ways to teach different students.”</i></p> <p><i>“When teachers are dealing with disruptive students, must remember that other students are there.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our favourite teacher is someone who helps us.”</i></p> |

External to the classroom, family members were also noted as providing support for learning. Students described how family members assisted with prescribed work and additional opportunities or resources for learning (such as hiring a tutor, creating learning tools or opportunities and encouraging learning behaviours). Additionally, family members contributed to a home environment that supported learning. While students largely felt supported by family members, they also acknowledged a range of social and economic factors can influence the provision of support. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt it beneficial for schools to provide support for homework and homework programs, particularly when support was not consistently available within the home environment. The ways family members support engagement with learning and school is discussed further in Chapter 3.3 – Families that are involved and interested.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“By helping you with your homework because if you can’t do it there is no point getting homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Help with work that is due soon and you don’t have a clue how to do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can be quiet.”</i></p> <p><i>“Set a good example.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Families can help their children with homework/ assignments if needed and make sure that they are not falling behind in class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents and older siblings help us do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Creating a learning space.”</i></p> <p><i>“Enough time to do work out of school.”</i></p> |

The classroom environment influenced student help-seeking behaviour. Students explained how the behaviours and actions of peers, friends and teachers contributed to the classroom environment. This included teacher response to disruptive students and behaviour management generally. Positive and supportive classroom environments were characterised by kindness, positivity and no fear or judgements. As discussed further below, fear of being judged, labelled or teased sometimes impeded student help-seeking behaviour. Positive and supportive classroom environments are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.1 – A positive and fair classroom environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Being nice to others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Good people.”</i></p> | <p><i>“When everyone gets along and helps each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“Getting along with other students.”</i></p> |

Barriers to support for learning

“It might make it hard because they might have something on every day or they might feel like they are not important so they don’t tell anyone so no one knows that they need help in certain subjects.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

A range of barriers to support for learning were described by students across Year 3 to Year 12. The difficulty of asking for help or voicing concerns was a strong theme from students, with this as the most common response to the question, ‘What makes it hard for kids to get the help or support they need?’ Students also referred to their relationships with others, teacher practices and their own perceptions and feelings.

“They might not have the support they need to learn.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

For many, the stigma attached to asking for help with learning led to students hiding their concerns or expressing uncertainty about asking for help. For others, the availability of the teacher limited their capacity to seek assistance. Teacher availability was often influenced by the behaviour or needs of peers. An environment in which help-seeking behaviour was encouraged and welcomed was desired by students. Similar to previous consultations by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, students wanted people to be available, to listen to them, understand them and to proactively provide assistance.

Availability of school staff

The availability of teachers was a particularly pertinent issue for students in terms of receiving support for learning. The size of classes limited opportunities for students to receive assistance. Some students perceived specific students who regularly received assistance, or those who did not need assistance, as taking up teacher time. In response to these concerns, students suggested smaller classes, streaming, or additional teachers or teaching assistants within classrooms.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Too many kids in one room. She can't hear you."</i></p> <p><i>"It's hard because some kids get more treatment than others!!!"</i></p> <p><i>"When there is only one teacher in the class."</i></p> <p><i>"Not enough assistants and one-on-one work."</i></p> <p><i>"They are helping the smarter students not the lower grade students."</i></p> <p><i>"When they are in big classes with only one teacher it is hard for the teachers to actually go through it with you."</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers might be talking to another teacher or student."</i></p> | <p><i>"There is only 1 teacher and about 30 kids so it's hard for the teacher to help everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"Kids that don't need extra help get distracted by the teachers. I get that they need extra help but it gets annoying, they should go to another room."</i></p> <p><i>"When the teachers focus on the kids that do well rather than the kids that need help."</i></p> <p><i>"Too many kids in class."</i></p> <p><i>"Having different levels of intelligence in one class."</i></p> <p><i>"If the teacher never gets to you, because they are too busy with other students."</i></p> <p><i>"Help people who have disability and make it hard for teachers to teach."</i></p> |

The behaviour of other students also affected student's access to support, in particular learning time and teacher time. Students described how the disruptive behaviour of other students, such as talking, not listening, calling out or instigating fights, made it difficult to concentrate in class and responding to these students took up the teacher's time.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"The kids might not understand what the person is saying and they will get the question wrong because they might not be listening."</i></p> <p><i>"When other people are talking about irrelevant subjects."</i></p> <p><i>"They won't get help because they will not behave."</i></p> <p><i>"People trying to get into a fight with a more naughty kid."</i></p> <p><i>"Kids are selfish because they haven't got any friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Distraction noises, vehicles passing, smaller (and noisier) kids."</i></p> <p><i>"People that don't care for your learning slowing you down."</i></p> <p><i>"When kids talk, they're not hearing the teachers so they get left behind."</i></p> | <p><i>"The teachers focus on people messing about the whole lesson and the people who want to learn miss out!"</i></p> <p><i>"If teachers are only focusing on the kids that muck around and annoy other students, instead of focusing on the kids who WANT to learn and get good grades."</i></p> <p><i>"The kids don't turn up to class and they do whatever they want."</i></p> <p><i>"Some kids talking too much and it's hard."</i></p> <p><i>"Disturbing each other to not study and not learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers don't actually concentrate on what the students around them do, so some students can't learn as much."</i></p> |

Feeling scared, embarrassed or shy

“Conceal don’t feel don’t let them know you’re stupid.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The perceptions of others strongly influenced student help-seeking behaviour. Students referred to feeling too embarrassed, scared and shy to ask for help and were concerned what others would think of them. Fear of being teased by other students or judged by teachers or peers immobilised students. There was a stigma attached to asking for help whereby students perceived they would be labelled as ‘different’ or not smart. Incorrect answers and not knowing what to do were also a cause of stress and anxiety.

Feeling scared or embarrassed affected student self-confidence and their help-seeking behaviour and, in some cases, students indicated that they would rather not ask for help than risk embarrassment within the classroom. Students valued teachers who created a safe learning environment in which students felt that it was OK to ask questions and to make mistakes. Such environments support engagement with learning.¹⁰⁰

The potential positive influence of friends was noted, with students wanting friends to be supportive of them, particularly if they needed assistance with learning. A learning environment that promotes help-seeking behaviour is critical for student’s level of comfort and confidence in learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“They might get the question wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“Someone might be too shy to ask for help so they copy others’ work and they never learn anything or get the help they need because the teacher just thinks they are fine.”</i></p> <p><i>“Embarrassed in front of smart people.”</i></p> <p><i>“It might be an easy question.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could get embarrassed for not knowing the question.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes people don’t notice so the kids can be stuck on something and they might be nervous to tell someone.”</i></p> <p><i>“They feel stupid that they don’t know it.”</i></p> <p><i>“When you don’t know how to do the work and you don’t want to put your hand up and be the odd one out.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s hard when people don’t really care if someone is trying hard but needs lots of support and help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Thinking they’ll get bullied if they ask for help they say nothing and carry on with no help with a bad or terrible grade.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Be able to ask a question without the fear of being made fun of.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s better and easier to talk to other students than a teacher. Sometimes students are scared to talk to teachers because you don’t want them to judge.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being too shy to ask the teacher questions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other smart people pressuring them like they need it or are different.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids do not sometimes find it hard unless they are nervous or scared asking for help from teachers. Other kids are OK about talking to someone who can help them and easily get support or help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Shame – embarrassed to ask for help on an ‘easy’ question.”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t want to get judged for asking.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes it can be awkward asking the teacher for help.”</i></p> <p><i>“They get teased by peers when they ask for help from a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“The surrounding classmates being judgemental.”</i></p> |

Teacher practices

"I think teachers that can relate to children are much more helpful and supportive in kids' lives." (Year 7 to Year 12)

"They might get scared of the teacher they have." (Year 3 to Year 6)

The actions and behaviours of teachers either created or stifled an environment in which students felt able to request assistance and had confidence in a positive response. Students referred to the interpersonal qualities of teachers and their classroom practices as influential.

Students wanted teachers who understood them and their lives and demonstrated care for students. Teachers who were mean, rude, stubborn, aggressive or verbally abusive, or used alienating practices such as intimidation, shaming, labelling or shouting were perceived by students as unhelpful and unapproachable.

Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt that sometimes teachers provoked students or that the teacher's mood affected how they treated students. They felt there should be clear and strict policies about teacher behaviour towards students, which should include no verbal abuse or aggressive behaviour. Students stated they wanted their classroom to mirror an adult learning environment, where students and teachers were treated with mutual respect and where teachers were relaxed and flexible.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"When the teachers don't care about you and they are mean because you feel sad."</i></p> <p><i>"When teachers shout all the time."</i></p> <p><i>"[...] teachers that don't care about the kids because the teachers help [us] to do well and [they] need to care."</i></p> | <p><i>"Kids need a teacher that will realise what children's lives are like outside of the classroom."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers who understand."</i></p> <p><i>"If they have a bad reputation and teachers always assume that it is the same person."</i></p> <p><i>"Misunderstanding teachers being prejudiced."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers that don't put you down or ruin your day."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers who don't make you lose your confidence."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers who aren't understanding or able to acknowledge students' troubles."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers being more laid back."</i></p> |

A range of classroom practices were suggested as making it difficult to learn or get support for learning. Some comments referred to the pedagogical approach adopted by teachers, whereas others referred to behaviour management or the expertise of teachers. Adjusting to different ways of learning between remote and metropolitan areas was noted as a difficulty by some students in Year 7 to Year 12. Adapting and modernising teaching methods to suit student needs was highlighted by students as beneficial for engagement.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Teacher favouritism."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers passing through subjects too fast."</i></p> <p><i>"When the teachers don't give help and they don't let the students use calculators or any sort of devices and let the children stress out and tell them off when it's the teacher's fault."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers don't go back to the same subject so you forget."</i></p> <p><i>"Not experienced teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers can't control the naughty kids."</i></p> | <p><i>"Teachers don't check and make sure you're learning and understanding."</i></p> <p><i>"When teachers single you out if you're not good at it."</i></p> <p><i>"When a teacher is using a teaching method that is hard to understand."</i></p> <p><i>"Page full of words (no pictures, diagrams or anything)."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers only make children do classwork but some students benefit more from interactive learning."</i></p> <p><i>"Teacher doesn't know what they are teaching."</i></p> |

Consequences arising from speaking up or seeking assistance were also a concern for students. Getting into trouble, being disciplined, not knowing how teachers would respond, or being judged by teachers complicated student's actions. Occasionally, students felt confused by mixed messages received from teachers, which hampered their willingness to ask for help.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Punished for nothing."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting put on the number 1,2,3 chart which puts you down."</i></p> <p><i>"Having someone help you but expect you to do all the work."</i></p> <p><i>"Being worried you will get told off for not completing work."</i></p> | <p><i>"Afraid to get detention if they talk."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers need to actually listen and help us understand instead of making us feel stupid when we have actual questions."</i></p> <p><i>"Afraid it will affect their grade."</i></p> <p><i>"Move you for no reason."</i></p> <p><i>"Worried teachers will get mad."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers make you feel bad."</i></p> |

When teachers did not act in supportive ways, students felt uncomfortable and unable to seek assistance with learning. Quality relationships with teachers facilitated student help-seeking behaviour – highlighting the importance of relationships for school and learning.

Students wanted teachers who use effective pedagogy, proactively provide support and use effective behaviour management strategies. When teachers worked in these ways, it was easier for students to learn and get help with learning.

Year 7 to Year 12

- "We shouldn't be scared of teachers."*
- "Some kids don't want to ask questions or talk to teachers they don't like."*
- "Some teachers seem unapproachable."*
- "Teachers not listening (enforcing a dictatorship in class)."*
- "If they don't have a relationship with the teacher where they feel like they can't talk to the teacher."*
- "They never talk to you unless you're causing trouble."*
- "Scared to approach the teachers."*

Students also indicated that they needed avenues of support in response to teacher behaviour or feedback.

"We need support for when teachers are hurtful or give bad feedback that is mean. We need people to talk to these teachers and help us deal with them." (Year 7 to Year 12)

Accessibility of support resources

Students were cognisant that a range of factors influenced the availability of resources and services within schools, towns and families. Cost of staff (tutors, assistants, etc) or equipment, time available and location were noted as prohibitive factors. At a systems level, it is essential that schools are adequately resourced to enable engagement through meeting the needs of their student cohort and community.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"Cost."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes it hard because sometimes you have to pay a lot of money to get help."</i></p> <p><i>"They don't have the money."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they might need a tutor and it might cost a lot."</i></p> <p><i>"Because we live in [a regional town] it's hard to get the support she needs."</i></p> <p><i>"Fundraising for equipment. If the school does not have the money to buy it."</i></p> <p><i>"No teacher assistants."</i></p> <p><i>"No books!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"</i></p> | <p><i>"Financial situations – not enough money for tutor."</i></p> <p><i>"Limited time for tutoring."</i></p> <p><i>"Cost of tutors or extra teaching."</i></p> <p><i>"Kids in the metropolitan area have up-to-date technology, but kids in regional areas have limited help."</i></p> <p><i>"No money to pay the tutors."</i></p> <p><i>"Internet (if it is so slow)."</i></p> |

Students also identified that the knowledge, skills and experiences of family members influenced the levels of support available to students. A family member's own level of education or experiences of schooling can impact their capacity to provide assistance, as discussed further in Chapter 3.3 – Families that are involved and interested.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 noted that diversity of backgrounds and experiences were not necessarily catered for within schools. They explained that cultural or religious backgrounds, gender, having English as a second language, having a disability or having been to different schools can make it hard for some students to learn. This included the differences between schools, and the differences in experiences between metropolitan and remote schools.

Pressure

"People think you are smart and know everything." (Year 7 to Year 12)

Pressure sometimes immobilised students from getting the help or support they needed. Students experienced pressure from the expectations of others, the fear of failure and when under a time limit or deadline. Feeling stress or pressure compromised their ability to concentrate on learning and impacted their self-confidence.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Pressure (not enough time)."</i></p> <p><i>"They need to learn faster."</i></p> <p><i>"Too much homework and worried to not get it done."</i></p> <p><i>"Preparing for something e.g. a test."</i></p> <p><i>"High expectations."</i></p> <p><i>"The pressure and shyness."</i></p> | <p><i>"They're scared they'll fail."</i></p> <p><i>"Standards – stress."</i></p> <p><i>"Hard to admit they need it."</i></p> <p><i>"High expectations of parents."</i></p> <p><i>"Pressure to succeed."</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

Assistance with learning and learning in a safe, calm and supportive environment were important for students to be ready and able to engage in learning. Positive and supportive relationships were critical for students feeling comfortable to seek assistance with learning.

To enhance engagement and overcome difficulties with learning students required increased access to support for learning. Students suggested a variety of strategies, including

- increasing the number of school staff (more teachers or aides/assistants) to improve ratios of school staff to students or to decrease the size of classes
- more time to be spent on active teaching and learning (rather than copying from a board or book)
- clear explanations
- consideration of class compositions (student need, ability/streaming, removal of disruptive students) to account for different learning needs, minimise disruptions and encourage a supportive classroom environment.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 also suggested greater communication about work requirements, learning progress and pathways beyond school (more frequent, responsive and targeted).

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Teachers helping children a bit more. Because they usually explain it and the student still doesn’t get it. Maybe extra help with a built in school tutor at recess and (or) lunch.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a specialist class for kids that are behind (– oh yeah).”</i></p> <p><i>“Better learning system e.g. more explaining, more ways of studying.”</i></p> <p><i>“More time to submit projects.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like more teachers/EA’s because we have over 1000 students.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Smaller classes – classes of 15-20 so the teacher has more time to work with you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers understanding how us students learn.”</i></p> <p><i>“Free study period catch-up on work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>between teachers and students</i> • <i>weekly emails addressing work due within the week</i> • <i>set times and days for online lessons that suit everyone’s timetables and schedules.”</i> <p><i>“More visual activities and less written work as this is bad to just learn in 1 way.”</i></p> <p><i>“More help for disadvantaged students.”</i></p> |

4.3 Teaching and learning that is interesting

Understanding teacher practices from the perspective of students provides important insight into how pedagogy impacts student engagement, motivation and learning behaviours. The pedagogy used within the classroom frames student engagement – with students as passive recipients of instruction in didactic approaches or as empowered participants in active approaches.¹⁰¹ Active learning increases the participation of students and is an essential component of effective teaching and learning. Providing opportunities for students to learn through a variety of experiences, including through interaction and discussion with peers, increases engagement with learning. Teachers can also use various methods of teaching, adapting their approach so that students are supported to reach learning goals.

Student opinions on the teaching methods they prefer provide important insight into the conditions and contexts for engagement.^{102 103}

Survey findings

- 62 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed with the statement that ‘Teachers try new and different ways to teach’.
- 42 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students disagreed with the statement that ‘Teachers are too strict in this school’. The remainder (58%) was either undecided or agreed with this.
- 1 in 2 students who reported that they don’t like school said that this is because they ‘don’t like the way that [I’m] being taught’.

In the Year 7 to Year 12 survey, participating students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements relating to teaching methods and learning.

In regard to innovation in teaching and preparedness to help, nearly two-thirds of students agreed with the statements that at their school ‘Teachers try new and different ways to teach us’ (62.4%) and that ‘Teachers go out of their way to help students’ (61.2%). Around 15 per cent of students disagreed with both of these statements (16.0% and 13.3% respectively).

In regard to rules and strictness, 17 per cent of students agreed that teachers in their school are too strict and 25 per cent said that the rules in their school are too strict.

Table 4.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with selected statements about their school and teachers

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Teachers try new and different ways to teach us | 18.1 | 44.3 | 21.6 | 9.4 | 6.6 |
| Teachers go out of their way to help students | 15.3 | 45.9 | 25.6 | 9.6 | 3.7 |
| Teachers are too strict in this school | 5.7 | 11.3 | 40.9 | 32.9 | 9.1 |
| The rules in this school are too strict | 8.1 | 17.1 | 30.4 | 34.4 | 10.0 |

Teaching pedagogy and individual approach were critical factors for students who reported not liking school. One-half of these students said they don’t like school because of ‘the way that [I’m] being taught’.

Many students made learning-related comments in response to some of the open narrative questions included in the survey (‘What do you most enjoy about school?’ and ‘Think about teachers you like. What do you like about them?’).

Overall, Year 7 to Year 12 students were less likely than Year 3 to Year 6 to speak of an innate enjoyment of learning new things and instead spoke about their preference for teachers who made learning more interesting, enjoyable and fun and did not put too much pressure on students. Students also asked for more hands-on activities and new and different ways of learning:

“[Teachers who] do lots of fun activities like [...] play bingo to help our vocabulary. They try to make learning fun and enjoyable.”

“[Teachers who] don’t apply pressure to understand the subject [...] they try other ways of teaching the information to help it become better understood.”

“More choices of learning.”

“To include multiple and interesting ways of learning.”

The questionnaire for Year 3 to Year 6 students did not include any specific questions about teaching methods.

Group discussion findings

“In Year 2 for science we made cocoa balls. I loved it because everyone got a turn at mixing the ingredients (and eating them!). I liked it because it didn’t feel like it was school but I was still learning (it was really fun).” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Because you can learn about history like listening to your Elders or family members or read a book.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“I really like learning when the class is fun and interesting, and when it’s not all about writing pages and pages of notes that don’t mean anything at all.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Within the group discussions, students were asked to consider a time when they really liked learning at school and why they liked it, what helps other students to like learning and what makes it hard for students to learn. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 said they were engaged in learning when they were having fun and were interested in what was being taught.

From the students that were asked these questions only one response from each year grouping indicated that the student/s never liked learning.

“Never!!” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“School was rarely fun when learning. NO normal person would think learning might be fun.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Through the group discussions, several important messages about teaching methods and learning emerged:

- Students appreciated and were engaged when there was diversity in teaching methods and learning experiences, with a clear preference for interactive learning experiences. This included learning through hands-on activities, games, strategies, excursions, incursions, and involving discussion and purposeful use of technology.
- Clear explanations were consistently raised as essential for enabling engagement and minimising anxiety.
- Students wanted to be empowered to be actively involved in their learning – through active learning and choices about their learning experiences.
- Learning experiences that were meaningful and appropriately challenging were engaging and provided motivation for learning, particularly when facilitated by support for learning and experiences of success.
- Encouragement and recognition of their effort motivated students.
- Competing demands were a source of stress and made it difficult for students to promote their own health and wellbeing, which affected their learning and motivation.

Engagement with learning was hindered by learning experiences that were too easy, too difficult, repetitive or not interactive.

Learning experiences contributed significantly to student perceptions of, and engagement with, learning, school and relationships with teachers. However, some students also acknowledged their own role in learning – discussing behaviours that support and negate engagement with learning.

Pedagogy

“Sometimes students like to learn in all different ways but the most common one is making it fun, instead of always making notes from a PowerPoint.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The ways teachers taught (or teacher pedagogy) strongly influenced student interest in learning. A range of teaching methods were suggested by students across Year 3 to Year 12 to enhance their engagement with learning. Students did not advocate for a particular method but rather expressed a desire for variety.

“I think it makes people like it more when we do things differently e.g. on our laptops or just doing stuff that we don’t normally do.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Try to make it fun and educational at the same time.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“A variety of different ways to learn, instead of just writing notes from a board constantly. Instead they like:

- *interactive learning*
- *watching relative films or documentaries for the subjects.” (Year 7 to Year 12)*

“[It’s hard to learn when] You get textbook work/worksheets lesson after lesson (more variety).” (Year 7 to Year 12)

There was a clear indication that learning experiences that were hands-on, interactive, enabled choice and autonomy, and were facilitated by clear explanations increased emotional and cognitive engagement with learning. Many students expressed that learning in these ways did not feel like learning or did not feel like school, and made learning enjoyable, interesting, simplified and easier to remember. Some also referred to their enjoyment of earlier years of school, such as Kindergarten and Year 1, where learning occurred predominately through play. Year 7 to Year 12 students in particular referred to earlier school years as being ‘stress-free’.

Importantly, as students explained, learning in these ways made students feel involved in their own learning, particularly when compared to more passive learning experiences.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| Hands-on and practical | |
| <p><i>“Maths because I did measuring around school buildings. It helped me learn about perimeter and was fun because we physically did it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Science experiments because we get to do lots of fun and interesting activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked learning at school when I was programming robots because it was ‘hands-on’ and I was good at it.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked basketball because we learnt lots of stuff and I don’t like work and tests.”</i></p> | <p><i>“I liked it because we went outside and did an interactive roleplay (that included food) which helped us to learn easier and quicker whilst having fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was hands-on and interactive – not boring.”</i></p> <p><i>“Science – pracs help to fully understand ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“Doing more intellectual thinking activities and projects.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working with machines.”</i></p> |
| Interactions with other students | |
| <p><i>“To be able to work in groups and to be able to share your ideas.”</i></p> <p><i>“When the teachers let us work in pairs.”</i></p> <p><i>“When in groups and with friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like it when we do Opti-Minds because we get to work with other students and share our ideas.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Discussing topics so we get involved and learn.”</i></p> <p><i>“Doing group work (it’s more interactive/enjoyable).”</i></p> <p><i>“I like learning when teachers make activities to interact with students more. That makes it more interesting e.g. physical activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Discussing our learning so we remember it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working in groups with other people when you discuss problems/issues about the topic.”</i></p> |

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| Games and strategies | |
| <p><i>“Games that are educational are cool because it helps people learn while having fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked Year 1 because we learnt everything in songs (it helps me remember).”</i></p> <p><i>“When the work is made into games.”</i></p> <p><i>“More fun activities that simplify tricky things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Using the Split Strategy so then it doesn’t seem hard anymore.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Educational games about subject i.e. Run the River.”</i></p> <p><i>“Scavenger hunts (like the Amazing Race) as a competition as well as exam revision. It helped keep us mentally healthy (as well as physically) and was extremely helpful for revision.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like learning because in math we have an awesome teacher who makes rhymes and songs about math and work/test.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning games, for example in humanities we played a game called ‘Treasure Island’ it was a fun way to learn about trading supply and demand.”</i></p> |
| Excursions and incursions | |
| <p><i>“I like some incursions and excursions because you can learn things at the same time as laughing.”</i></p> <p><i>“I loved the day we went to the Duyfken because it was fun and helped you learn about the history aboard the ship all in one.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Mayor talk, I liked it because I got a hands-on experience with what it’s like to be a town leader.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we go to excursions related to what we are learning that term.”</i></p> |
| Purposeful use of technology | |
| <p><i>“When they get to use technology.”</i></p> <p><i>“iPad learning apps.”</i></p> <p><i>“When the teachers put on a video to explain how to do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“When our teacher watched videos on YouTube sometimes it helps.”</i></p> <p><i>“Maths online because it helps me learn quicker by doing it online instead of worksheets all the time I think doing it online helps me enjoy maths more.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Watching documentaries/movies – easy to keep focus on and it’s fun and interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lots of kids find visual learning easier or when the teacher shows a slideshow.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lessons that involve technology.”</i></p> |

Not surprisingly, students outlined that it was difficult to learn when teaching methods and learning experiences were boring. Generally, practices based on didactic methods – that is, lectures, textbook work and copying notes – were considered unenjoyable by students. Such practices typically do not foster critical thinking, do not involve class or group discussions and do not empower students to be actively involved in their learning or develop self-direction.¹⁰⁴ Further, learning was also considered boring when students could not see the relevance of the work or did not feel the work catered to their learning style or ability.

The use of technology did not automatically make lessons interesting, instead students stressed that technology use must be carefully planned and be purposeful. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 also wanted choice regarding technology use as some preferred to write rather than type, whereas others had concerns about losing work.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"No hands-on!!"</i></p> <p><i>"The teaching style."</i></p> <p><i>"When you are given big worksheets about the same things."</i></p> <p><i>"Instead of teaching us he pulls up a YouTube video and the teacher has favourites."</i></p> <p><i>"When teachers keep talking about stuff for a long time."</i></p> | <p><i>"Boring lessons with nothing entertaining or engaging."</i></p> <p><i>"Too much info at one time."</i></p> <p><i>"If teachers don't teach to your learning style."</i></p> <p><i>"Separate class according to learning style."</i></p> <p><i>"They don't understand the way it's being taught."</i></p> <p><i>"When you are doing textbook work! BORING!"</i></p> <p><i>"Lectures lasting 30 minutes."</i></p> |

Feelings of stress and pressure negatively influenced student perceptions of learning. There were a range of teaching strategies and teacher practices that made students feel stressed about their learning. A lack of time, too much work and tests were all noted as creating stressful situations as students felt less able to concentrate on the task at hand. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to comparisons between students or when results were made public as also creating a stressful environment.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Don't give you enough time."</i></p> <p><i>"Not enough time."</i></p> <p><i>"When you have a really busy schedule."</i></p> <p><i>"NAPLAN."</i></p> <p><i>"Tests with times."</i></p> <p><i>"Surprise test."</i></p> | <p><i>"Pressure from tests and projects that are due."</i></p> <p><i>"Too much stress – not enough time for homework or class work."</i></p> <p><i>"When the school work is rushed."</i></p> <p><i>"Assignments/tests at unfair times."</i></p> <p><i>"When teachers have 5 tests in one day."</i></p> <p><i>"Stress from too much homework, family, teachers and lots of tests."</i></p> <p><i>"Expectations from teachers, family and friends. As well as the fact that there is much more assignments and exams in high school."</i></p> <p><i>"When teachers intimidate students by publicly calling out scores. Makes me anxious."</i></p> |

Clear explanations

The explanations provided by teachers were identified by students across Year 3 to Year 12 as critical for learning. Clear explanations, demonstrations or examples were consistently raised as being helpful to learning as students were then enabled to engage in and complete their work.

Conversely, poor explanations or no explanations from teachers were unhelpful to learning and made learning difficult and unenjoyable. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 suggested that a lack of information led to a sense of stress and isolation, particularly when it appeared peers understood the work or instructions. In contrast, students in Year 7 to Year 12 expressed frustration.

Throughout the consultation, students emphasised the importance of appropriate and tailored support for learning. Students wanted teachers to proactively check for levels of understanding and pay attention to students who may require additional support or who may be too shy or embarrassed to ask for assistance – as discussed further in Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment. When students felt unable to complete their work, they were more likely to disengage from learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“When the teachers explain things to you in an easier way to understand.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers explaining what to do and how to do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Explaining how answers occur.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Woodwork, how they talk thoroughly about the project and how to do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was well explained, making it easily understandable.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher doesn’t go into confusing detail, he tells/ explains in simplest form.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“It makes it hard when the teacher doesn’t explain what you have to do.”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t understand it. Explain it too quickly.”</i></p> <p><i>“When everyone else knows how to do the work but you don’t.”</i></p> <p><i>“When the wording isn’t clear or understandable.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some teachers make it hard to work, they explain it hard.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Hard to understand.”</i></p> <p><i>“When teachers suck at explaining!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“When teachers expect you to know everything and don’t go through it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers don’t explain anything properly then move on to the next lesson.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers explanations are sometimes very hard to comprehend.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gibberish instructions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Finding work too unclear.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are a bit shy and don’t always understand questions.”</i></p> |

Choice and autonomy

Opportunities to be autonomous and to exercise choice in their learning were important for students. Through these opportunities, students across Year 3 to Year 12 described a sense of empowerment, enthusiasm and ownership of learning. Providing students with choice can enable students to learn in ways they prefer and in subject areas they are naturally curious or interested in, increasing motivation to learn and engagement with learning. Supporting students to exercise choice in this way decreases student frustration with particular teaching methods, as noted above. In addition, students develop a sense of self-efficacy, responsibility and skills for self-directed learning.

Students also valued expressing themselves and their choices through learning tasks, directing their own learning and discussion with others.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“The choice to do stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“I really liked when I had really hard spelling words in Year 2 like enthusiastic and we got to choose what words were too hard or too easy.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked it in Year 2 when we had more freedom because now I feel like we have to do stuff exactly like they tell us to.”</i></p> <p><i>“It would be good if we had a free period on Friday where we could relax, do homework and do sports.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we did narratives and you could write anything.”</i></p> | <p><i>“When I got to choose the study method/type of activities which I had to do in order to work as productively and efficiently as possible.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked school when the subjects we did had a time limit with the level of difficulty and whether we wanted to learn. There’s no point in school if students aren’t paying attention or wanting to learn more about it.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I get to have a say in what I learn about.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like options in my learning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>choosing what you want to do in class</i> • <i>[in] cursive text you get to choose what subject you want to write about.”</i> |

Within a school environment there are multiple opportunities for autonomy at varying levels of control that can be provided to students – and importantly is critical to creating a child safe environment.¹⁰⁵ Classroom management strategies, learning activities, curriculum content and school organisation are all areas in which students can contribute – and have provided valuable insight through this consultation. Supporting students to have a say in their learning increases connectedness to learning, the school and education more broadly, and enables them to learn in ways that make sense to and suit them.

Competence, experiencing success and confidence

Students were cognitively and emotionally engaged in learning when it was appropriately challenging, they felt capable and they were supported to develop their level of competence. Students outlined they were interested in learning when they were able to complete the work, the work was easy and they understood what they were doing.

In contrast, students were less likely to enjoy learning when they did not understand the content area or did not possess prerequisite knowledge. In these instances, students lost interest in learning due to their frustration or anxiety. Not understanding content also made students feel shame and embarrassment, which made asking for assistance difficult and learning unenjoyable.

Similarly, when learning was too easy students lost interest because they found the work boring.

Students explained that work that was not tailored to their level of understanding sometimes led to behavioural disengagement. Similarly, not experiencing success negatively impacted motivation and persistence with learning, making students more likely to withdraw from learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"Being good at it. You know what you're doing."</i></p> <p><i>"Doing maths at school because it is fun and easy."</i></p> <p><i>"I like spelling because I'm a good speller."</i></p> <p><i>"I really liked learning about the Olympics because I was familiar with the Greek God King Zeus and knew much about him."</i></p> <p><i>"When we do things that are easy to learn and understand."</i></p> | <p><i>"Complex but simple at the same time."</i></p> <p><i>"I like work when it is easy."</i></p> <p><i>"Because we were learning something that I had a lot of knowledge on."</i></p> <p><i>"I felt like I understood the topic we were learning."</i></p> <p><i>"Math because you can understand easily and the teacher is Lit."</i>⁰⁶</p> |
| <p><i>"Because they think they can't do it so they choose to not listen and then they don't learn it then they can't use it in later life. It needs to be put in their head."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they give you hard work!"</i></p> <p><i>"NAPLAN because it is hard."</i></p> <p><i>"Not having any practise on school work."</i></p> <p><i>"Something they don't understand."</i></p> <p><i>"The question you might not know that word."</i></p> <p><i>"Really hard problems."</i></p> <p><i>"Making it more challenging than it is."</i></p> <p><i>"Our class people need a lot of help but the teacher pays no attention to the really smart people and only to the people who need help. We need to be graded by ability not age so that everyone gets attention."</i></p> | <p><i>"Don't understand the things being taught."</i></p> <p><i>"When teacher says you should have learned this at primary school or last year and so they don't explain it!!"</i></p> <p><i>"Constantly failing puts students off trying."</i></p> <p><i>"It's hard to keep with everyone in class when writing notes because we all write at different paces."</i></p> |

Tailored and individualised approaches were important to create motivation, encourage engagement, minimise boredom, frustration or stress, and ultimately enable student progress in learning and success. Students recognised that teachers use a variety of strategies to cater to students' different levels of ability, understanding or learning progression. When teachers tailored work to the varying abilities in the class, students felt valued as learners and that the teacher cared for their learning. These strategies were viewed as beneficial for individual students and the class more broadly.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>"It helps when the teacher asks if this is the way that you like to work."</i></p> <p><i>"I like when some kids find it easy but other kids can find it SO hard so we do activities like really fun stuff and that helps them learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Having others that are your skill levels to sit with them to help."</i></p> <p><i>"When the kids that don't know how to do something they get different work."</i></p> <p><i>"It's hard for some kids to learn because they don't quite understand what they are being taught and they need to be told in depth so it can be sinked into their heads. Or it's hard because they don't listen."</i></p> | <p><i>"Finding a learning method that helps for you."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers that understand 'your' learning/acting."</i></p> <p><i>"Examples that are understandable for our age – not what they understand."</i></p> <p><i>"More precise streaming more levels for learning so that kids at each level can learn the subjects."</i></p> <p><i>"Smaller classrooms so teachers can do 1 on 1 with students."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a teacher who teaches YOU as INDIVIDUALS rather than just a class."</i></p> |

Through their achievements, students are enabled to view themselves as successful learners. Student self-belief contributes positively to self-esteem, motivation, persistence and engagement with learning. Being provided with opportunities to develop their competence was important to students, particularly when they could see improvements in their learning or abilities, or when learning contributed to their own personal development. Learning that contributed to their future beyond school was also important for student enjoyment of learning, as discussed further in Chapter 4.4 – Teaching and learning that is relevant.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Sport/soccer: because the teacher taught me what I already knew, but he made me go over and get better at the skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Having an opportunity to practise."</i></p> <p><i>"When we do things that we know and when we improve on it."</i></p> <p><i>"Math helps me to be confident with myself. And to farm."</i></p> <p><i>"Rigg because you get to learn how to spell harder words."</i></p> <p><i>"We love to write narratives because, same with art, lets your imagination run wild, because it builds character."</i></p> <p><i>"I love reading because it makes all your skills develop."</i></p> <p><i>"When it brings deep conversation and it builds your personality."</i></p> | <p><i>"Because I finally understood something! It is honestly the best feeling once you understand a maths problem!"</i></p> <p><i>"When I finally completed my essay I felt a sense of achievement and I was proud."</i></p> <p><i>"Sport because I was able to participate in team building."</i></p> <p><i>"When I was getting good grades."</i></p> <p><i>"We weren't just learning for a test, it was for fun."</i></p> <p><i>"Sport because it's fun and learnt a lot about how to train myself."</i></p> |

Encouragement and recognition

Positive attention and reinforcement from respected others, such as school staff and family members, were effective in motivating students to engage in learning. Recognition of their efforts and learning progress built self-belief, self-confidence and contributed to motivation as well. Those who outlined such strategies as important for enjoying learning described motivation to learn and satisfaction with learning. Encouragement could come through acknowledgement or praise from school staff, rewards including food, games, movies or free time, or through structured reward systems.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Rewards to get motivated to learn.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement to do better in school and class because some aren’t as cooperative as others.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need congratulations.”</i></p> <p><i>“The time I liked learning at school is when I got to go to the office for good work.”</i></p> <p><i>“It helps kids learning if you set a reward for them. Example: math hour after small sports game for 20 mins. Set a goal for students.”</i></p> <p><i>“An encouraging teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends supporting them to do their best.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Being encouraged to achieve well at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivation to succeed.”</i></p> <p><i>“When friends support the work the student does.”</i></p> <p><i>“Awards (being recognised).”</i></p> <p><i>“Reward system – rewarding success through objects and or appreciation by peers.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked learning when there were chocolates and prizes involved.”</i></p> |

Valuing learning – student actions

Students acknowledged learning is not a unidirectional process. Whilst teachers have a significant role to play in the provision of engaging and appropriately challenging learning activities, students noted that they too have a role in their own learning. Students described learning behaviours and individual strengths that support learning, such as active listening, reading, self-confidence, perseverance and resilience. The previous chapters highlight the relational aspects of schooling and how they play an important role in student attitude, learning behaviours, academic self-concept and ultimately engagement with learning.

Students also identified individual student behaviours that were not helpful for learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Listening to the teacher. Look at the teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Read the question carefully.”</i></p> <p><i>“How much you are confident.”</i></p> <p><i>“Concentrating.”</i></p> <p><i>“They find education important and fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need to put their hands up.”</i></p> <p><i>“It helps them if they don’t give up.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Entering class with a positive attitude.”</i></p> <p><i>“Becoming more confident.”</i></p> <p><i>“Concentration.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talking to your teacher if you are having problems with the learning content, or possibly your grades.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“Not listening.”</i></p> <p><i>“[...] Or it’s hard because they don’t listen.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Don’t use the resources provided to their advantage.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not doing work (homework).”</i></p> <p><i>“Not using time wisely.”</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

“I think we should make work a little more fun.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Overwhelmingly, students in Year 3 to Year 6 wanted learning to be more fun to increase engagement. The suggestions on how to make learning more fun were parallel to the learning that students found engaging – that is, learning that was hands-on, interactive and relevant. Within learning activities, students wanted to be provided with clear explanations, be appropriately challenged, have choices, be able to work with other students, and receive encouragement and recognition.

Similar suggestions were made by students in Year 7 to Year 12, however, not as often as by those in Year 3 to Year 6.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <i>“Make learning more fun, because it lets the students enjoy what they’re doing and they would want to learn more.”</i> | <i>“Teaching Strategies – rather than just re-reading the book, sing, experiments, videos, activities and other alternatives.”</i> |
| <i>“Fun subjects because it can make students more positive about going to school.”</i> | <i>“Teachers – we need more fun and less strict work and less stress as we are still young and our brains are still growing.”</i> |
| <i>“We should have more hands-on learning.”</i> | <i>“Teachers who care about fun learning rather than learning something just for a test.”</i> |

Instead, students in Year 7 to Year 12 were more likely to refer to reducing stress and pressure associated with learning. School was stressful when students had many competing commitments, when several assessments were scheduled in close proximity, or when planning or working towards graduation and their lives beyond school. Regular communication and support for work and graduation requirements would minimise stress for students.

Year 7 to Year 12

“More time for homework, or less homework (too much stress).”

“Don’t put too much emphasis on Year 12 exams. If you do bad in the exam take your average off the rest of the year.”

“Notified about tests/assignments more often.”

“GAT expectations.”

“Teachers that understand that we have other class work/homework and extra-curricular activities.”

“Don’t tell us ATAR is the only option.”

“Longer breaks.”

“Testing

- *less tests*
- *mark day-[to]-day work instead.”*

The timing and workload of assessments across subjects was sometimes problematic for students in Year 7 to Year 12 as it affected their ability to structure their own time for learning and activities that support their wellbeing. Students expressed a desire for teachers to collaborate and map assessment tasks across the year, taking into consideration the demands of assessment pieces, homework, general study and their lives as young people. Students emphasised the importance of teaching staff to consider their lives outside of school, which could include sport, work and family commitments. Some students felt that school and learning commitments made it difficult to feel that they had a break from school and to spend quality time with their families or engage in activities that promoted positive health and wellbeing.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Teachers cooperate with one another – organise assessments to be on different days/weeks.”

“Organise it so all our assessments are not due at once – spread them out amongst the term.”

“Assignments spread out more evenly.”

“Less assignments given to us right after we've just finished one. Give us a break.”

Improved resources and use of technology for learning was a particular focus for students in Year 3 to Year 6. Purposeful use of technology made learning easier for some students and was important to others for their future economic participation.

Year 3 to Year 6

“I would like more electronics, lots of computers and iPads. Everyone would have an electronic for them to use. The reason why I want this is more people would learn and the people who have mental blocks can learn much easier.”

“More computer time because everyone will be using computers in the future.”

“I would like better tech: iPads, computers to take home so we can do homework.”

“We should have a computer lab again, because over 70% of jobs in the modern world need computers or use technology.”

To support their engagement, a small number of students across Year 3 to Year 12 also requested work to be more challenging. Work that was too easy decreased their engagement, with students indicating work was ‘boring’ and this sometimes contributed to behavioural disengagement (e.g. disrupting the class).

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“We need more school work.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would ask for harder maths, and harder spelling words.”</i></p> <p><i>“More hard maths because it is good fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“More extension classes so children can learn things according to their ability.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Better extension work.”</i></p> <p><i>“More gifted programs.”</i></p> <p><i>“If the work was a bit more challenging.”</i></p> |

Students also acknowledged that it was their own responsibility to practise behaviours that support learning. This included approaching learning with a positive attitude, applying effort, listening in class, seeking assistance when required and to persist. These behaviours were supported and enhanced when teaching and learning were interesting, quality interpersonal relationships existed and when working within a positive environment.

4.4 Teaching and learning that is relevant

In Western Australia, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is the body responsible for the development and accreditation of the school curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12. The curriculum sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to be taught and to acquire across their schooling, regardless of where they live, the sector of school, or their individual circumstances. Curriculum content is important for educational quality and equity across the State and nationally, and for preparing students to be active, productive and successful individuals.¹⁰⁷

Importantly, the curriculum does not stipulate how the content is to be taught. School staff members are expected to develop engaging learning experiences which cater to student learning requirements, needs and interests.

Therefore, there is a difference between the curriculum that is set out for students and their experiences of the curriculum through learning activities. Both are important within education systems. Students' perception on the relevance and value of education influences their engagement in school, learning and learning behaviours. Given these perceptions are partly framed by the curriculum and their learning experiences, listening to student insights into curriculum content are essential considerations for enhancing engagement with school and learning.

Survey findings

- More than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel their learning at school is 'very valuable' to them and their future.
- Students who say that what they are learning at school is very valuable to them are more likely to feel part of their school, to like school, to say being at school every day is very important to them and to achieve high academic results.

Is what students are learning valuable to them and why?

A little more than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students (54.0%) reported that what they are learning at school is 'very valuable' to them and their future, and one-third (35.1%) said that it is 'somewhat valuable' to them.

However, one in 10 (9.4%) students in Year 7 to Year 12 said they feel that what they are learning at school is 'not very valuable' or 'not valuable at all' to their future.

There were no significant differences between male and female students, students in regional and metropolitan areas, or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

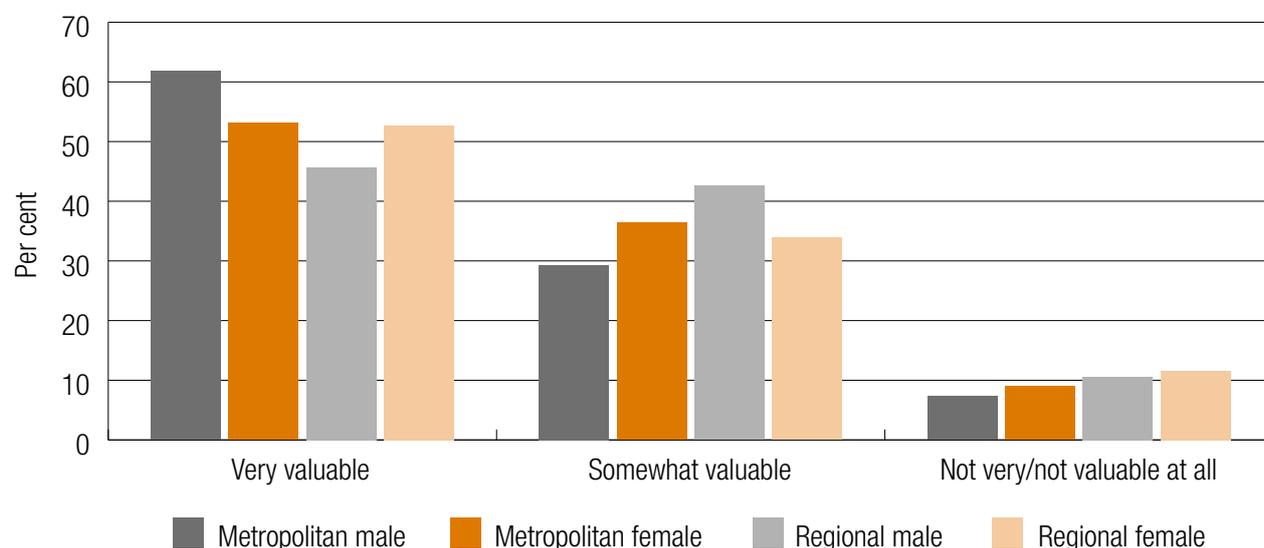
Table 4.9: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying what they are learning at school is very valuable, somewhat valuable, not very valuable/not valuable at all or they are unsure, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Very valuable | 56.5 | 53.0 | 56.1 | 49.3 | 54.5 | 45.5 | 54.0 |
| Somewhat valuable | 33.7 | 35.7 | 33.8 | 38.2 | 35.4 | 29.5 | 35.1 |
| Not very/not valuable at all | 8.5 | 9.8 | 8.7 | 11.1 | 8.8 | 20.5 | 9.4 |
| Unsure | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 4.5 | 1.5 |

A significant regional difference, however, was found within male students. Male students in metropolitan areas were significantly more likely than male students in regional areas to say that what they are learning at school is ‘very valuable’ to them (61.8% versus 45.7%).

The same difference was not found within female students in metropolitan and regional areas (53.1% versus 52.7%).

Graph 4.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying what they are learning at school is very valuable, somewhat valuable or not very valuable/not valuable at all, by gender and region



The most commonly mentioned reasons for why students felt that what they were learning was valuable to them were job prospects, the ability to do more study and the enjoyment gained from learning.

Table 4.10: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying what they are learning at school is valuable for selected reasons, all students saying very or somewhat valuable

| Reason | Percent |
|---|---------|
| It will help me get a job | 83.4 |
| It will enable me to do more study/go to university | 72.5 |
| I enjoy learning | 49.0 |
| It's interesting | 45.9 |
| I like and/or respect my teacher | 32.8 |
| Other reason | 5.0 |

Year 7 to Year 12 students saying what they are learning has little to no value to them most commonly mentioned ‘other interests’ (60.9%) and the notion that what they were learning at school ‘will not help me get a job’ (48.4%). Some of these students also described difficulties in seeing the relevance or connection between what they were learning at school and the ‘real world’ as well as their dreams and aspirations for the future:

“Up to a certain point in education, it eventually becomes unusable in everyday life. Example, where am I going to use quadratics in day-to-day life.”

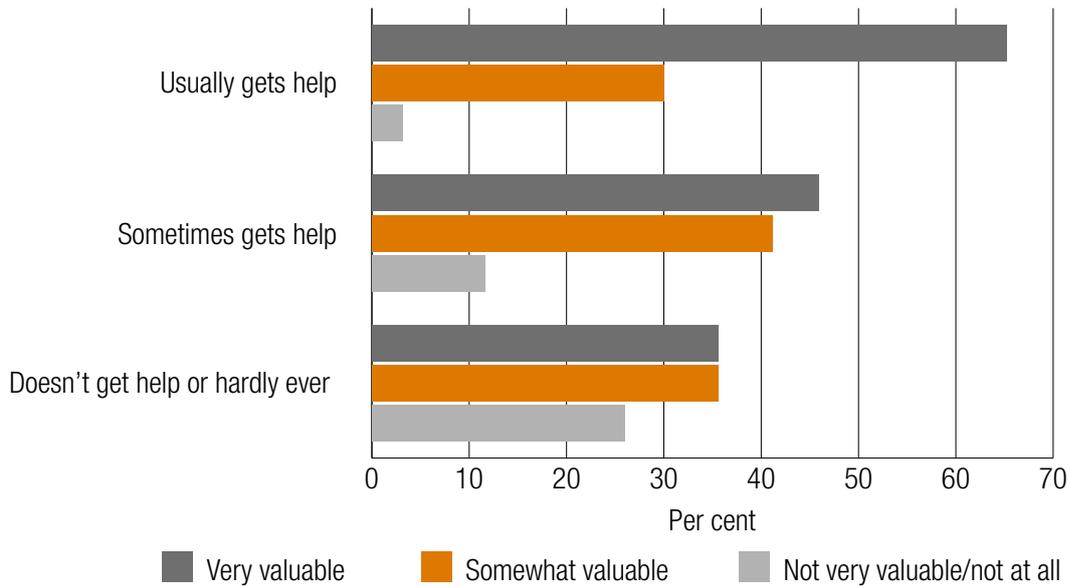
“I would rather be learning about things that are going to help me in the real world.”

“Learning what angles are in a triangle won’t help me be a makeup artist.”

“[...] I don’t know how to do taxes, create a budget. The necessities for being in the world.”

The survey data showed a positive association between the level of help students received and the value they placed on what they were learning. Students who reported 'usually' receiving the help they need to do their school work were significantly more likely to say that what they were learning at school is 'very valuable' to them and their future. On the other hand, students who reported 'never' or 'hardly ever' receiving the help they need were more likely to say that what they were learning at school was 'not very valuable' to them or 'not valuable at all'.

Graph 4.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying their learning is very valuable, somewhat valuable or not very valuable/not valuable at all, by level of help received



The questionnaire for Year 3 to Year 6 students did not include any specific questions about valuing learning.

Continuation of education until Year 12

In the survey, 25 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students answered that they would like to be able to leave school earlier than after Year 12.

A higher proportion of male students than female students said this, however, the difference was not statistically significant (27.7% of male students compared to 21.9% of female students). There was also no significant difference found between students from regional and metropolitan areas or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Students with positive relationships

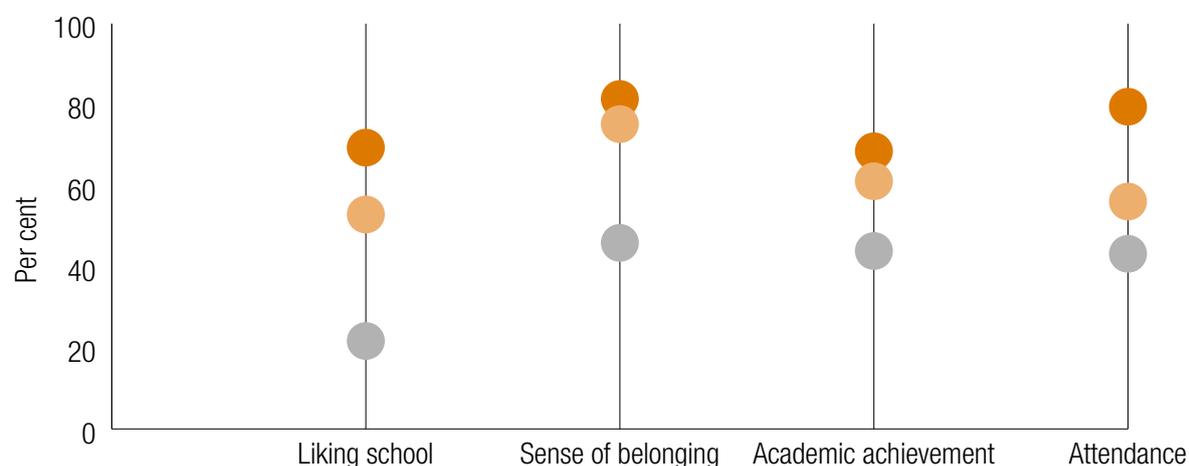
Further analysis of the data gained from Year 7 to Year 12 students showed a positive association between strong student-teacher relationships and the value placed on learning. The same association was found for students with families that are involved in school and learning.

- Students with families that 'often' ask about school work or homework and participate in school events were more likely to say that what they are learning at school is 'very valuable' to them (60.2% versus 45.6% of students with families that 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' ask about school work or homework and don't participate in school events).
- Students who 'usually' get along with their teachers and 'usually' get the help they need for their learning were more likely to say that what they are learning at school is 'very valuable' to them (66.9% versus 47.1% of students who get along 'sometimes' and 'sometimes' get the help they need).

Students who value what they are learning – Year 7 to Year 12

The survey results have also shown that students who said that what they are learning at school is very valuable to them and their future were more likely to feel part of their school, to like school, to say it is very important to them to be at school every day and to achieve high academic results:

Graph 4.9: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they find what they are learning at school very valuable, somewhat valuable or not valuable



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Group discussion findings

“Fun subjects because it can make students more positive about going to school.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Student enjoyment of particular curriculum content areas was dependent on a range of variable factors. Their inherent interest in the content, the way it was taught, their level of competence and their relationships with those around them all came into play.

Whilst students in Year 3 to Year 6 generally spend most of their day in a single classroom with a single teacher and relatively consistent group of peers, the contexts of engagement for students in Year 7 to Year 12 are more diverse. Students generally participate in a range of curriculum areas, shifting classrooms, peers and teachers – each curriculum area can therefore be situated within different conditions for engagement.

Students enjoyed learning when curriculum content:

- aroused curiosity
- was interesting
- was meaningful
- encouraged creativity
- enabled choice.

Correspondingly, students disliked subjects that were boring, uninteresting or too difficult. The perceived relevance of subjects was particularly important for students in Year 7 to Year 12, given their focus on pathways beyond school. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 also expressed frustration towards the curriculum content offerings available to them, stressing the impact that curriculum offerings have on their future.

Importantly, the factors that influenced student sentiments towards curriculum areas are open to influence. Student interest is malleable and can be shaped by pedagogy, self-belief, competence and relationships.¹⁰⁸ Working in ways to create optimal engagement conditions, as described by students, is likely to increase their overall engagement and encourage students to engage in learning behaviours.

Curriculum content areas

Students expressed both positive and negative sentiments for all curriculum areas. Student's feelings towards particular subject areas were influenced by a range of factors, including inherent interest, approaches to teaching and learning, competence, self-belief in their capacity, their relationships with their teachers and peers, and the perceived purposefulness of the content.

Sport was consistently mentioned as an enjoyable curriculum area for a variety of reasons. Students referred to being physically active as a welcome break from learning and important to be healthy, developing skills, working in groups or teams and being able to play their favourite sport.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"We need math because then your brain won't think and you need your brain to pop out with ideas on anything."</i></p> <p><i>"Have sports more often because it helps kids be more active."</i></p> <p><i>"More subjects like art and drama so more kids like school."</i></p> <p><i>"I want more history because it teaches me."</i></p> <p><i>"Learn more languages."</i></p> <p><i>"More spelling and maths because they are important and they are very fun subjects."</i></p> <p><i>"I liked football because it meant that everybody could get a run around in the fresh air and sport is better than work (football is the best)."</i></p> | <p><i>"More sport activities during school."</i></p> <p><i>"French – it was challenging."</i></p> <p><i>"I liked music – challenged my mind – I really enjoyed learning an instrument."</i></p> <p><i>"Psychology – interesting – style of teaching – content."</i></p> <p><i>"Bible because you could just debate the whole lesson, science and math because we learn new things."</i></p> <p><i>"Focus on spelling in later years (Year 7+)."</i></p> |
| <p><i>"To stop boring work like writing, spelling and English."</i></p> <p><i>"No art."</i></p> <p><i>"Less music because it is boring."</i></p> <p><i>"Less sport."</i></p> <p><i>"Maths because I hate it."</i></p> <p><i>"No history."</i></p> <p><i>"Maths because I find it's too hard."</i></p> <p><i>"NO SPELLING because we only need grammar or maybe less spelling."</i></p> <p><i>"NO EDU DANCE please!!! It's terrible."</i></p> <p><i>"Remove science for learning how to speak in French."</i></p> | <p><i>"Subject change – math not compulsory."</i></p> <p><i>"Religion classes they are boring and I'm not Catholic."</i></p> |

New and interesting curriculum content

“When you learn something new. (It’s like a new world or a new door to open).” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The results of the survey revealed one of the top three things that students enjoyed about school was learning new things. Through the group discussions students also indicated that learning was enjoyable when they were interested in the content.

Not surprisingly, students had a low level of interest in repetitive, boring or uninteresting curriculum content or when learning experiences were too difficult, influencing their motivation.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Science because I worked in a group and the group I was in helped me learn something new.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I learnt how to use formulas.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we made damper because it taught me now how to make it (all of us liked it).”</i></p> <p><i>“I like learning new words in spelling and reading it helps me a lot.”</i></p> <p><i>“Noongar dancing was interesting because you learn other dances.”</i></p> <p><i>“Spelling tests because you can learn how to spell words – that you don’t know how to spell.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because I didn’t know so much then (because I like learning new things).”</i></p> <p><i>“Year 1 because I could learn so many new things and we never learnt anything over and over again!!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“LOTE Noongar it was fun because you get to learn other language.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning new sport.”</i></p> | <p><i>“I found the subject really interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“It was on a subject that fascinated me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Any time where my interests have a direct link to the lesson.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I learnt a new way to work out a math equation.”</i></p> <p><i>“The fact that we were learning and not repeating what we did last year.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning new things that are interesting and relatable.”</i></p> <p><i>“New things or ways of learning e.g. Goals program, bricklaying.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“Sometimes they don’t like the topic.”</i></p> <p><i>“Least favourite subject.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Uninteresting topics makes us put in less effort.”</i></p> <p><i>“Irrelevant topics are boring.”</i></p> <p><i>“The student not wanting to learn anything about the topic.”</i></p> <p><i>“When students don’t enjoy the subject.”</i></p> |

Meaningful curriculum content

Feeling a connection or perceiving a purposefulness in the subject or curriculum content strongly influenced student emotional and cognitive engagement with learning. Students explained that being able to see the applicability of curriculum content to their lives was an important factor in seeing the relevance and value of education.

Learning in relation to their various pathways beyond schooling was critical to students in Year 7 to Year 12 for engagement in learning.

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to the more immediate future of high school and a longer-term view of future careers. Whilst some students perceived their learning experiences as meaningful, many of the comments from students in Year 3 to Year 6 were in response to being asked what they would change about their school suggesting an increased focus on the purposefulness of learning for this cohort is required.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p>Think about a time when you really liked learning at school. Why did you like it?</p> <p><i>“Cooking because it is really fun and teaches you how to write a method.”</i></p> <p><i>“Reading fiction books learning about real issues.”</i></p> <p>If there was one thing you could change about your school what would that be?</p> <p><i>“More reading to develop more learning and get a good job.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less BOMDAS because it is boring and bad I want more spelling because if you’re an adult no one would understand your writing.”</i></p> <p><i>“I want more ART because people want to have art careers and everyone likes art!!!!!!!!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“SIM (School of Instrumental Music) lessons for woodwind instruments in primary school as well as high school. So that there is more diverse musical ability.”</i></p> <p><i>“I want more geography so I know the world.”</i></p> | <p>Think about a time when you really liked learning at school. Why did you like it?</p> <p><i>“Maths: because you can get many jobs involving maths.”</i></p> <p><i>“Childcare – get a certificate to work with children. So I can have a future in a daycare or midwifery.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I was doing chemistry and physics and I discovered that I want to study aeronautical and aerodynamic engineering.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I knew it would help me with my dream job – e.g. sport.”</i></p> <p><i>“I love reading and I want to be a writer, so learning about novels and narratives in class was really fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Help you get a job.”</i></p> <p><i>“Help you go to university.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I know it will affect my future.”</i></p> <p>If there was one thing you could change about your school what would that be?</p> <p><i>“Don’t teach us stuff we don’t need to know like the Ottoman Empire.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be able to choose a level of maths – life skills like finance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Careers Unit – a lesson for learning life skills such as resume writing, applications for jobs and learning how to complete a good interview.”</i></p> |

Curriculum content and learning experiences that made connections to students’ lives outside of school also made learning meaningful and therefore interesting.

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to having a greater interest and satisfaction in learning when showcasing their learning to family members, learning with family members or sharing their lives (or pets!) with other students. However, for some students, curriculum content that made connections to their lives outside of school could be a source of stress or sadness. Teacher relationships with students and understanding student background are therefore critical to structure curriculum content appropriately and provide supports around learning.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 discussed the importance of general knowledge for daily life, for example understanding mathematics for purchasing goods, and also knowledge that developed their sense of identity and awareness, such as learning about different cultures or their own culture, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Coding going every night to play Tynker and my dad was a coder so he taught me.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like it when we did choir because we get to sing in front of family and friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“When my mum came in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fun sports because my mum and dad were there.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I got my cat and got to bring it to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“When it includes far away family or dead family [makes it hard for some students to learn].”</i></p> | <p><i>“Food for social occasions because it gives you skills for life.”</i></p> <p><i>“English: because you get to know one of the most popular languages.”</i></p> <p><i>“Woodwork due to you learning how to make things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning life skills.”</i></p> <p><i>“So that they can be smart when they grow older.”</i></p> <p><i>“When I began psychology because it’s interesting and is teaching me about me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Doing things that you can bring home.”</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested learning could be made more interesting by including certain topics that would be useful for them as young people. Students referred to learning experiences that strengthened their knowledge and awareness of wellbeing and functional knowledge for life beyond school. In particular, they indicated that inclusion of the topics below would increase the relevance and their enjoyment of learning.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Emotional support (education on mental health, drug and alcohol).”*
- “Sexual education (gay relationships) there’s nothing on them at school.”*
- “Time managing help.”*
- “More realistic lessons to help in the future.”*
- “To learn things that will help us in life out of school (e.g. bills, buying cars/house, loan).”*
- “Focus on the ‘real’ world – teach kids to do taxes, mortgage houses – prepare for living on your own.”*
- “Every school provide ‘Keys For Life’ program – teaching kids to drive.”*

Creativity and imagination in curriculum content

Time within the curriculum to be imaginative and to be creative was valued by students across Year 3 to Year 12. Creative outlets increased their intrinsic motivation, provided an avenue to express their feelings and provided ownership in the learning process, thereby facilitating both emotional and cognitive engagement. Student comments regarding creativity and imagination largely related to the arts, rather than across curriculum areas. Creativity and imagination are noted as enhancing key skills such as problem-solving skills, innovation, purposeful risk-taking, critical thinking, responding positively to failure and resilience.¹⁰⁹ Increasingly, these types of skills are viewed as essential 21st century skills.¹¹⁰

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“I like learning art because you spill out your creativity.”</i></p> <p><i>“Writing because I really like expressing my feelings through words.”</i></p> <p><i>“Writing – you can put your imagination into it.”</i></p> <p><i>“I love art because it lets our imagination run wild! (P.S it’s my favourite subject!).”</i></p> <p><i>“We love to read and get an imagination going.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Art and craft – I like it because I can be as creative as possible and it is sometimes very interesting.”</i></p> <p><i>“Short stories because you create another world.”</i></p> <p><i>“Art because we get to draw weird animals.”</i></p> <p><i>“More creativity.”</i></p> |

Choice in curriculum content

Similar to expressing a desire for autonomy within learning experiences, students valued having a say in what they were learning about and to exercise choice in subject selection. Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt that their choice was constrained by the offerings or timetabling of curriculum content areas, which influenced student behaviour and enjoyment of school.

Year 3 to Year 6 students suggested changes for their school. Some students suggested the structure of primary school should replicate that of high school, whereby students selected subjects to study, whereas others wanted variety of choice.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p>If there was one thing you could change about your school what would that be?</p> <p><i>“Kids should choose the subjects at school from Year 3 and up.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like to have two different languages, French and Italian.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can choose a sport to play and make different sport teams because people like different sports.”</i></p> <p><i>“Something I would change is the classes because I think there should be more items like in high schools because if you think of it my way people learn more in high school because of the items.”</i></p> | <p>What helps other kids like learning at school?</p> <p><i>“Interesting info or a class vote over what to learn ‘within the curriculum’.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having more say in what we learn and what subjects we would like to do (more variety of what we can choose).”</i></p> <p><i>“Having more courses open – ends bullying i.e. student wants to do certain course but as is not available takes it out on others.”</i></p> <p>If there was one thing you could change about your school what would that be?</p> <p><i>“Being allowed to select similar related subjects e.g. health studies runs at the same time as human biology BUT BOTH subjects are pre-reqs for any given health work field.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not make religion a compulsory subject – I don’t want to have to decide on important subjects because religion is in the way – at the very least they could expand the amount of religions we learn about.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would let students choose their own preferred subjects they think would help them in the future instead of doing every single boring subject.”</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

“Ways to improve school and learning:

- *more subject choices*
- *later school starts*
- *start learning pathways earlier (Year 9) so you can focus on stuff that is useful to future career.” (Year 7 to Year 12)*

Students’ suggestions for change mirrored those about curriculum content they found enjoyable. That is, suggestions were to make curriculum content and learning meaningful and include choice – and these comments are reflected throughout this chapter.

With reference to curriculum content and learning that was meaningful, students referred to connection to their present and future lives. For students this meant connection to family or community, health and wellbeing, life skills and future careers, and opportunities to explore a variety of post-school pathways and careers.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 also suggested that students in primary school should have education about drugs to inform them and prevent risk-taking behaviour. Some were concerned about the shift of Year 7 students to high school and the influence that older students may have on younger students.

4.5 Choices and a say on decisions that affect us

Including children and young people in decision making processes benefits the individual, organisations and the community.¹¹¹ Whilst formal schooling is structured by daily routines, school settings and the interactions that occur within also provide a range of opportunities for meaningful participation. Participation builds student's social and democratic skills, self-esteem, relationships with others, and contributes positively to school culture and student safety.^{112 113 114}

Survey findings

One-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students (51.0%) agreed with the statement that students at their school have a say in how things work. One in five students (20.9%) disagreed with this.

Female students were the group most likely to agree with this statement (53.2%) while Aboriginal students were the group most likely to disagree (29.5%).

Table 4.11: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing, disagreeing or neither with statement 'Students in this school have a say in how things work', by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Strongly agree or agree | 48.8 | 53.2 | 49.5 | 51.7 | 51.3 | 45.5 | 51.0 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 29.1 | 27.0 | 30.8 | 26.9 | 28.3 | 25.0 | 28.1 |
| Disagree or strongly disagree | 22.1 | 19.8 | 19.7 | 21.4 | 20.4 | 29.5 | 20.9 |

Narrative responses in the survey indicate that students strongly welcomed and appreciated opportunities to have a say and give their input to a range of matters affecting their school and learning.

Many students who said that they don't like school or feel like they don't belong gave reasons such as not being listened to, not being consulted or not being given the opportunity to effect change:

"I don't feel I'm being listened to."

"I feel not a part of the school because we are never consulted about changes up until the very last second."

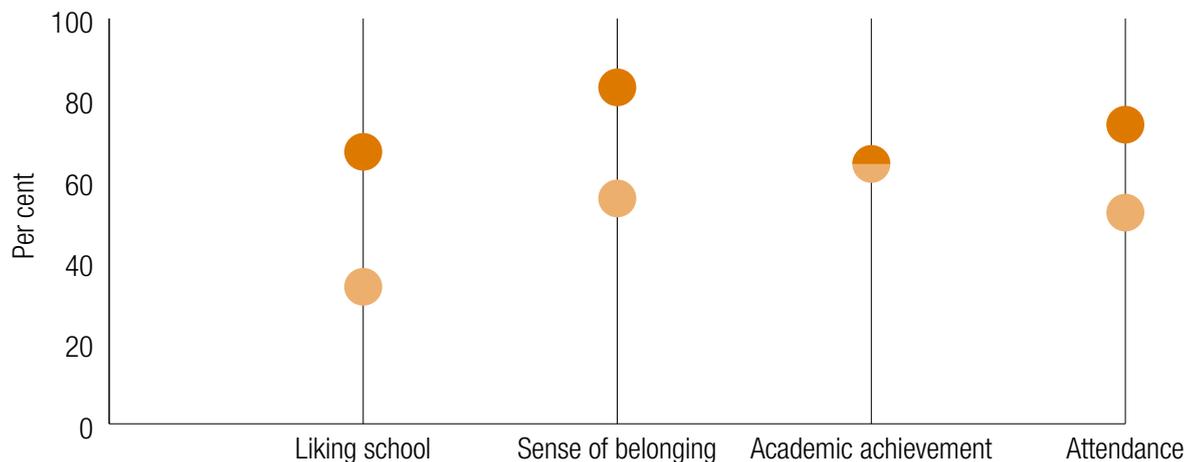
"I have no impact towards the school [...]."

The survey for Year 3 to Year 6 students did not include any specific questions about whether students are given a say at their school in matters that affect them.

Students who have a say

Year 7 to Year 12 students who agreed with the statement that students at their school have a say in how things work were more likely than students who disagreed with it to say that they like school, feel part of their school, and that being at school every day is very important to them. The data showed no relationship between this factor and high academic achievement.

Graph 4.10: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement that ‘Students in this school have a say in how things work’



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Group discussion findings

“To have a say about what needs improvement in the school. So basically our ideas and thoughts should be heard and utilised.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Having their voice heard mattered to students across all year levels. Students indicated when they were provided with opportunities to have a say about school and learning it:

- developed their confidence
- increased their level of responsibility and ownership of their learning outcomes
- created an environment that reflects their lives and identities, in which they felt valued and comfortable to learn.

Throughout the consultation, students expressed a desire to be able to have their views heard and to influence school processes, the school environment and learning.

Teachers were highly valued when they sought the views of students, listened to their opinions and responded to their suggestions. This was particularly true for students in Year 7 to Year 12; their increasing desire for autonomy underscoring the importance of having their views and ideas respected.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Make use of your ideas and thoughts.”

“They treat us more like young adults and less like students.”

Participation supports learning

Students were enthusiastic about learning and described a sense of empowerment when they were provided with opportunities to exercise choice in their learning.

Having a say in their learning decreased frustration and increased interest, ownership and engagement with learning. Participation also developed behaviours, dispositions and skills conducive to learning like self-efficacy, responsibility and self-directed learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"In Year 2 we could make our own choices and it let us be a little bit more responsible."</i></p> <p><i>"It helps when the teacher asks if this is the way that you like to work."</i></p> <p><i>"We got to decide our own choices to learn better."</i></p> | <p><i>"When I got to choose the study method/ type of activities which I had to do in order to work as productively and efficiently as possible."</i></p> <p><i>"When I get to have a say in what I learn about."</i></p> |

Suggestions from students

"[...] if we choose the books we would like to read, more students might want to read books." (Year 3 to Year 6)

Students wished to provide input into areas that influence the student experience and their suggestions for change across the primary and secondary factors demonstrate the important insight student's offer when provided the opportunity. Comments about being heard and having choices were largely raised in response to the question, "If there was one thing you could change about your school, what would that be?" Students had many suggestions that would influence their level of comfort at school, their engagement with learning and their relationships with school staff.

Students, particularly in Year 7 to Year 12, wanted a school culture that valued and demonstrated respect for students through participation. Being enabled and supported to have a say within the school also supported relationships with school staff, as discussed further in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested cooperative relationships to support students having more of a say in their learning, to be able to give feedback to school staff and to have input into employment processes.

Year 7 to Year 12

"The way the students are involved in decision making process in relation to student experience."

"A free period on certain days to show the teachers and to let the school know what we want to learn."

"I want to be able to give my teachers feedback because some do not realise the effect they have on students (ANONYMOUSLY)."

"Give us more freedom/power. We are controlled and treated like babies too much."

"We can't stand up for what we believe in because if we do we get in trouble."

"We should have more say in sporting activities and activities in general so we have more fun and are more interested in what we are doing."

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 valued exercising choice within learning experiences to cater to ability or interest, to make learning more meaningful, and to discuss the focus of learning (what to learn within the curriculum; interest and needs of students). Choice within learning experiences is discussed further in Chapter 4.3 – Teaching and learning that is interesting and Chapter 4.4 – Teaching and learning that is relevant. Students also had various views on homework; some wanting more, some wanting less and some emphasising homework should be purposeful and easily understood.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Less homework, like one day a week because it will give more time to discover and interact.”</i></p> <p><i>“Only homework if we don’t finish it in class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less homework because I have a tonne of jobs at home.”</i></p> <p><i>“More challenging homework for the smarter people in the class.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Homework – we learn all day, we don’t need to go home and learn more. “</i></p> <p><i>“Want them to know that we have other stuff going on and don’t have 5 hours to do homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less homework and assignments because we do have a life outside of school.”</i></p> |

Changes to school uniforms and uniform policies were a common suggestion, particularly from students in Year 7 to Year 12. Students raised concerns that uniforms were not functional, of poor quality, uncomfortable, too expensive and gendered. Students suggested they could design uniforms and that they wanted uniforms that were comfortable, practical, fit-for-purpose and affordable.

Students also noted that some uniform policies were restrictive and felt some schools were overly focused on the uniform and student appearance rather than education. Students suggested greater choice could be afforded to students which would increase their physical and emotional comfort at school. Suggestions were also made for students to be able to wear generic clothing rather than one bearing the school logo which would reduce the cost, for school staff to also wear uniforms, or for students to be able to dress in a similar fashion to school staff – appropriately dressed and wearing a name badge. Sports uniforms were generally viewed positively and students requested to be able to wear sport uniforms more often or for the whole day when they have sports.



| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"The uniform to [be] more comfortable!"</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers have to wear school uniform too."</i></p> <p><i>"Provide clothing."</i></p> <p><i>"I would have more choice of uniform."</i></p> <p><i>"To wear any type of black shoes."</i></p> <p><i>"Any type of hair things (lackys)."</i></p> <p><i>"The winter uniform because it doesn't keep you warm when it's really cold (regularly)."</i></p> <p><i>"Different uniforms because they make you sweaty and itchy."</i></p> <p><i>"Untuck our shirts."</i></p> | <p><i>"Gendered uniforms suck – subjugate and stereotype. They're also archaic. (Not the dress for girls for summer)."</i></p> <p><i>"I would like for the school uniform to be changed or altered. Maybe designed appropriately by the kids."</i></p> <p><i>"I wish we didn't have uniforms at our school because we need to express ourselves because there aren't any other ways to show who we are. I think there should be rules and boundaries in what is appropriate for us to wear. I know it would improve my attitude towards school because I would feel more confident and happier in class when learning! (PLEASE!) (PLEASE!) (PLEASE!)."</i></p> <p><i>"The school's uniform – students are often left freezing cold in winter due to the lack of warmth provided by the jumpers. For the price we pay we deserve to be given a better quality jacket. Additionally, students are being told off for wearing incorrect uniform. But why should we be told off for seeking basic human needs? We deserve to be given a good quality jacket that provides us with warmth during those cold winter months. For example: look at [name of school] uniform. Their jackets are good quality and have more than one design to choose from. Additionally, they provide student with tracksuits. This is important to female students as they are usually provided with just a skirt."</i></p> <p><i>"I would change the fact that this school seems to care more about uniform than student's actual education."</i></p> |

Finally, children and young people have different perceptions on safety than adults and listening to their views on safety permeates child safe organisations.¹¹⁵ Students in this consultation wanted to be provided with opportunities to share their perspectives on how to make schools safer places. Students discussed a range of ways to enhance safety and expressed a desire to have a selection of strategies that they could choose from to put in place when they felt unsafe, including ways to discuss concerns with school staff. Specific student suggestions are discussed further in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe.

4.6 Feeling safe

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear that children have the right to feel safe and to be safe at all times.¹¹⁶ The importance of adequate systems and structures to support student safety in schools and to respond to concerns for safety cannot be understated. Within schools, feeling and being safe is essential for students to be ready and able to engage with learning. When students feel unsafe it affects their behaviour and their feelings towards school and learning.

Survey findings

- 89 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they feel safe ‘all the time’ or ‘most of the time’. One in 10 said they don’t feel safe ‘sometimes’ or ‘ever’.
- Almost one in two Year 3 to Year 6 students were ‘sometimes’ afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school. One in 10 said they were ‘often’ afraid of this.
- 80 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel safe ‘all the time’ or ‘most of the time’. One in five said they feel safe ‘about half the time’ or less.
- Almost one in two Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having been afraid of being hurt or bullied and 28 per cent have not gone to school at least once because of it.
- Students who feel safe at school are more likely to have positive engagement outcomes (like school a lot, feel like part of their school, say being at school every day is very important, and achieve highly).

Do students feel safe?

One in two Year 3 to Year 6 students (53.0%) answered that they feel safe in their school ‘all the time’ and one in three (36.1%) said ‘most of the time’.

However, one in 10 students reported that ‘sometimes [they] don’t feel safe’ (8.8%) or ‘[they] don’t feel safe’ (2.1%).

There was no significant difference measured between female and male students or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how safe they feel at school.

However, Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional areas were less likely than their metropolitan counterparts to say they feel safe ‘all the time’ (47.0% versus 57.2%) and instead more likely to say they feel safe ‘most of the time’. The proportion of students who don’t feel safe was similar for students in both areas.

Graph 4.11: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don’t feel safe or they don’t feel safe, by region

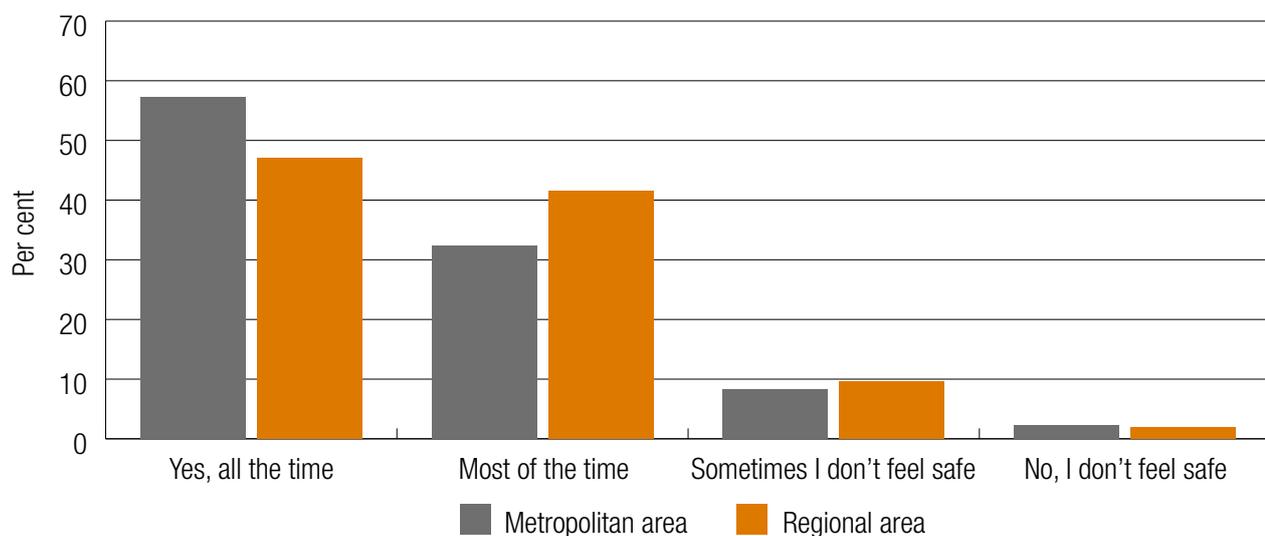


Table 4.12: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don't feel safe or they don't feel safe, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, all the time | 52.5 | 53.5 | 57.2 | 47.0 | 52.9 | 54.8 | 53.0 |
| Most of the time | 36.8 | 35.6 | 32.4 | 41.5 | 36.4 | 32.9 | 36.1 |
| Sometimes I don't feel safe | 8.3 | 9.2 | 8.3 | 9.6 | 8.5 | 11.0 | 8.8 |
| No, I don't feel safe | 2.5 | 1.8 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 2.1 | 1.3 | 2.1 |

Notably, more than one in two Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they are either 'sometimes' (45.7%) or 'often' (9.7%) afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school. Girls were more likely than boys to be worried about this.

Graph 4.12: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by gender

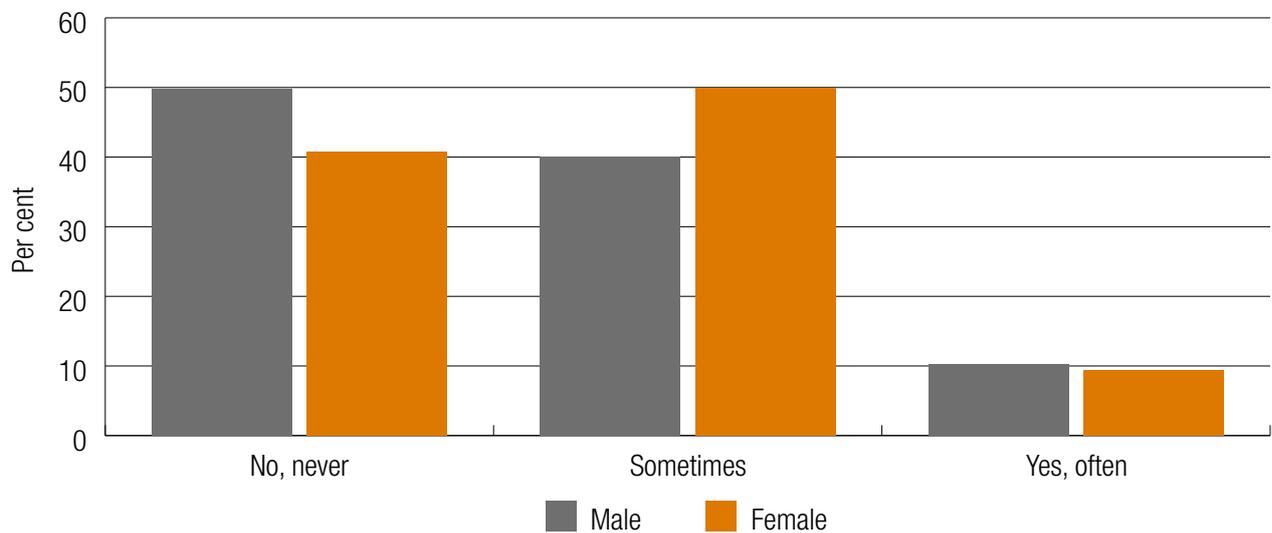


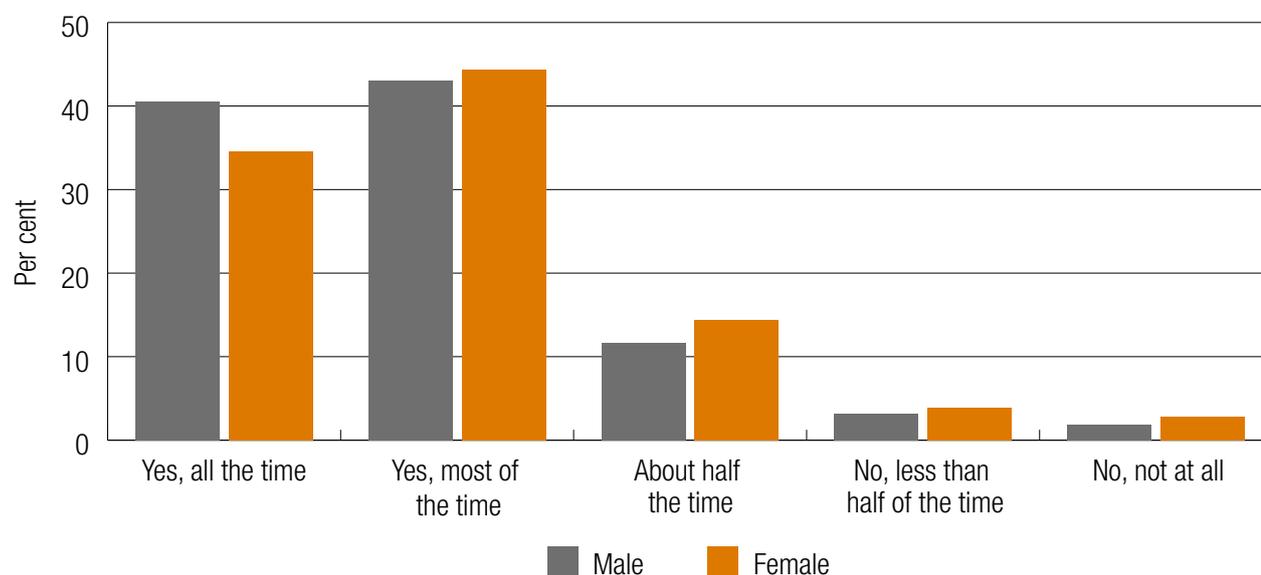
Table 4.13: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| No, never | 49.8 | 40.7 | 45.2 | 43.6 | 44.1 | 50.0 | 44.6 |
| Sometimes | 40.0 | 49.9 | 45.9 | 45.5 | 46.2 | 40.3 | 45.7 |
| Yes, often | 10.2 | 9.4 | 8.9 | 10.9 | 9.7 | 9.7 | 9.7 |

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, just 37 per cent reported feeling safe in their school 'all the time' while 44 per cent said 'most of the time'. One in five students (19.7%) said they only feel safe 'about half the time' or less.

A higher proportion of female students than male students reported feeling unsafe; however, this difference was not statistically significant (21.1% of female students said they feel safe 'about half the time' or less compared to 16.6% of male students).

Graph 4.13: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, about half the time, less than half the time or not at all, by gender



In regard to regional differences, metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students were significantly more likely than regional students to report feeling safe 'all the time' (39.7% of metropolitan students said this compared to 30.0% of regional students).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported feeling safe at school 'all the time' (43.2% versus 36.2%) but also 'less than half the time' and 'not at all' (11.3% combined versus 5.8% combined) however none of these differences were found to be statistically significant.

Table 4.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, about half the time, less than half the time or not at all, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, all the time | 40.5 | 34.5 | 39.7 | 30.0 | 36.2 | 43.2 | 36.7 |
| Yes, most of the time | 43.0 | 44.3 | 39.9 | 52.2 | 44.3 | 34.1 | 43.7 |
| About half the time | 11.6 | 14.4 | 13.4 | 14.0 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 13.6 |
| No, less than half the time | 3.2 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 2.9 | 3.6 | 4.5 | 3.7 |
| No, not at all | 1.8 | 2.8 | 3.0 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 6.8 | 2.4 |

Forty-four per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school at least once in the current school year (January – November 2016) and 28.2 per cent had not gone to school at least once because of it.

Female students were more likely than male students to avoid school because of bullying; however, the proportion of male students reporting the same was also significant (32.2% of female students reported this as did 21.8% of male students).

Graph 4.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by gender

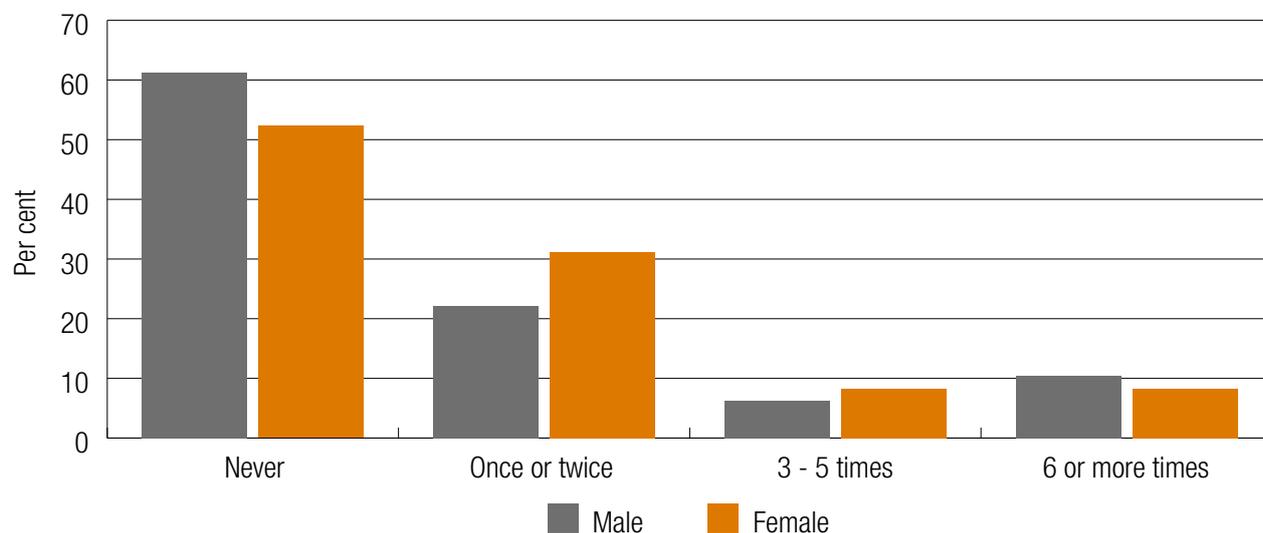


Table 4.15: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 to 5 times, or 6 or more times been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Never | 61.3 | 52.3 | 58.0 | 51.2 | 55.0 | 68.2 | 55.9 |
| Once or twice | 22.2 | 31.2 | 25.1 | 32.9 | 28.0 | 18.2 | 27.4 |
| 3 – 5 times | 6.3 | 8.2 | 7.4 | 7.7 | 7.7 | 4.5 | 7.5 |
| 6 or more times | 10.5 | 8.2 | 9.6 | 8.2 | 9.3 | 9.1 | 9.1 |

Graph 4.15: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times not gone to school because they were afraid someone might hurt or bully them, by gender

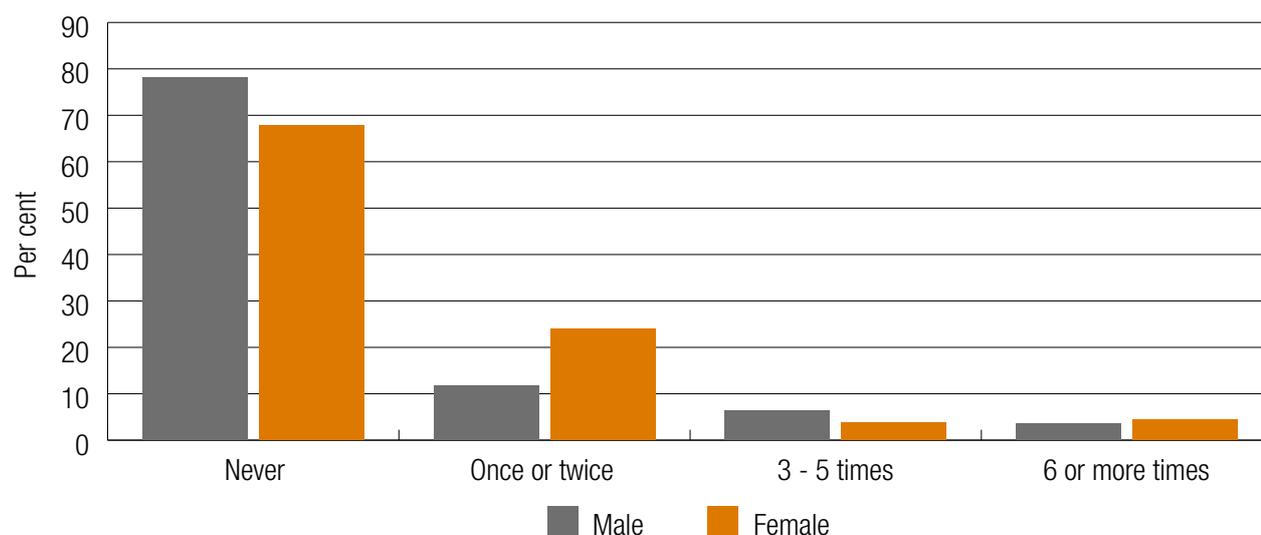


Table 4.16: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times not gone to school because they were afraid someone might hurt or bully them, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Never | 78.2 | 67.8 | 71.1 | 73.0 | 72.2 | N/A* | 71.7 |
| Once or twice | 11.8 | 24.0 | 21.3 | 16.0 | 18.7 | N/A* | 19.5 |
| 3 – 5 times | 6.4 | 3.8 | 4.6 | 5.0 | 4.9 | N/A* | 4.7 |
| 6 or more times | 3.6 | 4.4 | 3.0 | 6.0 | 4.2 | N/A* | 4.0 |

* $n < 20$

Do teachers take action?

Sixty-one per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students agreed with the statement that teachers ‘always’ do something that helps when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, while 29 per cent answered that teachers help ‘sometimes’. Some students (4.6%) felt that teachers ‘almost never’ do something that helps and the remainder (5.2%) said they did not know.

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, one-half (49.3%) believed that teachers ‘almost always’ take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, however, just over one-third (35.9%) of them also believed that the action that the teachers take helps or makes the situation better. Male students and students in metropolitan areas were more likely than other students to say that teachers ‘almost always’ take action and that this helps improve the situation.

More than one in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students (12.0%) felt that teachers ‘almost never’ take action and one in five (21.8%) said that if action is taken by a teacher it does not help or make the situation better.

Female students were more likely than male students to feel that teachers do not take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, (14.0% of female students reported this compared to 8.5 per cent of male students) and in addition, they were less likely to agree that the action that teachers take helps or makes the situation better.

None of the differences between regional and metropolitan students or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were statistically significant.

Table 4.17: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying teachers take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied almost always, now and then, almost never or they are unsure, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|---------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Almost always | 53.2 | 47.2 | 51.5 | 44.2 | 49.2 | 50.0 | 49.3 |
| Now and then | 27.3 | 28.0 | 25.9 | 32.5 | 28.5 | 19.0 | 27.9 |
| Almost never | 8.5 | 14.0 | 12.8 | 10.2 | 11.6 | 19.0 | 12.0 |
| Unsure | 11.0 | 10.9 | 9.8 | 13.1 | 10.8 | 11.9 | 10.8 |

Table 4.18: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying the action that teachers take in response to bullying helps, does not help or they are unsure, by selected characteristics

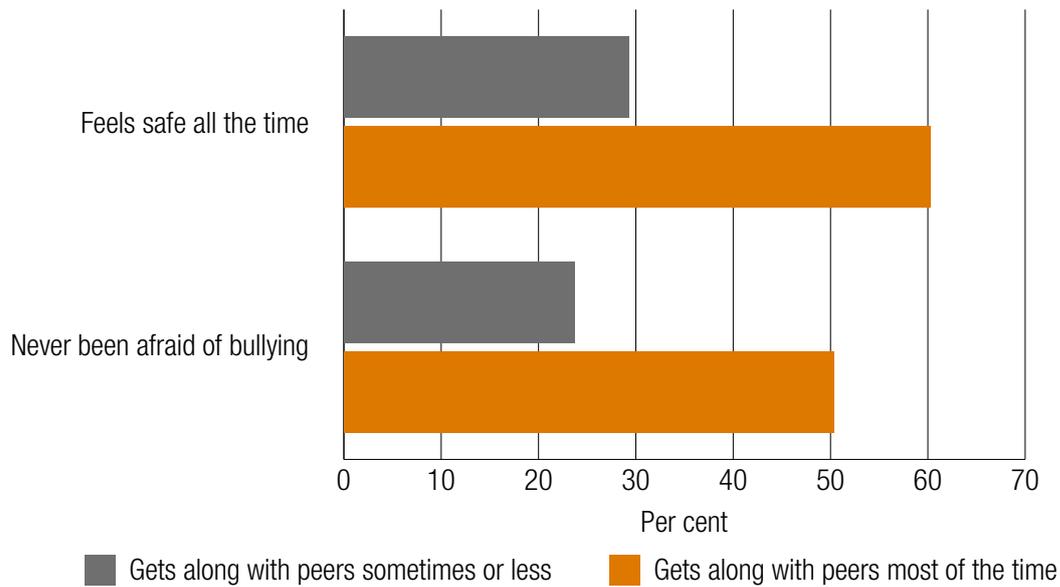
| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|--------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes | 42.2 | 31.6 | 36.8 | 34.0 | 36.2 | 31.0 | 35.9 |
| No | 20.6 | 21.8 | 22.0 | 21.4 | 21.0 | 33.3 | 21.8 |
| Unsure | 37.2 | 46.6 | 41.2 | 44.7 | 42.7 | 35.7 | 42.3 |

Students who get along with peers and teachers – Year 3 to Year 6

Compared to students who said they get along with peers and teachers ‘sometimes’ or less, those who said they get along ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’ were more likely to feel safe and have no fear of being hurt or bullied:

- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘most of the time’ were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (60.3% versus 29.3%).
- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘most of the time’ were more likely to say they are never afraid that someone will hurt or bully them (50.3% versus 23.7%).
- Students who said they ‘always’ get along with their teachers were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (63.3% versus 38.1%).

Graph 4.16: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe at school all the time or have never been afraid of bullying, by how well they get along with peers

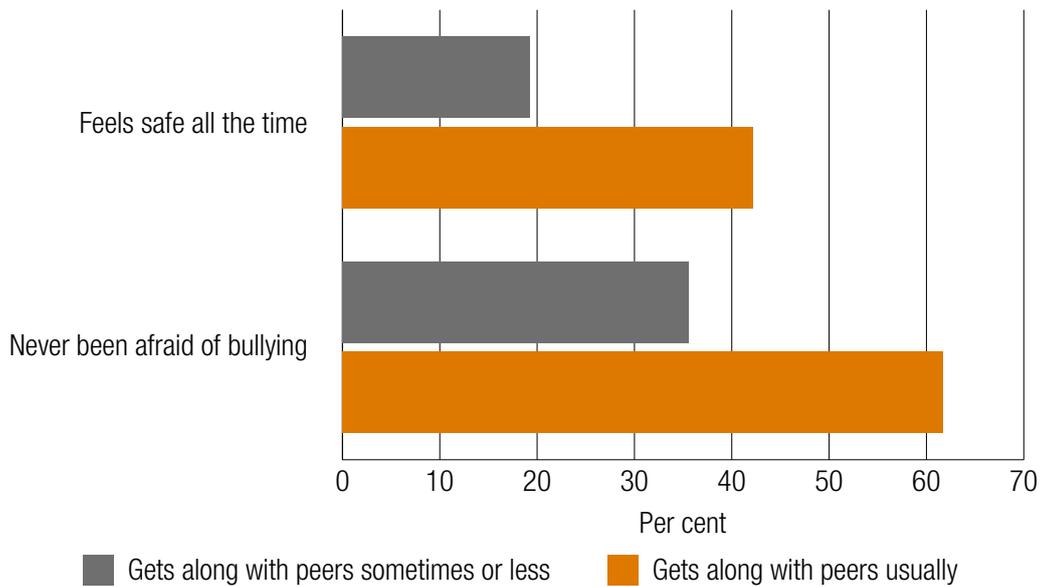


Students who get along with peers and teachers – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they ‘usually’ get along with their peers and teachers were more likely than those who said they get along ‘sometimes’ or less to feel safe and have no fear of being hurt or bullied:

- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘usually’ were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (42.2% versus 19.3%).
- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘usually’ were more likely to say they are never afraid that someone will hurt or bully them (61.7% versus 35.6%).
- Students who said they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (42.5% versus 17.7%).

Graph 4.17: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe at school all the time or have never been afraid of bullying, by how well they get along with peers



Students who feel safe – Year 3 to Year 6

Compared to students who sometimes or never feel safe at school, those who said they feel safe ‘all the time’ were more likely to say that they like school, that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them and that they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results:

- Students said being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (82.4% versus 53.6%).
- Students said they like school ‘a lot’ (63.4% versus 22.6%).
- Students reported doing well or very well in their school results (53.3% versus 36.9%).

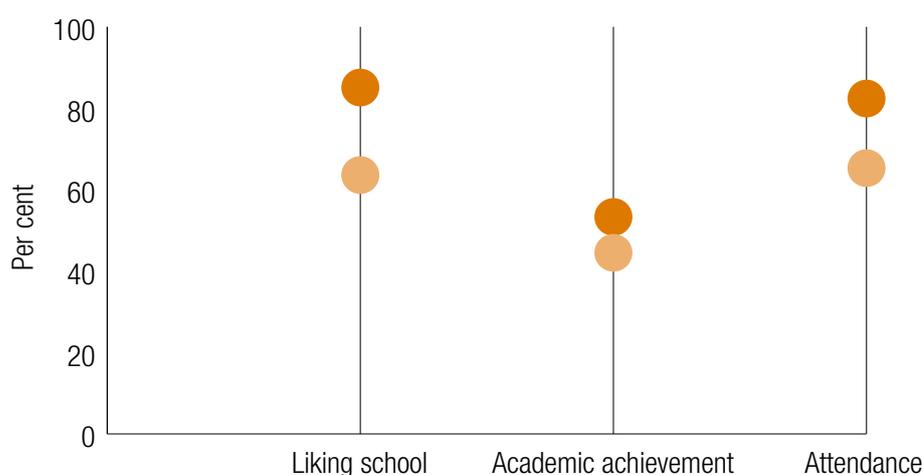
Table 4.19: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don’t like school or don’t like school at all, by how safe at school student feels

| | Feels safe all the time | Feels safe most of the time | Sometimes doesn’t feel safe or never feels safe |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Likes school a lot | 63.4 | 35.5 | 22.6 |
| Likes school a bit | 21.7 | 33.7 | 22.6 |
| Thinks school is OK | 13.4 | 26.9 | 38.1 |
| Doesn’t like school/not at all | 1.5 | 3.9 | 16.6 |

Table 4.20: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they do well or very well, OK or not so well in their school results or they’re unsure, by how safe at school student feels

| | Feels safe all the time | Feels safe most of the time | Sometimes doesn’t feel safe or never feels safe |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Well or very well | 53.3 | 46.8 | 36.9 |
| OK | 41.8 | 44.6 | 41.7 |
| Not so well | 1.5 | 4.7 | 14.3 |
| Unsure | 3.4 | 4.0 | 7.1 |

Graph 4.18: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who feel safe all the time or not all the time



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Students who feel safe – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they feel safe ‘all the time’ were more likely than students who said they feel safe ‘about half the time’ or less to feel part of their school, to like school and to say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them. No significant relationship was found between feeling safe and academic achievement for Year 7 to Year 12 students:

- Students feel part of their school (91.6% versus 43.6%).
- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (76.7% versus 29.3%).
- Students say that it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day (80.2% versus 51.9%).

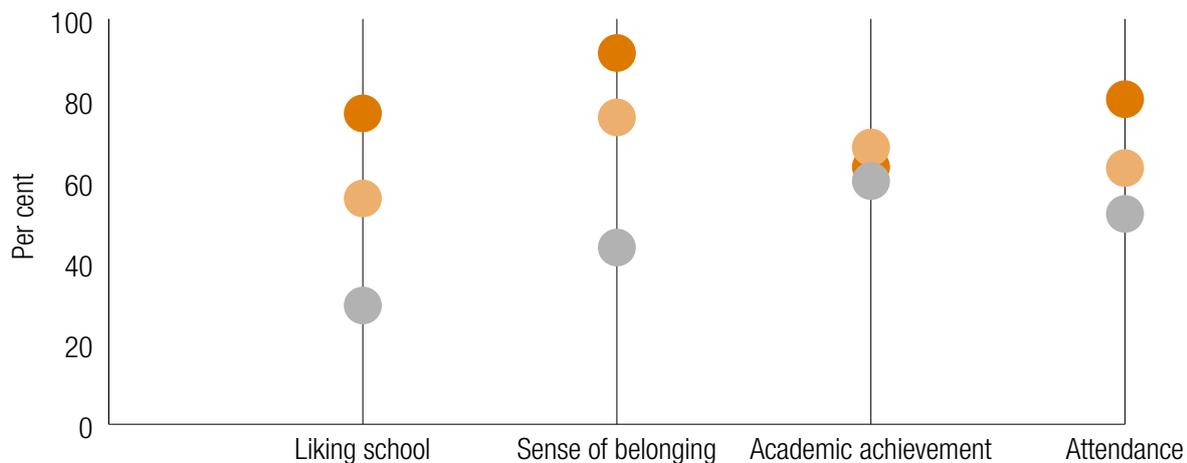
Table 4.21: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school, by how safe at school student feels

| | Feels safe all the time | Feels safe most of the time | Feels safe about half the time or less |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Likes school a lot | 49.8 | 26.0 | 15.0 |
| Likes school a bit | 26.9 | 29.7 | 14.3 |
| Thinks school is OK | 18.9 | 34.5 | 44.4 |
| Doesn’t like school/not at all | 4.4 | 9.8 | 26.3 |

Table 4.22: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be at school every day, by how safe at school student feels

| | Feels safe all the time | Feels safe most of the time | Feels safe about half the time or less |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Very important | 80.2 | 63.2 | 51.9 |
| Somewhat important | 19.4 | 32.4 | 36.8 |
| Not important | 0.4 | 4.4 | 11.3 |

Graph 4.19: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who feel safe all the time, most of the time or half the time or less



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Group discussion findings

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, safety affected their willingness to attend school and their ability to engage in learning. Through the group discussions several important messages about safety emerged:

- Friends and teachers create safety.
- Feeling safe is a precursor to learning.
- Safety at school is particularly important for children who may not experience safety in other aspects of their lives.
- Students require support to feel safe and to be safe.
- Students want their ideas for safety to be heard and acted on by schools.

Safety as relational

For children and young people safety is largely relational.¹¹⁷ Feeling safe and being safe is influenced by the relationships they have with the people around them. Safety is experienced when students are with people they trust and in places that are familiar to them, and when there is consistency in their relationships, the behaviour of people and processes. For students, friends and school staff made them feel comfortable, relaxed and happy, which created feelings of safety. Experiencing a sense of belonging and acceptance through these relationships also contributed to feeling safe and comfortable at school.

Friends at school were particularly important for making students feel safe and accepted. Students characterised friends as reliable and trustworthy – as people who would take their concerns seriously and ‘have their back’. Friends were also a protective factor against bullying, would stand up for students and seek additional help when required. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 made clear connections between their sense of safety and motivation to attend school, and feeling ready and able to learn. Feeling comfortable was a particularly important precursor to learning, as discussed further below.

Without friends, students indicated they would feel unsafe and alone and were more likely to experience bullying. Feeling these ways had implications for school attendance and learning with students explaining it was difficult to concentrate on learning when they felt upset, uncomfortable or unsafe.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“They make you feel safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because at our school there is a little bit of bullying so if you have a friend you feel safe at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you feel comfortable when you go to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you have friends at school you will have someone to play with you and keep you safe if something happens.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Friends are important] For your safety.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you have someone to play with it is safer to be around people you know if you get hurt they are there for you!!!!!!! Happiness!!!”</i></p> | <p><i>“To allow people to feel safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“Creates a better atmosphere.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you feel safe around a place you may not want to be.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feel more comfortable.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends help you feel accepted and also make the environment feel safer and more enjoyable/comfortable.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“Unsafe.”</i></p> <p><i>“You’ll be lonely and scared.”</i></p> <p><i>“It puts weight on your back and you get worried.”</i></p> <p><i>“You would be sad and lonely and you would be bullied.”</i></p> | <p><i>“You feel unsafe and unable to come because you will get bullied.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel alone, unsafe, insecure.”</i></p> <p><i>“Wouldn’t feel comfortable.”</i></p> |

Quality relationships with teachers were also important for students' sense of safety in school. Students referred to the qualities of teachers that made them feel comfortable and safe – they were caring, nice, helpful and approachable. School staff that embodied these qualities also made students interested in learning and school, as noted in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Because you'll have to stay with them for a year or they will save you and keep you safe."</i></p> <p><i>"So you feel safe going to school."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] because she is nice and she helps you when you need help and she makes sure you stay safe and don't get hurt physically and mentally."</i></p> | <p><i>"Make you feel safe."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher I like is very helpful, makes me feel comfortable and helps me throughout the situation I'm in."</i></p> <p><i>"Make you comfortable."</i></p> <p><i>"So if you feel unsafe they will keep you happy."</i></p> |

Feeling comfortable with school staff meant students felt happy at school, able to voice their opinions and able to discuss their concerns or ask for help. As discussed in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future and Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment, when students did not feel comfortable in class they were less likely to ask for assistance with learning or other concerns.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"If you don't get along with your teacher it's going to be hard to communicate with them and get along but if you like them you can ask for help and feel safe!"</i></p> <p><i>"Because you can talk to them if you feel unsafe or unsure about class work."</i></p> | <p><i>"Makes the environment feel safer healthier and I can be comfortable saying what I feel is true."</i></p> <p><i>"If you have a bond with a teacher, you build on a connection and it makes you feel comfortable."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes you feel more comfortable if you talk to your teacher about something you don't wanna talk in the class."</i></p> <p><i>"Because maintaining a healthy relationship increases your overall happiness and allows you to feel comfortable talking to them."</i></p> |

Students wanted school staff to be proactive in making sure that they felt safe at school. When teachers 'checked in' with students they felt cared for and safe. If students perceived that teachers did not care for them, then it made it difficult for them to seek support to feel safe and for other concerns.

"For teachers that don't care about the kids they are teaching because for the kids to be comfortable the teachers need to care for the little munchlings." (Year 3 to Year 6)

For some students, concerns for safety at home placed an increased importance on feeling safe at school.

"Somewhere safe to live to know that people are out there to help them e.g. kids helpline because they need to feel safe everywhere they go." (Year 3 to Year 6)

Safety and learning

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, feeling safe and comfortable within the school and the classroom was a particularly important precursor to learning. When students felt safe, they also felt emotionally able to engage in learning. Students said they enjoyed learning when they were in an emotionally safe environment that enabled them to engage in learning, as discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.1 – A positive and fair classroom environment.

Concentrating on learning was difficult when students did not feel comfortable or were worried about their safety. Students explained if they felt unsafe they also felt that no one would listen to them, they would feel upset and felt they could not think straight. Concerns for safety had an impact on students thinking, learning and behaviour. Ultimately, their experience of school was stressful and they were less likely to feel able to emotionally engage in learning or ask for the support they needed to feel safe. Friends and teachers were pivotal in creating an environment in which students felt comfortable, as noted above.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Because it was a safe place to learn about new things.”</i></p> <p><i>“I liked [learning] when [name of staff] was here and I worked a lot and I loved the safe environment I was in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Safer school please.”</i></p> <p><i>“It may be hard for kids to come to school if they are being bullied or don’t feel safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“It makes it hard [to learn] when you get bullied because your mind is still thinking about it.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s hard for children to learn when not in correct mindset.”</i></p> | <p>What helps other kids like learning at school?</p> <p><i>“Feeling safe and comfortable in the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feeling comfortable with your teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Is it important to have friends at school?] Yes, because it makes the learning environment more comfortable and makes you feel safe and have someone to complain to about a bad teacher... etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“[What happens if you don’t have friends at school?] You won’t feel comfortable in class, because you have no one to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>[Is it important to get along with your teachers at school? Why?] Allows for a good and safe environment to learn in.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Is it important to get along with your teachers at school? Why?]” It allows students to feel happier, safer, more comfortable and makes learning easier.”</i></p> |

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, relationships with teachers significantly influenced student help-seeking behaviour. Students were proactive in asking for help when they felt comfortable and had positive relationship with their teachers. However, asking for assistance was difficult when students did not feel comfortable, as discussed further in Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment and Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“They might be scared of the teacher they have.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes it is hard to ask the teachers.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Feel comfortable asking questions.”</i></p> <p><i>“Rely on them [teachers] and feel comfortable asking for help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not feeling comfortable enough to ask for help [makes it hard to get help and support].”</i></p> |

Experiences of bullying

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that experiences of bullying go against student's rights.¹¹⁸ Bullying has significant implications for future health and wellbeing and is preventable.^{119 120} Bullying was a concern for students across Year 3 to Year 12 as experiences caused distress, loneliness and anxiety. Further, students described how bullying also affected motivation to attend school, concentration in class and achievement.

Student experiences of bullying and their perceptions of safety were strongly influenced by their relationships with peers. Friends were a protective factor against bullying as being with friends lessened the likelihood of bullying occurring.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"You won't get bullied if you have friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes definitely because if you don't have friends you will be lonely, sad, depressed and have no friends. You have more chance of getting bullied."</i></p> | <p><i>"If you have a group of friends you are less likely to be picked on."</i></p> <p><i>"Protect you."</i></p> <p><i>"So you don't get bullied and they help you out and kids should be friendly."</i></p> |

Further to this, if bullying did occur, students felt confident in their friends as supportive bystanders. The actions friends took varied from 'standing up' to the bully, providing support and comfort to the victim or, for students in Year 3 to Year 6, seeking help from school staff. All of these actions were viewed positively by students and contributed to feeling safe at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Yes it is important to have friends at school because at recess and lunch you could come across bullies you won't have a friend to stand up to the bully with you."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because if you're getting bullied you have friends, you have someone that can help you."</i></p> <p><i>"They have your back."</i></p> <p><i>"So if you are getting bullied they can stick up for you."</i></p> | <p><i>"Also so you won't get bullied and someone to back you up."</i></p> <p><i>"If someone is bullying you they will say stop."</i></p> <p><i>"Friends are important because they are there for you if you get bullied."</i></p> <p><i>"They will always stand up for you and make you feel better when you're sad."</i></p> |

Without the natural allies of friends, students were more likely to be a target for bullying and not receive support when bullying did occur. For students across Year 3 to Year 12, experiences of bullying exacerbated their feelings of a lack of belonging and safety and the effects included depression, negative feelings toward school and lack of motivation to attend school.

Further, there was an apparent cycle of effects related to bullying. Experiences of bullying made students feel sad and, as student's explained, they were then more likely to be picked on for being sad.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <i>"You would probably be teased."</i> | <i>"You would be an easy target. You get bullied and teased."</i> |
| <i>"You will be alone and you won't have much fun. You will not have anyone to stand up for you."</i> | <i>"You feel unsafe and unable to come because you will get bullied."</i> |
| <i>"You are constantly put down."</i> | <i>"You will be lonely and more of a target to bullying."</i> |
| <i>"If you are getting bullied, nobody will stand up or help you."</i> | <i>"You are more prone to being picked on and being isolated even more."</i> |
| <i>"You get lonely – and you start to get bullied about it."</i> | <i>"You get bullied because you look lonely and sad."</i> |
| <i>"Get hurt."</i> | |

Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 also indicated how labels put on students or students who were deemed as 'different' experienced bullying from peers and teachers. These labels related to sexuality, being 'different' and also perceived capability linked with post-school destinations (for example, 'ATAR students', 'foundation students', etc).

For students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI) there was a desire for greater acceptance and awareness through education for peers and school staff.

When students were labelled by the school in terms of their post-school destinations, it affected how students felt about themselves, their self-esteem, and was the source of bullying.

Safety in the school environment

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 expressed a desire for a culture in schools that provided safety. A school in which people cared for and were nice to each other created a culture of safety and made students feel comfortable and happy at school.

Year 3 to Year 6

"The thing I would like to change about the school is have lots of people care about one another because lots of people would say that's a nice school and more people would feel safe."

"[...] I would change the safety at the school so nobody gets hurt because then the whole school is happy."

"Something I want to change is the behaviour is caring, helpful, nice etc. because then no one would get bullied and everyone could feel safer."

The physical school grounds were also noted by some students as an area of unsafe activity. The ways students played on equipment and access by community members outside of school hours were both problematic. Students explained sometimes community members left broken glass or vandalised school property over the weekend – at one school, windows had been broken on several weekends.

Year 3 to Year 6

"Cameras around the school so no more vandalism."

"Students are getting angry because of the vandalisms that have been happening to our school."

However, some students felt constrained by rules that promoted safety.

Year 3 to Year 6

"Not so many safety rules."

"To change new rule of no running on pavement so we can play more and new things."

"Be able to climb trees and if you get hurt you learn a lesson."

"Less caution."

"No hats when cloudy."

Support for being and feeling safe

Students identified a need for support to be and to feel safe at school and at home. They suggested letting students know that people in the school care about them and are looking out for their safety, stopping bullying and providing lessons to students on safety. They wanted school staff to be proactive and responsive to safety concerns, including bullying.

Students wanted school staff to understand safety from the student perspective, to hear the voice of students and for schools to proactively implement strategies to support students to feel safe at school. Systems which enable students to contribute to their own safety at school provide important avenues for the student voice to be heard.

Students also wanted teachers to be proactive in protecting students from fights and bullying, particularly younger students. They expressed a desire for schools and school staff to take action and prioritise student safety.

Suggestions from students

Feeling unsafe was a significant concern for wellbeing, self-esteem, learning and engagement. Additionally, students identified being safe and feeling safe as impacting their ability to engage in learning and motivation to attend school. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 wanted safety to be prioritised within schools. A range of suggestions to improve their sense of safety related to school culture, student participation and the physical and emotional environment.

Students wanted schools to nurture and promote a culture of safety based on positive relationships. Student experiences of school and of safety were highly relational, as such, relationships with school staff and other students critical. Proactive approaches were suggested to increase positive, pro-social behaviour and reduce bullying and fighting, such as rules, positive messaging around the school (through posters for example) and positive behaviour programs. Students also suggested increased education for students and staff on student diversity and inclusion (with specific reference to sexual orientation, labelling of students, and staff behaviour towards students). Some students suggested explicit lessons on safety would be beneficial.

Students expressed a desire to have a selection of strategies that they could choose from to put in place when they felt unsafe. Some students were able to identify activities or strategies that supported them to feel calm or reduce anxiety. Some students wanted a space to destress when anxious, upset or angry and the autonomy to decide when they needed to use this space.

"[Putting really big words in] Alphabetical order to help calm down." (Year 3 to Year 6)

"Read more books because it can calm us down." (Year 3 to Year 6)

Hearing and understanding safety from the perspective of students was important to students, as was ensuring prioritisation of safety through implementation of preventative strategies and adequate responses to safety concerns. Clear and consistent rules and consequences, particularly in response to bullying and fighting, increased student sense of safety. Occasionally, students felt instances of bullying or fighting were 'noted' by school staff and this was an inadequate response.

Bullying was a particular concern for students in Year 3 to Year 6 and an area in which they wanted action.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“That the teachers would deal with problems such as arguments properly because they just let things like that go.”</i></p> <p><i>“To have a class for bullies doing homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“To make more punishments for bullying.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would make a program teaching kids to all treat each other nicely with fun games because some treat each other badly and use violence to release their anger.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like kids to be a bit less rougher, physically.”</i></p> <p><i>“Much less BULLYING because I’m getting bullied too much. Help me teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“For the teachers to do more about bullying.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a more protective area for kindies.”</i></p> | <p><i>“I would like to see a type of buddy system set up – something for the younger kids to help them feel safe and heard.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a bully-free zone somewhere in the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less bullying.”</i></p> |

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also suggested changes to the environment and practices of schools. Increased natural surveillance was suggested through more staff on duty, the use of cameras, and use of walkie talkies for ease of communication. Changes to the physical environment included different building materials, different colour choices, increased lighting and planning to reduce congestion. Students indicated these changes would make schools safer spaces and more welcoming.

“Have your phones during school because what if the duty teacher left the oval and someone might capture you and you will be able to call for help.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“The back school gates are checked that they are closed by the teachers so that people don’t get in.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“I would paint the toilets brighter colours inside so they are not so dark/spooky.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Less red and yellow bricks on school because people get hurt.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Keep the toilet cameras around the school but not in the toilets.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Critically, students wanted to be involved in their safety. They wanted schools to listen to student suggestions, to implement, promote and share with students the approaches that schools were adopting. As noted previously, such practices underpin child safe organisations.¹²¹

4.7 Help to overcome personal issues

Schooling does not occur in isolation for children and young people. They bring with them the impact of their circumstances, shaped by economic, environmental and social factors. So too are they affected by the circumstances within school, such as their relationships with others. Personal issues, then, may be associated with family, household, the individual or school factors.

Emotional concerns have the potential to impact student thinking, learning, behaviours and relationships. However, emotional support facilitates social and emotional development, particularly if provided when children or young people are facing challenges.¹²² Support may be informal, through quality interpersonal relationships or through formal systems.

Requirements for support are also not static – children and young people move in and out of situations and circumstances. For some, however, situations will be sustained and these children and young people may be more vulnerable to not achieving their potential or the benefits of education without supports and intervention.

Supportive relationships facilitate positive social and emotional wellbeing and build the capacities to cope with adversity.¹²³

Survey findings

- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 39 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that their teachers care ‘a lot’ about them.
- 61 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that teachers go out of their way to help students.
- More than two-thirds of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that teachers will find time to talk to students.
- More than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported doing activities to help others at school.

Sixty-one per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that at their school teachers go out of their way to help students and more than two-thirds (67.4%) agreed that teachers will find time to talk to students if the students need to talk to someone.

However, less than 40 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel that people at school (like teachers, other school staff and the principal) care about them ‘a lot’, just over one-half (52.3%) said ‘some’ and about one in 10 students (8.7%) said they feel that teachers and other school staff do not care about them ‘at all’.

Among Year 3 to Year 6 students, 60 per cent said they feel that their teachers care ‘a lot’, 38 per cent said ‘some’ and about two per cent said ‘not at all’.

For more findings on the relationships between teachers and students see Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

In regard to helping others, more than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported doing activities to help others such as peer support, tutoring, coaching, being a leader or helping others with their work.

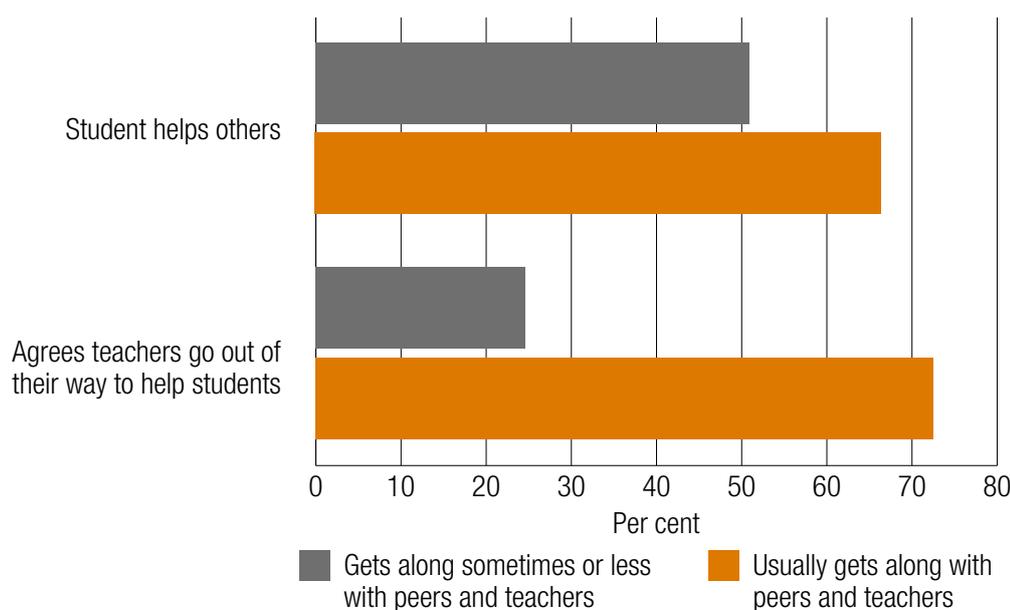
Table 4.23: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they do activities to help others at school often, sometimes or never, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|----------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, often | 14.4 | 19.2 | 18.2 | 15.4 | 17.4 | 15.9 | 17.3 |
| Yes, sometimes | 46.0 | 46.4 | 45.9 | 46.2 | 45.3 | 54.5 | 46.0 |
| No | 39.6 | 34.4 | 35.9 | 38.5 | 37.3 | 29.5 | 36.7 |

Students who get along with peers, teachers and family – Year 7 to Year 12

Cross-tabulation of survey results has shown that students who usually get along with their peers and teachers are more likely to say that they help others at school and that teachers go out of their way to help students (this is in comparison to students who said they get along with peers and teachers only ‘sometimes’ or less). In addition, students with families who are involved and interested in their learning were also found to be more likely to say that they help others and that teachers go out of their way to help students.

Graph 4.20: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing teachers go out of their way to help students or saying they help others, by how well student gets along with peers and teachers



Students who feel they can get help and who help others – Year 7 to Year 12

Students who said that teachers go out of their way to help students and who do activities to help others (‘often’ or ‘sometimes’) were more likely to feel part of their school, to like school, to say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them and to achieve high academic results. For instance:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (76.2% versus 31.3%).
- Students feel like part of their school (88.3% versus 51.3%).

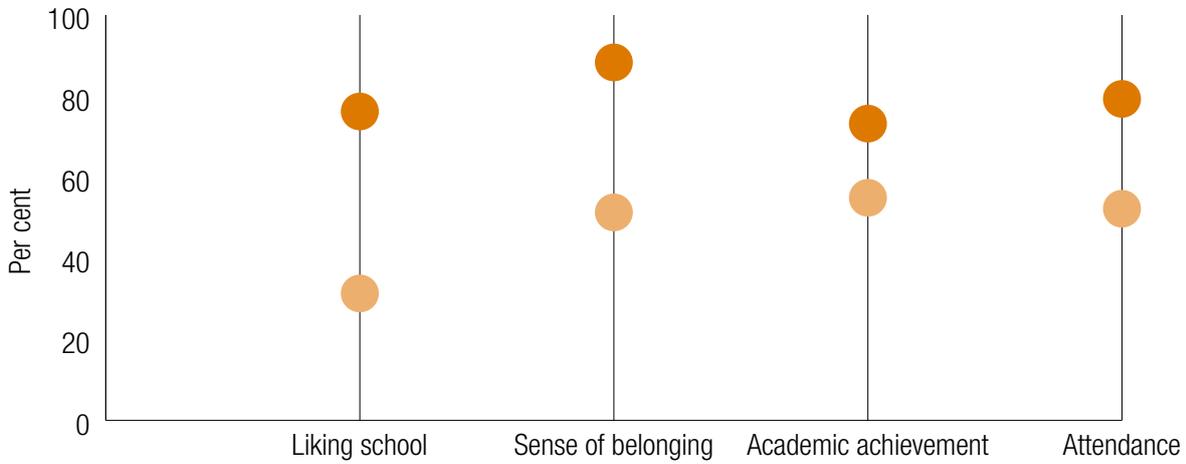
Table 4.24: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/don’t like school at all, by response to selected statements about school

| | Student agrees teachers go out of their way to help students and student does activities to help others | Student disagrees or unsure if teachers go out of their way to help students and student doesn’t do activities to help others |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Likes school a lot | 48.8 | 13.0 |
| Likes school a bit | 27.4 | 18.3 |
| Thinks school is OK | 20.6 | 45.2 |
| Doesn’t like school/not at all | 3.2 | 23.4 |

Table 4.25: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling part of their school, not feeling part of their school or unsure, by response to selected statements about school

| | Student agrees teachers go out of their way to help students and student does activities to help others | Student disagrees or unsure if teachers go out of their way to help students and student doesn't do activities to help others |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Feels like part | 88.3 | 51.3 |
| Doesn't feel like part | 1.1 | 14.8 |
| Unsure | 10.7 | 33.9 |

Graph 4.21: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who say they help others and agree teachers go out of their way to help students or students who say they don't help others and disagree teachers go out of their way to help students



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student helps others but disagrees teachers go out of their way) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“Some kids might be worried about something or they could be having difficulties with friends or at home.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Students described a range of issues or areas in which they required support. These concerns could impact their wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and learning. The reasons and circumstances in which students were seeking help significantly affected their help-seeking behaviour. Namely, students referred to:

- their relationships with others (the approachability, attitudes and responses of peers, school staff and family members)
- their own perceptions and knowledge (knowing how or where to seek help, identifying and articulating their concern, determining the seriousness of the problem)
- school practices (accessibility, availability, responses and maintaining confidentiality)
- past experiences of seeking help.

Stigma attached to needing help or being perceived as different made students feel embarrassed, shy or scared – with this as the most common difficulty to receiving or asking for help and support.

Support for a range of personal concerns

“Kids need help or support sometimes because they get bullied or have no friends or bad teachers that don’t help.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 discussed a range of areas in which they desired support to help them attend school, to like school and be better positioned to engage in learning. Students stated they need help and support:

- with learning
- to develop and navigate positive relationships, including responding to bullying
- with mental health and wellbeing
- to make and follow through on decisions
- with family issues.

For further discussion on student’s views on support for learning, see Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment.

To develop and navigate positive relationships

“Everyone deserves friends so we should be able to express ourselves and solve by ourselves when we fight this I believe will stop us worrying about things.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Students overwhelmingly spoke positively of their relationships with friends and the significance of these relationships. Given the importance of friends, students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed a desire for support with learning social and emotional skills that support friendships. They described the complexity of changing friendship groups and the difficulty new students sometimes face, particularly if moving schools throughout the school year – for further discussion on school mobility see Chapter 1 – Profile statistics.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Making/finding new friends instead of playing with the same person who tosses you away like trash.”</i></p> <p><i>“Social support to help make friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“When new kids come they don’t know their way around</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>help with learning</i> • <i>miss out on things they need to learn</i> • <i>need help finding friends</i> • <i>help with school difficulties.”</i> <p><i>“Being able to socialise or let down their barriers.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Friendship circles you can be happy about.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some kids also need help with becoming more confident or social.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouraged to do more interesting activities with new students (students encouraged to do that).”</i></p> |

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also requested support for experiences of bullying. They referred to stopping bullying, but also support for dealing with bullying. They suggested support could be provided from teachers and peers.

Year 3 to Year 6

“Kids need help and support to get around bullies because some aren’t strong enough.”

“Teachers helping with bullying.”

“If they are getting bullied and need help just ask teachers or parents. It is good for others to tell teachers if they know what’s going on.”

“Report bullying.”

“People can tease and they need them not to tease.”

“Help to stop bullying.”

Positive responses to bullying helped students to feel safe at school. Safety was another area of support referred to by students and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe. Students wanted help to feel safe at school, to know that people were there for them and looking out for them and also direct instruction on safety.

Mental health and wellbeing

“Many kids our age struggle with depression and anxiety, I think there should be effort to support them.”
(Year 7 to Year 12)

Positive mental health and wellbeing is essential for personal wellbeing and constructive relationships. Mental health concerns can result in behavioural issues, a negative sense of worth and lack of coping skills. This affects a child or young person’s quality of life and emotional wellbeing as well as their capacity to engage in school and learning.¹²⁴ Within the consultation, students noted poor mental health made it difficult to learn and to get help and support. Students discussed the requirement for mental health support and education for students. In particular, education on mental health and wellbeing was suggested as a topic that would increase the meaningfulness of education for students in Year 7 to Year 12, as discussed in Chapter 4.4 – Teaching and learning that is relevant.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Psychological help because people can be insane.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sad help because they are sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“Positive encouragement when they look/feel down.”</i></p> <p><i>“My friends help me stay calm.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Students with mental problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental help – depression, self-esteem, anorexia, bulimia counselling.”</i></p> <p><i>“Many teenagers just need someone to talk to – bottling up feelings can lead to self-harm (and has at this school on several occasions).”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental, physical, emotional – support.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental health help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Psychological issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“Anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“Low self-esteem.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a phobia of meeting new people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Social anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“Suffer depressions.”</i></p> |

For students in Year 7 to Year 12 this included needing support for feeling positive about themselves.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Confidence.”*
- “They need care and love to feel good about themselves.”*
- “Self-support.”*
- “Support to be themselves.”*
- “Encourage them to be more positive.”*

Students stressed that positive mental health and wellbeing was important for school and learning. As such, they hoped that support staff, such as counsellors, psychologists or chaplains, would be visible within schools, such as walking around, and would proactively approach students, rather than the onus being on students to seek support. Such visibility would also help to build connections between school staff and students, as noted in subsequent sections of this chapter.

To make and follow through on decisions

“Teachers and parents to support us to pursue our dreams.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The support of friends, family members and school staff was a common theme that students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified as helping them to feel positive towards school and learning. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 wanted people in their network to be supportive of them. They wanted encouragement to feel good about school and learning and, for students in Year 7 to Year 12, for people to support the choices they made about their life. As discussed in Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested, having family members who were interested in their learning and set high expectations for them was considered an important motivating factor providing the expectations were balanced and did not create stress. Similarly, high expectations from teachers and friends encouraged persistence, resilience and self-belief.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Encouragement from everyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement helps happiness.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Parent encouragement towards school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to be more positive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents who care about their education – but not so much the kid is stressed.”</i></p> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 are often confronted with making significant decisions about their life. Students welcomed the advice provided by teachers, friends, family members or other role models. Respect and support for the decisions they made or their goals was also an important factor students identified as encouraging them with school and learning.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Support in choices that student makes.”

“Working towards a goal with parents/family.”

“Using advice from family, teachers and friends to make choices.”

“Support them to do what they love.”

“Give some role models they can learn from.”

“Friends to help support your decisions.”

“Advice.”

To cope with family concerns

A small number of students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke about requiring help with family concerns. Students noted that systems need to support students to deal with these concerns before they are able to engage with learning.

Students also identified how situations in the home environment can make it difficult for them to get the help and support they needed. The home may not provide a supportive environment, student’s may feel embarrassed talking to others about their family situation, feeling upset about their family situation may be difficult for students to talk about, or relationships with adults in the home may influence students attitudes towards or relationships with adults in general. For students in these situations, quality relationships at school were particularly important.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Kids need a good home environment so they don’t have a hard time.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your parents fight and you are scared to go home to your family.”</i></p> <p><i>“Things going on in the family could distract such as a death or a divorce.”</i></p> <p><i>“Divorces they might feel sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe these people are having troubles at home and it’s worrying them at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“It might be hard because family and that don’t pay attention to them so they cannot get any help.”</i></p> <p><i>“It may be hard for kids to go to school if they have family issues. If their mum or dads don’t drive a car they might miss or be late for school. They might be scared of bullies and won’t come to school.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Help coping with domestic issues and class distractions.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they have any ‘problems’ at home with family members.”</i></p> <p><i>“A support group where they can talk to other students about their issue at home. This would give them reassurance that someone else is going through something similar to what they are. It is often easier to talk to someone about something if they understand the issue at hand.”</i></p> <p><i>“A better home environment.”</i></p> |

Support is relational

“Kids need emotional support to help them work at their best and focus on their work rather than other distractions (friends, problems at home etc.).” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed a desire for an environment in which they felt comfortable and confident to talk about any concerns. This meant they had someone to talk to who would listen, understand, make them feel OK and who was supportive and trustworthy. Students also explained the environment should promote help-seeking behaviour – indicating that it was a sign of strength to be able to ask for or access assistance.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Somewhere where kids can express their feelings.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need lots of support and need to be confident with everything they do.”</i></p> <p><i>“More understanding.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think kids need more people to understand them when they need it the most.”</i></p> <p><i>“A chance to tell their fears to others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support (from the teachers and classmates) (having people you can trust).”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need a good listener to support them because if there is no listener the child will not be supported by anyone.”</i></p> | <p><i>“People who care about them and they need adults to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need to feel like they are being understood so they can feel they can trust.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need more supportive people that will listen to us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have someone they can rely on at all times.”</i></p> <p><i>“Love and kindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need to know that someone will always be there to help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need to know that their problems can never be too big or too small.”</i></p> |

Personal networks of friends and family members and formal supports of school staff and external agencies were all essential in creating a supportive environment. Whether students felt able to talk to people within these networks and whether they felt confident in the response was highly dependent on relationships.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke positively of the many sources of support available to them. Friends, teachers, family members, carers, teacher assistants, pets, chaplains, school nurses, helplines and the community were all seen as sources of support and encouragement. These individuals were characterised as helpful, reliable, trustworthy, provided advice and cared for them, which made them feel supported and valued. Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested discusses the positive ways family members provide support in more detail.

Aboriginal students in Year 7 to Year 12 expressed a desire for more Aboriginal staff and for school staff or visitors to the school to be more aware and understanding of Aboriginal culture and ways of working. This would provide culturally appropriate support to Aboriginal students.

Students at boarding school wanted more family contact when boarding. Living away from home sometimes made it difficult for these students to feel they had access to support. However, they also noted that the experience was positive for their developing independence.

Similarly, some students stated that their friends attended different schools; limiting the amount of time they were able to see them.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <i>"Parents give us advice to support us whenever we need."</i> | <i>"Parental guidance and support."</i> |
| <i>"Supportive teachers, friends and family."</i> | <i>"Chaplains."</i> |
| <i>"Help from your teacher assistants."</i> | <i>"Mentors from other people who are around their age group and have been in the same situation."</i> |
| <i>"Their friends, siblings, parents, family and pets support me."</i> | <i>"Support from teachers."</i> |
| <i>"Nannas."</i> | <i>"Support from their parents or care takers."</i> |
| <i>"Pets."</i> | <i>"Counsellors, for issues."</i> |
| <i>"Poppas."</i> | <i>"KIDS HELPLINE."</i> |
| <i>"The community can support you."</i> | <i>"Health counsellor."</i> |
| <i>"Chaplain."</i> | <i>"Teacher aids (helpers to help you understand)."</i> |
| <i>"Teachers, helper, family and many more."</i> | <i>"Doctors."</i> |
| <i>"More helplines/ phone numbers."</i> | <i>"Kids need more support from their families."</i> |
| <i>"Kids helpline: 1800 555 800."</i> | <i>"Aunty, uncle."</i> |
| | <i>"Nana, pa."</i> |
| | <i>"People in general."</i> |
| | <i>"Psychologists."</i> |

Talking to someone face-to-face was important for some students, whereas others preferred to have the option of a variety of ways to communicate and tailored to communication abilities where appropriate.

For students in Year 7 to Year 12, the anonymity offered through helplines or online options was particularly important. These options provided students with an avenue to feel comfortable talking about their concerns. Such options are critical for students who may feel they do not have a support network available to them or feel unsure about discussing their concerns with individuals in their support network.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“Someone to sit down with and talk.”</i></p> <p><i>“Telling someone in person, not online.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like it when we have buddy time because I help a person and help them open their hearts.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Online/text message counselling to make it easier for people to talk about the problem without being in the space of the person.”</i></p> <p><i>“They/we need an anonymous place to share troubles and get help/advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“Private help.”</i></p> |

However, students also stated that simply providing a link to a website was not an adequate level of support. They hoped for individuals in their support network to proactively engage with them about their health and wellbeing. They wanted school staff and families to approach them, particularly if there were changes in their behaviour. Some indicated that this made it easier to talk about concerns.

Generally, having a connection to those they were receiving support from assisted students in accessing support structures or talking about their concerns. There were barriers to getting help where connections did not exist or were fraught, as discussed further below.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Not opening up to strangers.”*
- “Too afraid (don’t know the counsellors).”*
- “If they don’t have any connection at school.”*
- “The teachers never stick around.”*
- “If they don’t have a relationship with the teacher where they feel like they can’t talk to the teacher.”*
- “Not close to teachers or parents.”*

Students without quality interpersonal relationships with friends, peers, school staff, family members or other community members are isolated from accessing the support such relationships provide. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 made this connection, outlining that students without positive relationships would find it difficult to get the help and support they needed generally and for school and learning.

Disjuncture within the support network also caused stress for students, making it difficult to get help and support, as discussed in Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Not helpful teachers, no supportive friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Unsupportive parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very bad parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your friends put you down.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad friend.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad guardians.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they have no friends (loner).”</i></p> <p><i>“Mean teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they are getting bullied they may be threatened not to tell the teacher so it is hard to make a decision so they don’t have so much support because people don’t know.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Not enough connections.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having parents/teachers that don’t care about you or you education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Dysfunctional families that interfere with learning or support systems.”</i></p> <p><i>“No parents to support them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t have many classmates.”</i></p> <p><i>“Rude friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Loneliness.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they feel like they can’t talk to anyone.”</i></p> |

Support from friends

Friends were a significant source of support and friendships were often the key to students feeling they were valued, their concerns were valid, and that they would be able to cope with concerns. When describing friends as sources of support, students used terms that expressed reliability – ‘always’, ‘all the time’, ‘have your back’ and ‘are there for you’. Particularly in comparison to adults, friends were described as trustworthy and possessing a level of understanding that adults were not able to provide. For students in Year 7 to Year 12, provision of support and understanding their perspective was the most commonly stated reason why it’s important to have friends at school.

Students explained how friends responded to their emotions, noticing when they were sad and acting in ways to make them feel happy and included, and also supporting them to self-regulate. Additionally, students noted friends provided advice for responding to concerns, which was informed from their position of understanding (in comparison to adults).

When students did not have friends they spoke about feeling isolated and the impact this had on their ability to cope with and respond to concerns, and subsequently concentrate on learning. Trying to deal with concerns without support can be particularly difficult for children and young people.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“I think friends are important because they always care about YOU!”</i></p> <p><i>“So you don’t have a terrible time at primary school, so you don’t have to deal with everything by yourself.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s important because when you are lonely your friends could calm you down.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because if kids have a problem and they don’t like to talk to a teacher they can talk to the friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because they won’t tell on you if you do something wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can tell what’s happening at home and tell your secrets to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you might be lonely and you need someone to talk to and you will also want to come to school more. Friends also encourage you and help you if you need a friend to talk to especially if you don’t want to talk to a teacher.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Yes IT IS IMPORTANT, good friends are always there for you!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because friends are everything, they will be with you through hard times.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they can help you and give you some advice and if you need to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help you and encourage you. They see the real you, whereas some teachers do not.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can relate to you and understand what you go through.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s important to have at least one friend at school because you might have a problem with someone/ something and that friend will have a better understanding of that situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is important to have friends at school because they help you get through hard times and they are also good at keeping secrets that you tell them.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“You have no support.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel you have to do things on your own.”</i></p> <p><i>“All the bad things builds up and there’s no one to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“You don’t have anybody to support you or stand up for you if you are going through rough times.”</i></p> <p><i>“You won’t have people to care about you and you won’t have someone to help you back up if you fall.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can’t share your worries so it’s harder to solve out the problem.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Yes because if you don’t have friends you will feel lonely and you won’t have anyone to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have no one to trust with your worries and fears.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you need to talk to someone, nobody would talk to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You become lonely and sad if you have no one to comfort you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have no one to talk to when you need it most.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not feel as supported as someone with friends.”</i></p> |

Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 acknowledged the significance of friends to supplement sources of support that may not be available for all students. This included necessities, such as food, and support provided by family.

Year 7 to Year 12

“School friends become such a large influence in our lives. They mould us into the people we are today and give us the attention and love we may not have at home or outside of school.”

“I suppose not everyone has a great family and it might provide additional support. Also if they lean towards extraversion it might make them more likely to attend.”

“They give you food.”

“If you can’t talk to someone at home.”

Support from teachers

Teachers were identified as another important source of support and students described positive ways in which teachers provided help and advice. For students in Year 3 to Year 6, these included helping with worries, bullying, hard situations, feeling unsafe or being hurt. Whereas for students in Year 7 to Year 12 teachers helped with problems, decisions and hard situations.

While students in Year 3 to Year 6 described teachers as trustworthy, students in Year 7 to Year 12 had some reservations – as is discussed below.

There were several benefits to positive relationships with teachers in relation to provision of support. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 explained relationships with supportive teachers continued beyond the year within the classroom – *“It’s a forever trust”* (Year 3 to Year 6). When positive relationships existed, students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt more comfortable talking to teachers which, students felt, led to them being better understood and receiving more informed responses from teachers.

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 felt the provision of support from teachers was shaped by the student-teacher relationship. Students perceived that teachers were unable or unwilling to provide help if students and teachers did not get along. While there were a few responses suggesting this association from students in Year 7 to Year 12, it was more pronounced in the responses from students in Year 3 to Year 6. Where positive relationships did not exist, students in Year 7 to Year 12 were more likely to state they felt uncomfortable or that the teacher was unapproachable.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Because teachers want to help and make sure that you are happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then they can talk to a trusted adult if you’re upset.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you can talk to them if you feel unsafe.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Guide us to do the right decision.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help form a good circle of help that you can get in school and help make you feel like you are a part of the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they help you when you need it and don’t get ignored because they hate you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it makes it easier to communicate with them if you have an issue or problem.”</i></p> |
| <p><i>“You need to be friends with your teachers so they will help you more.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t get along with your teachers they will give you a hard time, doesn’t help you and ignores you!”</i></p> <p><i>“It is important to get along with teachers because they could help you more.”</i></p> | <p><i>“The teacher might refuse to help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you don’t get along with them, they might not help you, but if you do get along with them, they are more approachable to ask for help.”</i></p> |

Barriers to seeking and receiving support

“People may not want to hear their problem because they may be really busy and have no time to listen or people may not want to know their problem.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Feeling embarrassed or scared

The difficulty of asking for help or voicing concerns because of the perceptions of others was a strong theme from students across Year 3 to Year 12 – with this as the most common response to the question, ‘What makes it hard for kids to get the help or support they need?’ Students discussed how speaking up about concerns can make them feel scared, shy or embarrassed. These feelings were uncomfortable and students felt it required a lot of courage to ask for help or discuss their concerns.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“It is hard because they are too scared to explain to parents and teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids don’t have the courage to ask for help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are shy so they don’t talk to anyone about it!”</i></p> <p><i>“Being ashamed of what they need help with.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Too cool to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel like you’ll be embarrassed if you tell.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hidden feelings/feel cooped up.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are shy to speak up and feel they need to deal with it by themselves.”</i></p> <p><i>“Scared to approach the teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working up the courage to talk to someone is very hard.”</i></p> |

Often embarrassment was linked with fear or stigma of being different. Students were concerned that others would judge or tease them if they required help. The feeling of isolation compounded the difficulty of speaking to others about their concerns and affected a student’s feelings of acceptance and belonging at school.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Kids don’t want their friends knowing because of peer pressure.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some people tease and bully others because they need extra help.”</i></p> <p><i>“By people judging them and not wanting to be their friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Rumours.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they are afraid to ask and people put them down.”</i></p> | <p><i>“The mindset that they will be judged/bullied for trying to get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other peers saying things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Scared of being judged.”</i></p> <p><i>“The fear of being abnormal or different.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fear of being alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Opinions – what people think of them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes they think if they ask for help they would look like a loser in front of their friends but they’re not.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t want other kids thinking they have ‘problems’.”</i></p> |

Intimidation or judgement from teachers, peers and friends contributed to students' concerns about asking for help. Students were largely concerned about responses from friends and other students if they asked for help.

Responses to bullying were particularly complex for students to navigate as they feared speaking up about bullying would lead to more bullying. These experiences of students highlight the importance of schools as emotionally safe environments for students.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"Words like 'You're not good enough', 'You're bad', 'You're useless'."</i></p> <p><i>"Not telling an adult if they are getting bullied or having a hard time."</i></p> <p><i>"Being threatened to tell a teacher by another student."</i></p> <p><i>"When they get bullied they may get distracted – they also may not tell the teacher because they don't want the kid in trouble."</i></p> | <p><i>"Teachers can be intimidating for some students."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a figure of authority intimidate them."</i></p> |

Identification and acknowledgement

For some students in Year 7 to Year 12, not realising they needed help, not wanting help or not realising the gravity of the situation influenced their help-seeking behaviour.

Year 7 to Year 12

"If no one, even the student themselves, acknowledge that they need help or support."

"Students not accepting that they need help."

"Not understanding the importance of the situation/problem."

"Sometimes kids lie to themselves saying they are 'fine' when they aren't."

"Being bottled up (not telling people you need help)."

"People think they can handle their own problems."

"Kids often act ignorant or some might just not have the confidence to ask for help. Some rather pretend everything is OK and be silent."

Availability and accessibility

“And help and support they can get.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students referred to the accessibility and availability of support resources as a potential barrier to receiving support. They referred to the time people may have available, the type of support people were able to provide, the accessibility and capacity of services and financial constraints.

Students often referred to family members and school staff being too busy to provide assistance. For some students, friends attending different schools meant that their access to their support network was also limited.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Family doesn’t have time.”</i></p> <p><i>“The teachers don’t have time to help them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Their parents are at work after school or away for job in a different country.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some may have some friends that are different and the friends at the other school may not be like that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Cost.”</i></p> <p><i>“It makes it hard because sometimes you have to pay a lot of money to get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because we live in [a regional town] it’s hard to get the support she needs.”</i></p> | <p><i>“More chaplains.”</i></p> <p><i>“Psychologist more than one.”</i></p> <p><i>“People that you need help from are too busy with others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not enough staff working in student services.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids don’t get support because they can’t get money.”</i></p> <p><i>“No phones to call helpline.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support is offered outside of school which students don’t want.”</i></p> <p><i>“Language barrier.”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t know English.”</i></p> |

Students spoke about feeling or being different as a barrier or making it difficult to get support. They identified disability, cultural reasons, sexuality, gender or religion. Racial discrimination from other students and school staff was also commented on by a few students in terms of accessing support and also their experiences of school and learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Different religions get different respect because of their beliefs.”</i></p> <p><i>“People who have special needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“The kids who have disability and can’t talk well it makes it hard for them to talk to others in the way they want to.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Not fitting in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Race/ethnicity.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gender.”</i></p> <p><i>“The way they look – appearance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Different family background.”</i></p> <p><i>“Religion.”</i></p> |

Uncertainty

“Not knowing where to get the help or fear of the unknown of what the help might be.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Uncertainties made it difficult for students across Year 3 to Year 12 to access or receive assistance. For some, this meant not knowing or being unsure of who to talk to or where to get support. For others, identifying what they needed assistance with or articulating their concerns was challenging, particularly if they did not feel comfortable or did not feel they had supportive relationships.

For students to receive appropriate levels of support they need to be aware of and able to access support systems.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“Don’t know who to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not knowing what they need help with.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because some children don’t know the number to call.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being able to say why.”</i></p> <p><i>“You always need a note to see the nurse, but the teachers tell you to get a note from the teacher, but the nurse wants a note from a teacher so you never get a note, so you can’t talk to anyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mind blank.”</i></p> | <p><i>“The fact that kids just don’t have access to certain services and the lack of exposure to these kind of resources prevents them from that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Schools don’t say that there is someone to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t know who to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Might not know how to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not knowing the right words to tell someone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of communication.”</i></p> |

To feel confident in support systems, students wanted to know what would happen after they raised their concern and assured it would be kept confidential. Students explained how being unsure of whether they would be heard, of what might happen, what people’s responses might be or whether their concern would be kept private all made it difficult for them to get the help and support they needed. Some students were worried that the situation may be made worse or they may not receive the right type of support.

Concerns about family members or teachers minimising or dismissing their problems made it difficult for students to seek help. Students perceived sometimes adults were not interested, did not have the time, did not believe or take them seriously or did not understand their perspective.

Students explained that how people responded to their concerns influenced their future actions. They stated that a lack of action or support from an adult compounded feelings of distrust, made them less likely to approach another adult and made them feel isolated. Making the situation worse, taking over or overreacting were also concerns of students.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"People won't listen or they shrug it off, then the students will get more anxious to tell anyone else."</i></p> <p><i>"You might think that they won't believe you."</i></p> <p><i>"Their mum, dad, teacher and kids might not listen to her or him to get what her or him needs."</i></p> <p><i>"They might think that if they tell someone that it will get worse."</i></p> <p><i>"Have to go up and speak alone."</i></p> | <p><i>"The feeling of being alone can make a student not feel like they can ask and not feel understood."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers not understanding kids' problems."</i></p> <p><i>"When no one listens."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers who aren't understanding or able to acknowledge students troubles."</i></p> <p><i>"Might be scared to be turned down."</i></p> <p><i>"Because it can make the situation worse."</i></p> <p><i>"Not providing legitimate support, providing a link won't help."</i></p> <p><i>"The people you go to for help make it 10x worse."</i></p> <p><i>"What they need might be harmful for them."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers need to listen and act. Students turn to other resolutions because they feel like they're not being listened to."</i></p> |

Regarding confidentiality, students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to their past experiences of trust being broken and how this made them sceptical of privacy being maintained. Students were particularly concerned about conversations between teachers, and between teachers and parents. They wanted teachers to ensure confidentiality, especially when explicitly requested by students.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Teachers gossiping."

"Nobody trusts chaplains/teachers."

"Sometimes they feel they can't trust anyone."

"Not respecting privacy."

"Trust being broken previously, affecting any future trust needs."

Suggestions from students

“Everyone gets what they need.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The areas for support and barriers to accessing support discussed by students highlight significant areas for action where change is possible and that would better position students to engage in school and learning. Throughout the consultation, students emphasised the difficulty of engaging in learning when they were hungry, tired, unwell, worried or anxious. Students were also clear about the behaviours of others and the environments in which they felt comfortable.

Students referred to systems being stretched and complex or difficult to access (off-site locations, lacking privacy or prohibitive because of cost). Students suggested support systems should be accessible, meet the varied needs of students and be responsive.

Students wanted schools to promote avenues of support, providing a variety of options, so students are aware of the help available. This would contribute to a culture in which help-seeking behaviour is viewed positively and as a strength. Creating an environment and cultures in which asking for assistance is encouraged and framed positively will assist students to overcome concerns for feeling embarrassed, shy or fearful of bullying or judgement.

Ensuring students have people they feel comfortable and confident talking to and in whom they believe will have a positive response is critical. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified family members and school staff (teachers, assistants/aides, principals, and non-teaching staff such as counsellors and psychologists) as potential sources of support. When these adults proactively built relationships and ‘checked in’, students perceived them as approachable and available to raise concerns with. This means these adults regularly talk with students and ask about their health and wellbeing (particularly if there are changes in behaviour), encourage help-seeking behaviour, listen when students raise concerns, assure and uphold confidentiality, and provide support, advice or take direct action as requested and as required, with students being involved in or informing responses. These practices are consistently raised by children and young people with regard to speaking up about concerns and are implemented in child safe organisations.^{125 126}

4.8 Feeling physically and mentally well

Physical and mental health affects all aspects of life and all areas of wellbeing.¹²⁷ Positive physical and mental health provides a strong foundation for learning and student emotional, cognitive and behavioural engagement with school and learning. Student engagement with learning may also be affected by disability or a long-term condition. It is critical that student health is promoted and students with disability or a long-term health condition are appropriately supported to be able to engage with learning.

The following chapter explores student's views of health and its influence on learning. Chapter 5 – Students in education support centres and students with disability discusses the experiences of school and learning from the perspective of students in education support centres and students in the main sample who identified as having a disability or long-term health condition.

Survey findings

- 70 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good'.
- 22 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having long-term health problems and seven per cent reported having a disability.
- More than 40 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they had difficulties with concentration, behaviour, feelings or getting along with people.
- Students who reported a health problem were less likely to give a positive rating of their school and learning experience than students with no such problems.

The views of Year 3 to Year 6 students

A number of Year 3 to Year 6 students raised health-related issues in response to the final survey question 'If there was one thing you could change about your school what would it be?'

Predominantly in their comments students asked for healthier canteen food, more playground equipment and for more sports and physical education to be taught in their school:

"Physical education every day to keep us healthy."

"I would change the canteen food because the canteen food is very unhealthy."

"More playground equipment. I feel if there [was] some more it would intrigue more kids to get more fit and healthy."

In response to a question about preferred teacher qualities, students acknowledged the importance of tailored support for their health and wellbeing, and the impact on their learning:

"I love how all of the teachers care and ALWAYS look out for you. With me I have ADHD and my mum only found out about it about five years ago and I was really struggling with my school work and my concentration but all of the teachers helped me heaps with my education and if I had not come to this school I think my concentration and education would be very poor."

"I love learning with my teachers because they help me with my maths and my hearing problem."

The survey for Year 3 to Year 6 students did not include any specific questions about physical and mental health.

How do students rate their health? – Year 7 to Year 12

Almost 70 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good', with a further 23 per cent saying their health was 'good'.

However, more than seven per cent of students answered that their health was either 'fair' or 'poor'. A few students were 'unsure'.

A higher proportion of male than female students rated their health as 'excellent' however the difference was not statistically significant (25.7% versus 22.3%). There was little difference between students from regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal students were significantly less likely than non-Aboriginal students to rate their health as 'excellent' (11.4% versus 24.8%) and more likely to say their health was 'fair' or 'poor' (22.7% versus 6.4%). In other words, only one in 10 Aboriginal students said their health was 'excellent' but more than one in five said their health was 'fair' or 'poor'.

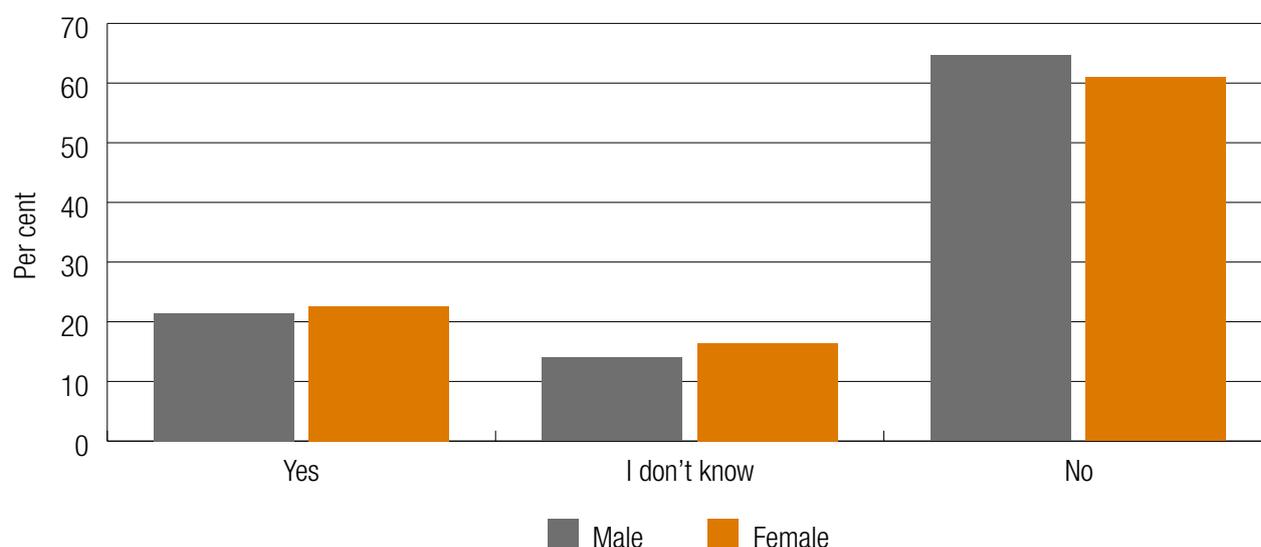
Table 4.26: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying their health is excellent, very good, good, fair, poor or student is unsure, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-----------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Excellent | 28.4 | 22.3 | 25.2 | 24.0 | 25.7 | 11.4 | 24.8 |
| Very good | 42.8 | 46.2 | 42.3 | 49.5 | 44.8 | 38.6 | 44.5 |
| Good | 22.8 | 22.6 | 23.5 | 20.7 | 22.3 | 27.3 | 22.6 |
| Fair | 4.2 | 7.7 | 7.0 | 4.8 | 5.5 | 18.2 | 6.3 |
| Poor | 1.1 | 0.5 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 4.5 | 1.0 |
| Unsure | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.7 |

In regard to long-term health problems, one in five (22.2%) Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having a long-term health condition(s) such as asthma, diabetes or depression. Two-thirds of students (62.3%) said they had no long-term health problems and 16 per cent said they 'didn't know'.

There was no significant difference between the genders, between students from regional and metropolitan areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to this question.

Graph 4.22: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have long-term health problem(s) or condition(s) (lasting 6 months or more) (e.g. asthma, diabetes, depression), by gender



Year 7 to Year 12 students with a long-term health problem(s) reported that their condition most commonly caused them difficulty or stopped them doing:

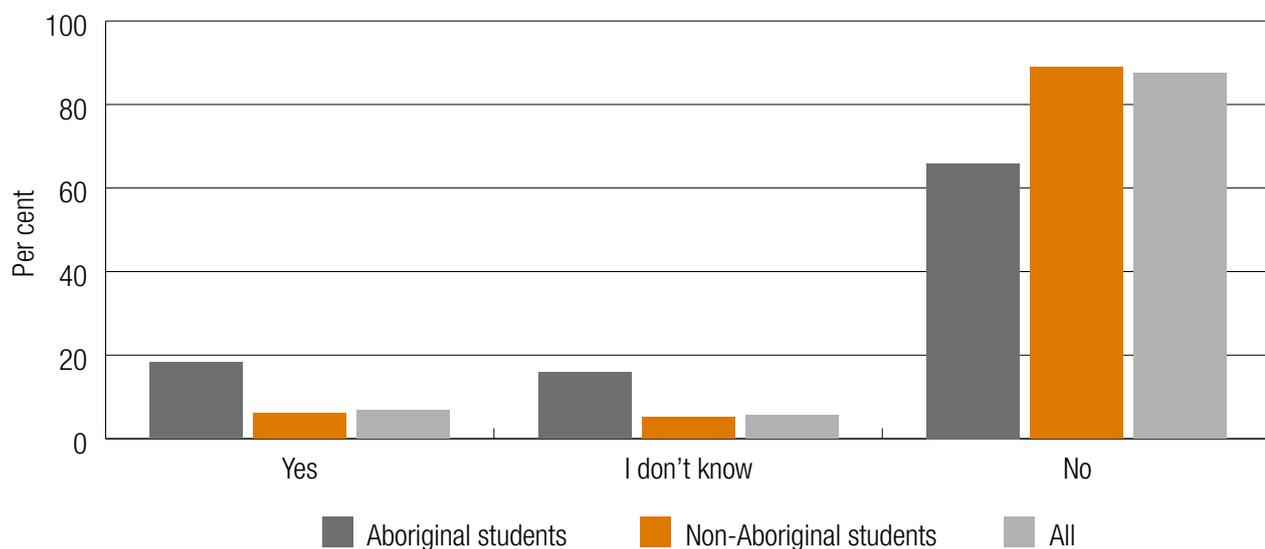
- sports (36.4%)
- socialising, communicating and meeting friends (21.9%)
- coming to school (19.9%).

More than one-third of students (35.8%) with a long-term health condition(s) said that it did not cause them any difficulty.

Students were also asked whether they had a long-term disability such as sensory impaired hearing, visual impairment, were in a wheelchair or had learning difficulties. Seven per cent of students answered 'yes' to this question and a further six per cent said they 'didn't know'.

Eighty-eight per cent of students said they had no long-term disability. There were no marked differences between the genders or students from regional and metropolitan areas. However one in five Aboriginal students (18.2%) reported having a long-term disability and a further 16 per cent said they 'didn't know'.

Graph 4.23: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have a long-term disability (lasting 6 months or more) (e.g. sensory impaired hearing, visual impairment, in a wheelchair, learning difficulties), by Aboriginal status



Students with a long-term disability reported that their disability most commonly caused them difficulty or stopped them doing:

- school work in class (41.3%)
- homework (34.8%).

A little less than one-third of students with disability (30.4%) said that it did not cause them any difficulty.

Almost 15 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported doing extra work around their house because someone has a disability, is sick or can't do things. Aboriginal students were particularly affected by this with 34.1 per cent of Aboriginal students reporting doing extra work around their house.

For affected students, this extra work impacted most commonly on doing homework (22.0%), everyday activities that other people [their] age can usually do (20.0%) and socialising, communicating and meeting friends (20.0%).

Around one-half of students (48.0%) who do extra work around their house answered that it did not stop them doing any activities.

Students' mental health

More than 40 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having difficulties with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with other people.

A higher proportion of male than female students reported being affected by such difficulties however the difference was not statistically significant (44.6% versus 38.2%). There was little difference between students in regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal students were significantly more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be affected with two in three Aboriginal students (68.2%) saying they had some level of difficulty with concentration, behaviour, feelings or getting along with other people.

Table 4.27: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have difficulties with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with other people, by selected characteristics

| | Male | Female | Metropolitan | Regional | Non-Aboriginal | Aboriginal | All |
|-------------------------|------|--------|--------------|----------|----------------|------------|------|
| Yes, a few difficulties | 28.4 | 19.5 | 23.9 | 21.6 | 22.4 | 34.1 | 23.2 |
| Yes, some difficulties | 13.0 | 15.6 | 14.2 | 15.9 | 13.8 | 29.5 | 14.7 |
| Yes, many difficulties | 3.2 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 4.5 | 3.2 |
| No | 55.4 | 61.8 | 58.8 | 59.1 | 60.7 | 31.8 | 58.9 |

Overall, Year 7 to Year 12 students who reported having some level of difficulty in the mental health area were more likely than students with no such difficulties to:

- have other long-term health problems or poorer health overall
- not like school or not like school very much
- feel unsure about feeling part of their school
- feel that teachers don't care or care some rather than a lot
- not think it important to be proud of their school work
- not feel safe at school 'all the time' and be afraid of getting hurt or bullied
- have wagged school.

The additional burden of disadvantage in the Aboriginal community is well documented. Aboriginal children and young people are also more likely to experience mental health concerns – and this was reflected in the results of this survey with Aboriginal students being significantly more likely to report difficulties in this regard (68.1% of Aboriginal students reported having such difficulties compared to 39.3% of non-Aboriginal students).

Specifically in regard to gender, male students overall were more likely than female students to report having some level of difficulty in the area of mental health (44.6% versus 38.2%) however they were less likely to say that these difficulties upset or distressed them (62.2% versus 82.6%).

Overall three-quarters of all students with mental health problems (73.6%) reported being upset or distressed by these difficulties. One-half of affected students (48.5%) felt that the difficulties interfered with their classroom learning and more than one-third (37.2%) said their difficulties interfered with friendships.

Table 4.28: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying their difficulties in the mental health area interfere with their everyday life, by selected areas of interference

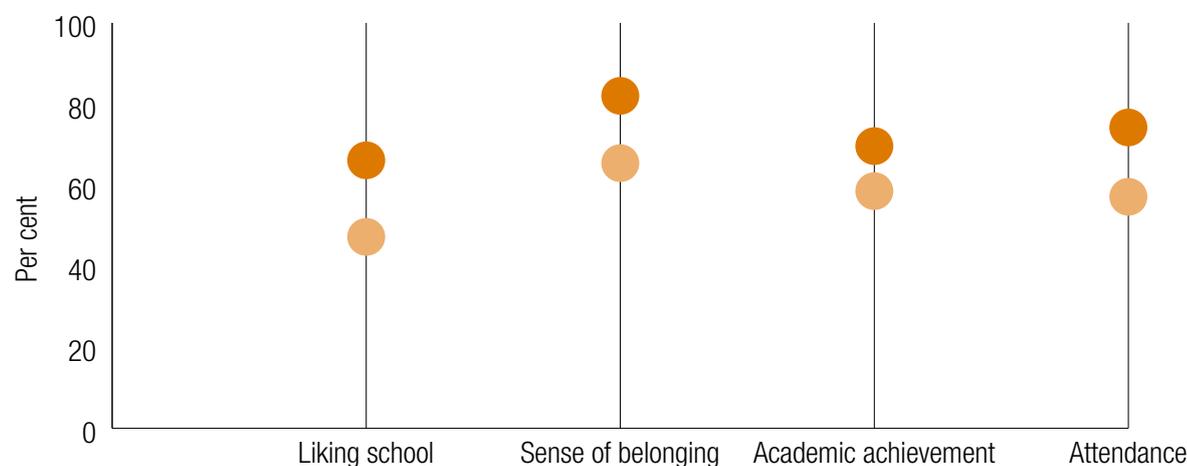
| Area | Percent |
|--|---------|
| Friendships | 37.2 |
| Classroom learning | 48.5 |
| Home life | 32.5 |
| Leisure activities | 13.1 |
| No, do not interfere with any of these areas | 29.9 |
| Other area | 3.6 |

Cross-tabulation of responses from students who reported difficulty with concentration, behaviour or feelings with those from students who reported no such difficulty showed that students with difficulty in the mental health area had poorer engagement outcomes.

Students with reported difficulty in the mental health area were less likely to:

- like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (47.2% compared to 66.1%)
- feel like they are part of their school (65.4% compared to 82.0%)
- say being at school every day is ‘very important’ (57.1% compared to 74.2%)
- achieve results that are ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ (58.5% compared to 69.6%).

Graph 4.24: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they do not or do have difficulty with concentration, behaviour or feelings

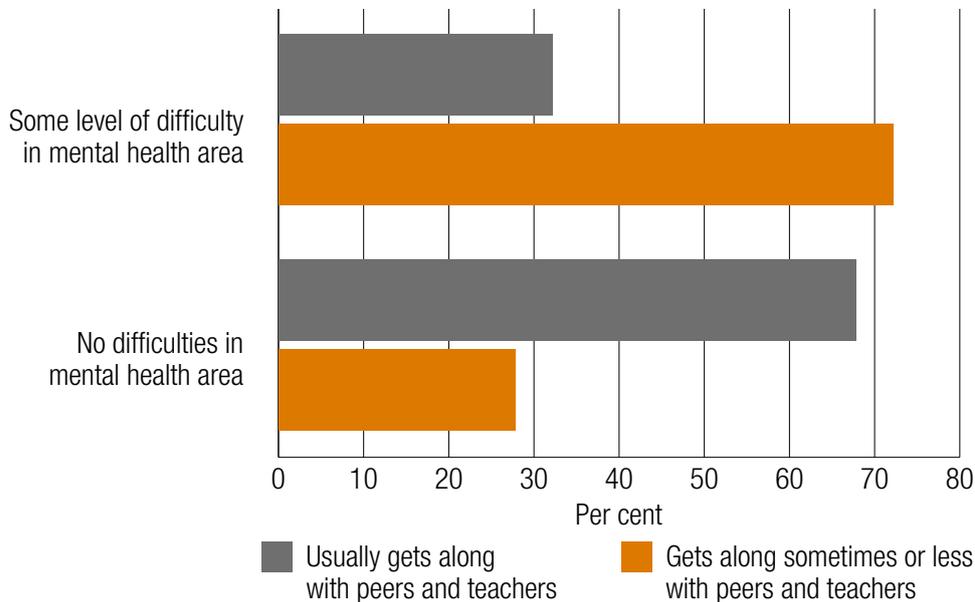


Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

Students who get along with peers and teachers

Students who said they 'usually' get along with their peers and teachers were less likely than students who said they get along 'sometimes' or less to report some level of difficulty in the area of mental health (32.2% versus 72.2%).

Graph 4.25: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting some or no level of difficulty with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with others, by how well student gets along with peers and teachers



Students with fair or poor health

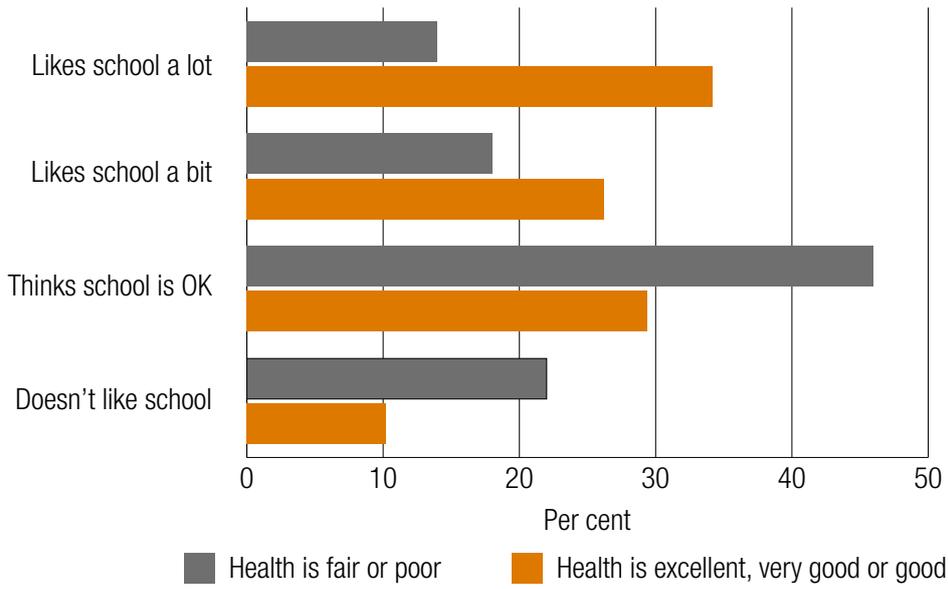
Cross-tabulation of responses from students who described their health as either 'fair' or 'poor' with those from students who said their health was 'good' or better showed that less healthy students had poorer engagement outcomes.

Students with self-reported ill-health were less likely to:

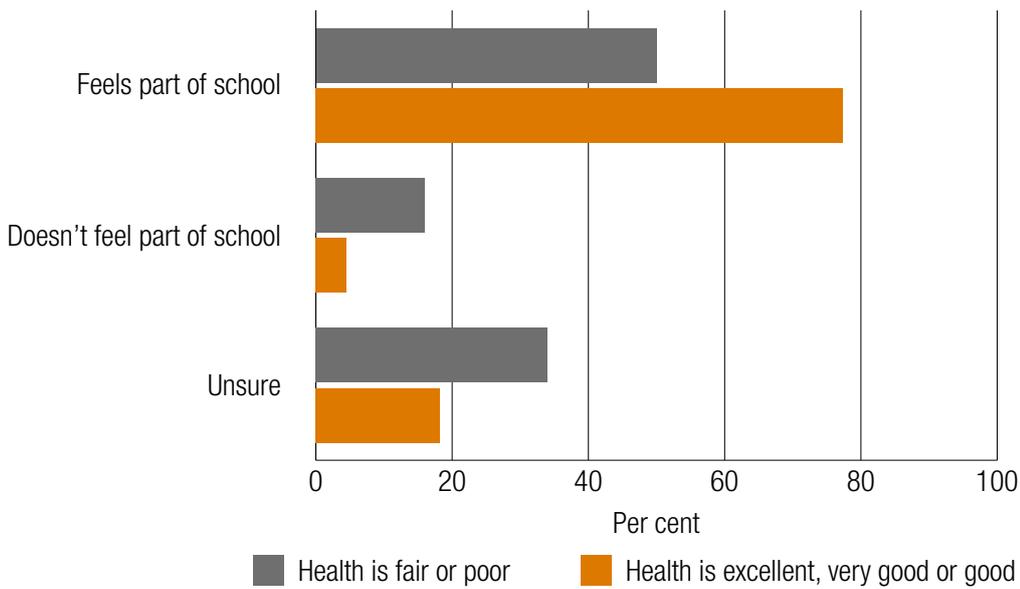
- like school 'a lot' or 'a bit' (32.0% compared to 60.4%).
- feel like they are part of their school (50.0% compared to 77.3%).
- say being at school every day is 'very important' (48.0% compared to 68.4%).
- achieve results that are 'above average' or 'near the top' (40.8% compared to 67.2%).

It is important to remember that Aboriginal students were significantly overrepresented in the group of students with 'fair' or 'poor' health (22.7% of Aboriginal students versus 6.4% of non-Aboriginal students).

Graph 4.26: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school/don't like school at all, by self-reported health rating



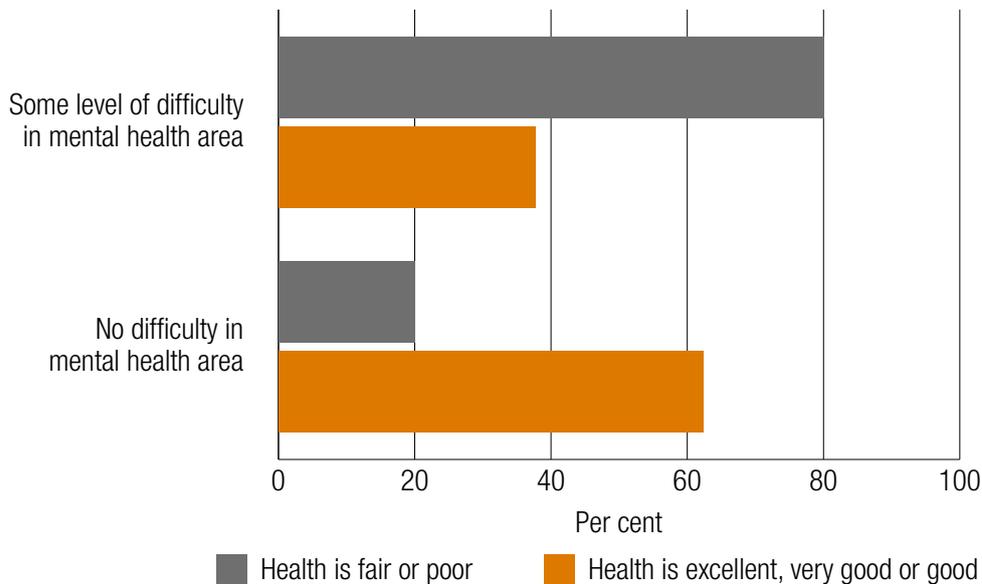
Graph 4.27: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel like part of their school yes, no or unsure, by self-reported health rating



Accumulation of health problems

Results from the survey showed that compared to students with 'good' health or better, those with 'fair' or 'poor' health were more likely to report having a long-term health condition(s) (19.1% versus 40.0%), a long-term disability (4.9% versus 22.0%) or difficulties in areas of mental health such as problems with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with other people (37.7% versus 80.0%).

Graph 4.28: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting some or no level of difficulty with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with others, by self-reported health rating



Students with long-term health condition(s) or disability

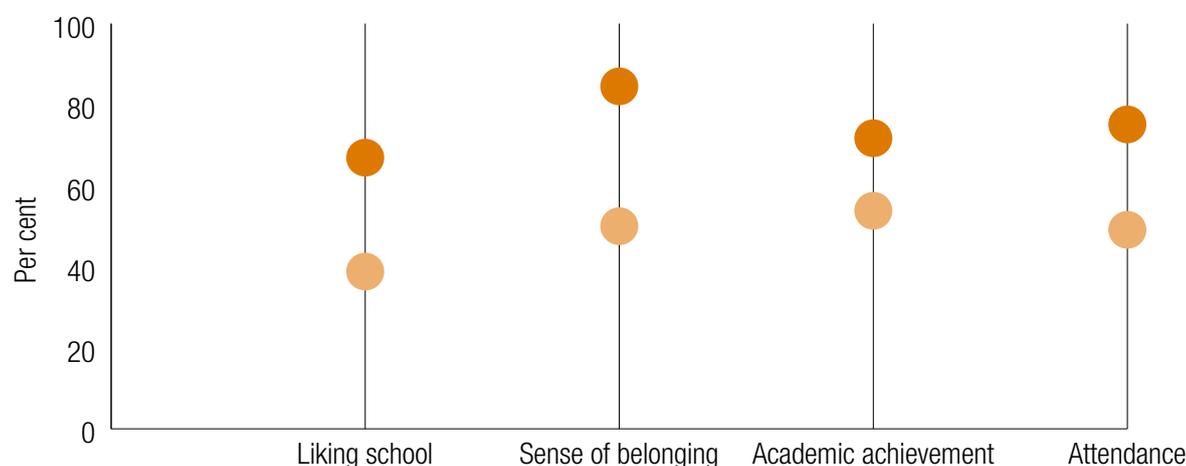
Cross-tabulation of survey responses showed that students with long-term health condition(s) or disability were less likely than students with no such health problems to feel like they are part of their school, to like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, to achieve highly and to say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them.

Table 4.29: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students, by self-reported health status

| | Student reported health is excellent or very good and student has no long-term health condition | Student reported health is good, fair or less and student has a long-term health problem or isn't sure | Student reported no difficulties in mental health area | Student reported difficulties in mental health area |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Liking school | 66.9 | 38.8 | 66.1 | 47.2 |
| Sense of belonging | 84.5 | 50.0 | 82.0 | 65.4 |
| Academic achievement | 71.7 | 53.8 | 69.6 | 58.5 |
| Attendance | 75.1 | 49.1 | 74.2 | 57.1 |

Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student reported health is very good but student has long-term health condition) have been omitted in this table.

Graph 4.29: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students saying their health is excellent or very good and they have no long-term health problems or students saying their health is good, fair or poor and they have long-term health problems



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

For further discussion on students with disability, see other sections in this chapter (‘Learning and disability’) and Chapter 5 – Students in education support centres and students with disability.

Group discussion findings

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified that being healthy increased their ability to engage with school and learning. Students adopted a holistic view of health, with being healthy including physical, mental and emotional health. To be healthy students needed to:

- have their basic needs met – food, water and sleep
- be provided with or have access to healthy foods
- be provided with breaks and opportunities to be physically active
- have positive relationships with peers, school staff and family members.

Students identified that schools and families have important roles to play in meeting these needs. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular, felt schools could do more to support their health and wellbeing, particularly through the provision of breakfast programs and altering school times to take account of their changing biology through adolescence. Friends, school staff and family members contributed significantly to student health – as noted in previous chapters.

Being unhealthy or student ill-health negatively affected student learning and students wanted support and strategies to minimise the consequences of ill-health.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also identified that disabilities can make it difficult for some students to learn and to get the help and support they need. Students suggested a range of supports that students with disability may require to like and engage with school and learning. These supports are the same as those of all students, including having:

- acknowledgement of learning needs and subsequent support for learning
- someone to talk/communicate with
- someone to trust
- safety
- people to support them.

A holistic view of health

To be in a position to engage with school and learning students were cognisant of the importance of their basic needs being met. They indicated it was essential to have food, water and sleep to be able to concentrate. Generally families provided for these needs, however, as outlined in Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested, friends and schools also provided for basic necessities, and students requested support for these needs to be met. Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested schools had a role to play through programs such as breakfast clubs, and they felt that all schools should have these programs.

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 noted school can impinge on their ability to have their needs met, particularly regarding sleep. Students explained that their time is often taken up by school and work, and they may need to stay up late to complete homework.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Food.”</i></p> <p><i>“Water.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sleep.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Rest.”</i></p> <p><i>“Balanced diet.”</i></p> <p><i>“More sleep.”</i></p> <p><i>“Breakfast at home.”</i></p> |

The types of food available at school were also commented on by students, with identification of improvements that could be made to support student health. Many requested changes to the canteen menu, including increasing the amount of healthy food, and for prices to be reduced. For schools without canteens, the installation of one was seen as beneficial for students who forgot lunch and as an additional income stream for schools.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>“Healthy food in canteen.”</i></p> <p><i>“Eat food in class so whenever we are hungry we can eat.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change school by putting a cafeteria in the school. If you don’t have lunch or recess you could buy food yeh?”</i></p> <p><i>“A canteen because if you don’t have time to make lunch they could buy lunch and plus it will earn the school money.”</i></p> <p><i>“More healthy food.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Healthier food available to buy – it’s all sugary or greasy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Cheaper canteen and healthier canteen.”</i></p> <p><i>“More canteen options that will not break my bank. It is so expensive to buy lunch and recess.”</i></p> <p><i>“More food in our canteen and healthier options.”</i></p> <p><i>“A school farm so we can produce our own food like eggs and milk.”</i></p> <p><i>“Food in class.”</i></p> |

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 made a clear connection between their ability to concentrate and nutrition. Not being provided with food or being provided with unhealthy food made it difficult to concentrate on learning.

Year 3 to Year 6

“Feed them/as you need food to concentrate.”

“Feed you bad food e.g. McDonald’s because they have so much advertising. They are also so junky it is hard to learn.”

“Sometimes not bring lunch at all and you sit in class when you are supposed to be listening you are thinking about how hungry you are.”

“They [family members] provide lunch so that you can concentrate.”

Whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 requested changes to school organisation that would better enable them to engage with school and learning. Largely, their comments related to later school starting times to accommodate the biology and associated sleeping patterns of the adolescent brain, and more breaks from learning. Breaks from learning could include longer lunch times, earlier finish times or more pupil free days. Students explained these breaks gave their brains a rest, reenergised them and provided time to participate in activities they enjoyed and that promoted positive mental health, such as seeing friends, playing sport, listening to music or spending time with family.

Their comments emphasised the importance of breaks for learning, spending time with friends and play. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also suggested changes to school organisation that would enhance their health.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>“Earlier recess because I get really hungry before 10:55.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change the amount of time students have for lunch and recess because I don’t think we have enough time in those areas. I would change lunch to 50 minutes. I don’t think it’s fair that we have 6 hours doing nonstop work and 25 minutes as a break.”</i></p> <p><i>“Brain breaks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less hours at school because you don’t get a lot of sleep.”</i></p> <p><i>“I want the recess and lunch time to change because people don’t get to play enough!!”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change the time of recess and lunch because not everyone is a fast eater so they can’t play with their friends.”</i></p> | <p><i>“I wish school would start a bit later and finish later. Teenagers don’t function well when they are tired so by making school start later will help teenagers function and work to the best of their ability.”</i></p> <p><i>“Change the start and finish times to about 10:30-4:50 because teenagers are more focused at that time.”</i></p> <p><i>“Earlier lunch times – not after 1:15pm!”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like to have more pupil free days, because I get tired.”</i></p> |

Physical activity was noted by students in Year 3 to Year 6 as important for being healthy and to assist their behavioural and cognitive engagement in learning. Students discussed the importance of being physically active to increase their level on concentration when in class. Curriculum content and learning experiences that contributed positively to physical health were valued.

Year 3 to Year 6

"I liked learning about sport to get more fitter."

"Sport: you can get fitter and we have a nice teacher. I love being active and running around with friends."

"Because it is fun and I like to be fit and healthy."

"I liked football because it meant that everybody could get a run around in the fresh air and sport is better than work (football is the best)."

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 were cognisant that ill-health made it difficult to learn and to get the help and support they needed for learning. Absences and disruptions in class were referred to by students in Year 3 to Year 6 as contributing to difficulties with learning and getting support for learning, whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 discussed the mental health of students, disabilities and family issues.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>"When kids are away from school e.g. sick or on holidays."</i></p> <p><i>"Kids with mental health issues makes it hard for the other kids to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Homework when sick so you know stuff when you go back to school."</i></p> <p><i>"When a kid is sick and people want to take you down to the office."</i></p> | <p><i>"Mental issues."</i></p> <p><i>"Health and mental problems."</i></p> <p><i>"Home issues!"</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>domestic violence</i> • <i>drug abuse (very common in the Pilbara)</i> • <i>depression and other mental disabilities."</i> |

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 identified a need for support in regards to their mental health. Requesting formal education (as discussed in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues and Chapter 4.4 – Teaching and learning that is relevant), understanding from teachers, family members and peers, and outlining how quality time with friends and family supported wellbeing.

While family members were generally noted as positively influencing health and wellbeing, sometimes their actions to support student health were frustrating for students.

"If they make you stay home because you are sick but something fun is going on at school." (Year 3 to Year 6)

Suggestions from students

Students suggested changes to schools to create functional, clean and welcoming built environments that promote physical activity and social interaction. Specific suggestions included café-style or shaded tables and chairs within the school grounds so students could sit and talk together, more stairs to increase physical activity, fit-for-purpose areas (particularly to account for weather), stimulating playgrounds and different or better use of recreational sports areas to support student fitness (e.g. remove bans placed at certain times of day).

The cost and options of food from the canteen was commonly referred to as prohibitive. Students outlined canteen food was overpriced and requested healthier options. Some students also suggested regular breakfast clubs as essential for all schools.

Changes to school organisation to better enable student engagement with learning were also suggested. This included the timing and length of breaks and, for students in Year 7 to Year 12, change to the timing of the school day to account for the biology of adolescence. In particular, students suggested breaks from learning throughout the school day to increase concentration, motivation and engagement with learning. This included short breaks between lessons or classes, opportunities to move around or to be active and longer lunch breaks.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"I would change the canteen's menu because it's too unhealthy and messy. Quick, healthy snacks are more school-appropriate."</i></p> <p><i>"We could grow a veggie garden for the school canteen."</i></p> <p><i>"Playground redesign – more activities."</i></p> <p><i>"Lunch area I want a carpeted lunch area because we have to sit on cold stone."</i></p> <p><i>"Colourful walls (Patterns) because colourful and bright room can make the students more positive when they come in the room. Positive students can cause less bullying."</i></p> | <p><i>"We should get canteen cards like a smart rider."</i></p> <p><i>"School should start later in the morning."</i></p> <p><i>"Cheaper canteen and healthier canteen."</i></p> <p><i>"More food in our canteen and healthier options."</i></p> <p><i>"A school farm so we can produce our own food like eggs and milk."</i></p> |

The toilets were mentioned as an area for improvement, with this suggestion more common for students in Year 3 to Year 6. Students outlined toilets were untidy, unhygienic and lacked basic requirements such as toilet paper, soap, hand towels or hand dryers. Suggestions for toilets to be cleaned more frequently and to include mirrors were made.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|--|
| <p><i>"I would change the toilets because they are not very hygienic."</i></p> <p><i>"More toilet paper."</i></p> <p><i>"The toilets because the spiders."</i></p> <p><i>"Toilets because one toilet has no lock and there is wee all over the floor."</i></p> <p><i>"I would change the toilets they are disgusting and we need hygiene."</i></p> | <p><i>"There are too many mozzis [mosquitoes] in the change rooms."</i></p> <p><i>"Toilets are disgusting. There aren't any mirrors."</i></p> <p><i>"More bathrooms around the school."</i></p> <p><i>"A clean toilet with no graffiti."</i></p> |

Learning and disability

Children and young people with disability emphasise that their disability is just one part of their life.¹²⁸ Indeed, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹²⁹ and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹³⁰ require that children with disability are considered as children first, experiencing their lives as children and, by extension, students within the education system. However, the experiences of school for students with disability may differ considerably from their peers.

Within Australia, all students have the right to an education. Ensuring the system is accessible and equitable for all students requires that their needs are considered and catered for at a systemic, whole-school and classroom level. For some students, their disability may be undetected until commencement of school.

Within the consultation, students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified disabilities can make it difficult for some students to learn. They spoke of learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory impairments or mentioned ‘disability’ in general.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“It is hard for [name of student] because he has disability.”</i></p> <p><i>“They might have a disability.”</i></p> <p><i>“My friends has dyslexia and she needs glasses to read.”</i></p> <p><i>“Dyslexia.”</i></p> <p><i>“Blindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“Concussion.”</i></p> <p><i>“O.C.D.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hearing aid.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they have special needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“When kids have dyslexia or any disabilities and can’t work properly.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because some people are deaf or have autism.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they have special needs.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Behaviour problem.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they have problems/disabilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Disabilities (ADHD) (dyslexia).”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning difficulties.”</i></p> <p><i>“Behaviour issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning disabilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they have a disability they find it hard.”</i></p> <p><i>“They have learning disabilities.”</i></p> |

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also identified that having a disability can make it difficult to get support for learning. Students referred to communication, behaviour, cognition, viewpoints or understandings of others and ‘disability’ generally. Through previous consultations with children and young people with disability, supportive families were one of the good things in their lives.¹³¹ However, as students stated in this consultation, if family members found it difficult to acknowledge a young person’s disability then this impacted their capacity to access the help and support required for school and learning.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“The kids who have disability and can’t talk well it makes it hard for them to talk to others in the way they want to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some kids with disabilities can’t concentrate like us.”</i></p> <p><i>“People who have special needs.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Sickness, disability.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents may disagree on children’s disabilities for personal reasons. Often pride can influence a parent’s thoughts (unintentionally).”</i></p> |

While the majority of student comments referred to students with disability, family situations in which someone in the home environment had disability also had an impact on school and learning. Students in Year 7 to Year 12 explained having a family member with disability at home made it difficult to get the support they needed for school and learning. The reasons may be because other family members, such as parents, may be required to spend significant amounts of time caring for a sibling with disability. Alternatively, students may be young carers, providing informal care to family members.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Family situations – family with disability.”

“If you have a death/disabled sibling or family member in the family.”

As such, students were mindful of the varying needs of other students. They identified that some students may require individualised and tailored support for learning and to be empowered to participate in classroom activities. This required schools to acknowledge all needs of students, regardless of whether a diagnosis existed, and to support teaching staff in their roles. Without appropriate support, students noted that students with disabilities experienced difficulties in accessing school, engaging in learning or getting support for learning or other concerns. Students expressed a clear desire to be able to engage with and support students with disability.

| Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
|--|---|
| <p><i>“If they are blind they can talk about it, if mute we should be able to learn sign language to speak to them because when the blind or mute need us we can speak.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some kids with disabilities need helpers to help them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids with disability need a nursing hospital (or their own personal protector that they can trust).”</i></p> <p><i>“Learning disability.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s hard for kids with disabilities like down syndrome to get support. They might need a special EA to help them with all their school work.”</i></p> | <p><i>“Having mental disabilities at a school that has no help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids with disabilities will need easier ways to get somewhere such as ramps.”</i></p> <p><i>“Help people who have disability and make it hard for teachers to teach.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers need to properly acknowledge and respect even the smallest of disabilities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Depends on their condition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>deaf students need hearing aids</i> • <i>down syndrome students need an extra person to help.”</i> |

The kinds of support suggested by students above speak to the needs of all students and, in particular, the importance of having strong relationships and understanding from those around them. Students referred to having someone to talk to/communicate with, someone to trust, safety and support.

“If you had a disability you need someone close to your heart.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Suggestions from students

Within Australia, all students have the right to an education and to receive appropriate support to experience success. Similar to previous consultations undertaken by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, students expressed a desire for greater awareness and understanding of disabilities.¹³² Students clearly wanted schools, school staff and family members to acknowledge and to understand disability and potential impacts. Students also wanted schools and school staff to cater for the range of student abilities, no matter how small a disability was perceived to be.

“Dyslexia education.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Having a broader learning spectrum... Taking into account people’s learning skills and disabilities.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

There are a range of ways in which the education system can create equality and equity within the schooling system. What is critical is to adopt a strengths-based approach and to understand and respond to the needs of all students.

5. Students in education support centres and students with disability

The sample

Twenty-one students attending Year 3 to Year 12 at an education support centre participated in the survey. The students came from four government-run education support centres, one of which was in a regional area.^{133 134}

The students at education support centres completed an amended version of the school and learning survey. They used either hand-held electronic devices or desktop computers and some were assisted by teaching staff or a CCYP staff member.

Due to the small sample size of this survey (21), the discussion of findings will be descriptive and focus on outlining trends. Where comparison between students at education support centres and students at mainstream schools will be undertaken, it will be done using broad proportions only.

In addition to the discussion of the responses from students in education support centres, the responses from 46 students who were part of the Year 7 to Year 12 main sample and who reported having disability will also be discussed.¹³⁵

The views of students from mainstream schools regarding the intersection of health, disability and engagement with school and learning are discussed in Chapter 4.8 – Feeling physically and mentally well. The views were expressed through the group discussions and therefore students may or may not have identified as having a disability or long-term health condition. Through some of the responses it was clear students were referring to friends and other students and advocating for support.

Student profile

One-quarter of participating students in education support centres were born outside of Australia and reported that their parents spoke a language other than English at home.

No Aboriginal students attending an education support centre participated in the survey.

All participating students in education support centres had attended more than one primary or high school and more than one-half of them had attended three schools or more.

Students' health

All participating students in education support centres described their health as 'good' or better, and more than three-quarters said their health was 'very good' or 'excellent'. This is significant as it highlights that students with disability do not necessarily perceive their disability in terms of the impact it does or does not have on their health, or that their disability is linked with 'good' or 'poor' health outcomes.

The students reported a range of activities that they had difficulty with or could not do on account of their disability or long-term health condition. The most commonly mentioned activities that were impacted were 'doing school work in class' – more than one-half of students mentioned this – and 'sports'.

Liking school

When asked how they feel about school, one-half of students reported liking school 'a lot'. The other half of students answered that they like school 'a bit' or think 'it is OK'. One student reported not liking school.

Participating students at education support centres described a range of activities and things that they like about school. The most commonly mentioned activities were:

- seeing my friends (mentioned by three-quarters of respondents)
- sports (mentioned by three-quarters of respondents)
- learning new things (mentioned by one-half of respondents).

These three most commonly mentioned activities that students like about school are the same that were mentioned by students in mainstream schools.

Positive relationships with peers, teachers and family

Most participating students in education support centres (three-quarters) reported feeling that the teachers care ‘a lot’ about them. The remainder felt that teachers care ‘some’ and one student felt that teachers do not care about her/him.

In regard to receiving help for their school work, most students (more than two-thirds) answered that they ‘always’ get the help they need. The remainder of students answered that they ‘sometimes’ get help and one student said ‘not at all’.

When asked about relationships with other students, three-quarters of participating students reported getting along with the kids in their class ‘most of the time’. The remainder answered that they get along ‘sometimes’ and one student said that he/she does not get along with the kids in his/her class.

All students answered in the affirmative when asked whether their family says it is important they go to school every day.

Families were described as being engaged with their child’s school with nearly all students saying that their parents meet with the teacher, come to school activities, and also one-third saying that their parents help in class or at school. Most students also said that their family asks about their school work.

Safety and attendance

All participants said it was important to them to be at school every day with three-quarters saying it is ‘very important’ to them. Most students also reported being worried when they miss school but some said they were not.

In regard to safety, while nearly all students reported feeling safe either ‘all the time’ or ‘most of the time’, two students reported not feeling safe. In addition, more than one-half of students reported being afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school either ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’.

Bullying was the most commonly mentioned topic when students were asked what they would change if they could change one thing about their school. Seven students made a comment relating to bullying with other comments relating to more freedom or students saying they would not want to change anything.

“People who are bullies not to be at my school.”

“Bullying stop.”

“Do anything we want.”

“I would like to keep my school same like always.”

Overall, students attending school at an education support centre who participated in the survey presented positive attitudes and ideas about school and learning that were comparable and, at times, more favourable than those of students attending a mainstream school.

The participating students in education support centres provide a positive example of how students with disability who are well supported and show positive attitudes and thoughts about school and learning can achieve the same engagement outcomes as their peers.

When considered in more detail, three areas were found to stand out by trending more negatively for participating students in education support centres in comparison with students in the mainstream sample and these are:

- an increased likelihood to have changed schools more than once
- an increased likelihood of experiencing difficulties with a range of activities on account of their disability or long-term health condition
- an increased likelihood to feel concerned or worried about being hurt or bullied at school.

For all other topic areas the trends that were found for students in education support centres were comparable if not trending more positively than those described for students in the mainstream sample: students in education support centres exhibited a similar if not greater level of enjoyment of school (more than one-half of students in education support centres said they like school a lot), assigned equal or greater importance to being at school every day and listed the same top activities that they felt were most enjoyable about school.

As with students in mainstream schools, the majority of students in education support centres felt that teachers care about them, that mostly they receive the help they need to do their school work (the trend for students in education support centres was that they were more likely than students in mainstream schools to say they get the help they need) and that they get along well with the peers in their class.

Families were described as being engaged with their child's school and as assigning great importance to their child's daily attendance at school.

Students with disability in mainstream schools

Aside from the 21 students attending an education support centre, 46 students with disability who were attending Year 7 to Year 12 in a mainstream school also participated in the survey.

A number of areas were found to stand out for students with disability compared to students without disability (all part of the main sample). These were an increased likelihood to:

- have changed schools at least once
- have a long-term health problem or condition in addition to a disability
- experience difficulties with a range of activities on account of their disability or long-term health condition
- have difficulties with concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with people.

In addition, 17 per cent of surveyed students who had a disability were Aboriginal.

These factors compound students' vulnerability and disadvantage and are supported by the literature, much of which describes children and young people with disability experiencing poorer health, educational and employment outcomes compared to their peers without disability.^{136 137}

In terms of attitudes and thoughts about school and learning, there was little difference between students with and without disability in mainstream schools. The trends in the following areas can be described as positive and are comparable for both groups of students:

- most students like school (a lot or a bit)
- most students feel that teachers care about them and treat them fairly
- most students usually get along with their teachers
- most students usually get the help they need
- most students get along with their peers (slight trend for students with disability to be more likely not to disclose this information ('prefer not to say'))
- most students feel it is important to be at school every day (slight trend for students with disability to be more likely to find this 'somewhat important' and less likely to find it 'very important')
- most students find what they are learning very valuable.

Finally, comparison between students with and without disability in mainstream schools has shown students with disability were more likely to:

- have waggged school for a full day at least once in the school year
- have been suspended at least once (increased likelihood for both school suspension and in-school suspension)
- feel unsafe at school or worried about bullying
- not have gone to school at least once for fear of being hurt or bullied.

In summary, students with disability in mainstream schools reported a range of problems that have the potential to impact negatively on their school experience and making them more prone to vulnerability and disadvantage.

Despite their predisposition to increased vulnerability however students with disability described similarly positive attitudes towards school and learning as students without disability. For instance:

- Students with disability who are well supported either in mainstream or education support have positive experiences with school and learning.
- Students with disability who are well supported either in mainstream or education support can and will work towards reaching their potential.

6. Students in regional areas – comparative survey findings

Equal proportions of regional and metropolitan Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that:

- they like school a lot, a bit or think school is OK
- being at school every day is very important to them and their families
- they always get the help they need to do their school work
- they always get along with their teachers
- they feel that teachers care a lot about them.

Regional Year 3 to Year 6 students were **less likely** than metropolitan students to report that:

- they get along with their peers most of the time
- they feel safe all the time.

Regional Year 3 to Year 6 students were **more likely** than metropolitan students to:

- have been born in Australia
- be of Aboriginal origin.

Equal proportions of regional and metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students reported:

- they usually get the help they need to do their school work
- they usually get along with their teachers
- they feel that teachers care a lot about them
- they usually get along with their peers
- what they are learning at school is very valuable to them.

Regional Year 7 to Year 12 students were **less likely** than metropolitan students to report that:

- they like school a lot
- being at school every day is very important to them
- they feel safe all the time.

Regional Year 7 to Year 12 students were **more likely** than their metropolitan counterparts to:

- have been born in Australia
- be of Aboriginal origin.

The sample

In Year 3 to Year 6, a combined total of 493 students attending school in a regional area completed the School and Learning survey (313 regional students were in the main sample and 180 regional students were in the additional sample).

In Year 7 to Year 12, a combined total of 364 students attending school in a regional area completed the survey (208 regional students were in the main sample and 156 regional students were in the additional sample).

Regional students were oversampled (through the additional sample) to allow for more accurate comparisons between regional and metropolitan students.

The following chapter presents comparative results for the following three groups of students:

1. Regional students from the main sample (referred to as regional)
2. Metropolitan students from the main sample (referred to as metropolitan)
3. Regional students from the additional and the main sample combined (referred to as combined regional)

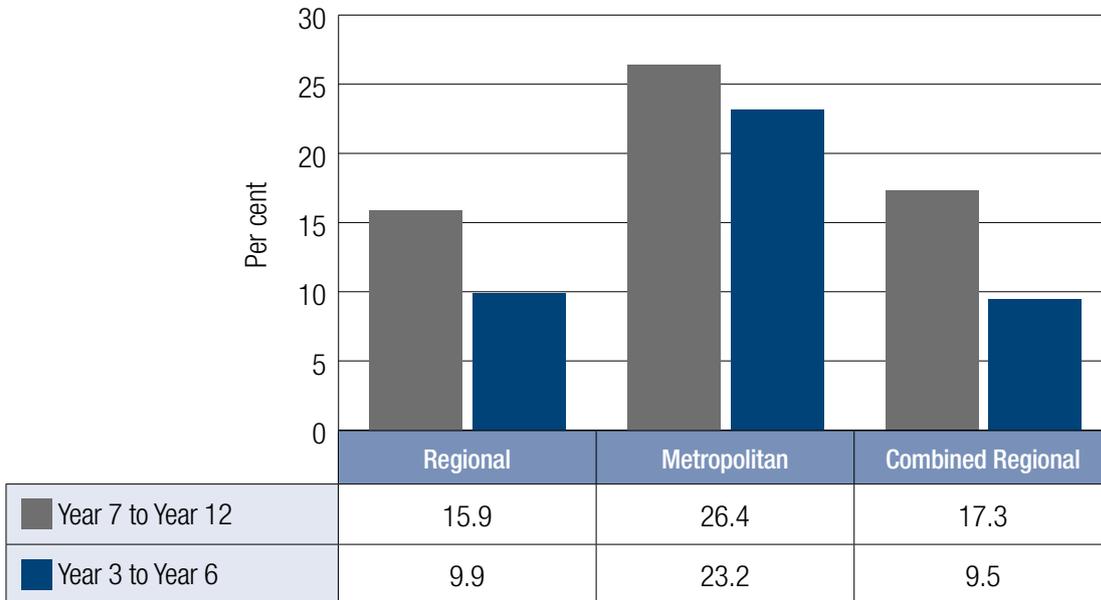
The results for regional and metropolitan students are the same as in the preceding chapters of this report. The combined results for regional students have been added to the tables in this chapter to allow for further and more robust comparison. They have not been discussed separately in the commentary unless a significant difference emerged in the comparison of the combined regional sample with the metropolitan sample. Combined regional results for survey indicators not included in this chapter are available upon request.

Comparative results

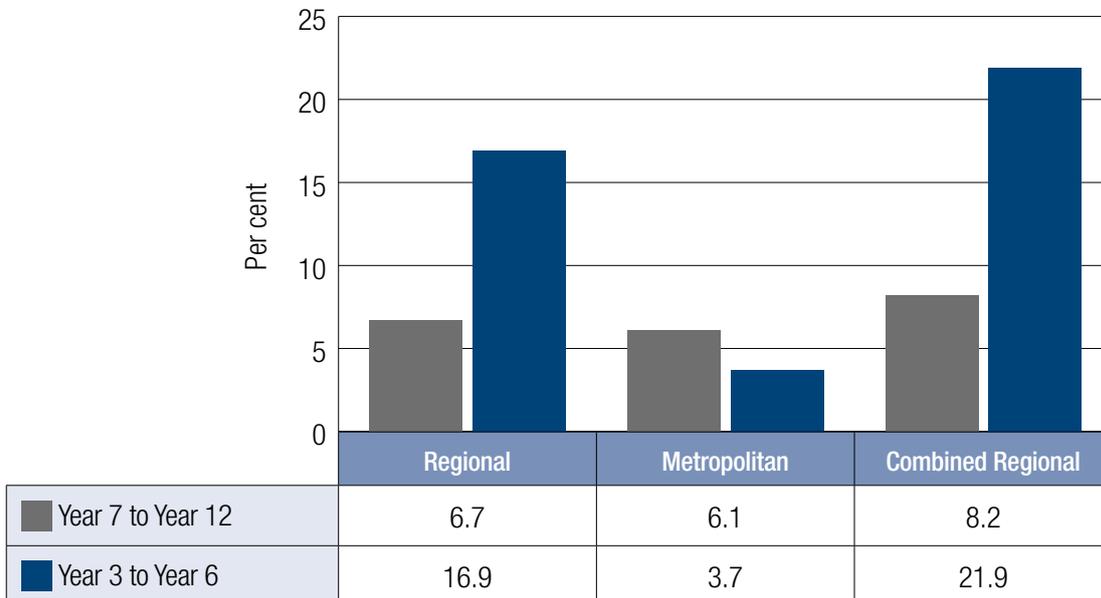
Overwhelmingly, students in regional and metropolitan areas expressed very similar thoughts, ideas and attitudes towards school and learning. The following chapter highlights some of the differences found between the two groups of students.

In regard to cultural background, students in regional areas were more likely to have been born in Australia and also more likely to identify as Aboriginal.

Graph 6.1: Proportion of students born outside of Australia, by year level and region



Graph 6.2: Proportion of students identifying as Aboriginal, by year level and region



Liking school

Equal proportions of regional and metropolitan Year 3 to Year 6 students said they like school 'a lot', 'a bit' or think 'school is OK'. Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, regional students were less likely to answer that they like school 'a lot' (24.0% versus 36.6%) and were instead more likely to say they like it 'a bit' (31.7% compared to 22.8%).

Similar proportions of Year 7 to Year 12 students in both geographic areas answered that they don't like school (12.1% of regional students compared to 10.6% of metropolitan students).

Comparison of results for the younger and older cohort shows that the proportion of regional Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school 'a lot' is about one-half of the proportion of regional Year 3 to Year 6 students saying the same (24.0% compared to 49.2%). While it is common for Year 7 to Year 12 students to be less enthusiastic about school than Year 3 to Year 6 students, the decrease in the proportion of students who say they like school 'a lot' is more significant for regional than for metropolitan students.

Correspondingly, there is an increase from primary to high school in the proportion of students saying they don't like school. Here the increase is similar for regional and metropolitan students.

Graph 6.3: Proportion of students saying they like school a lot or they don't like school/not at all, by year level and region

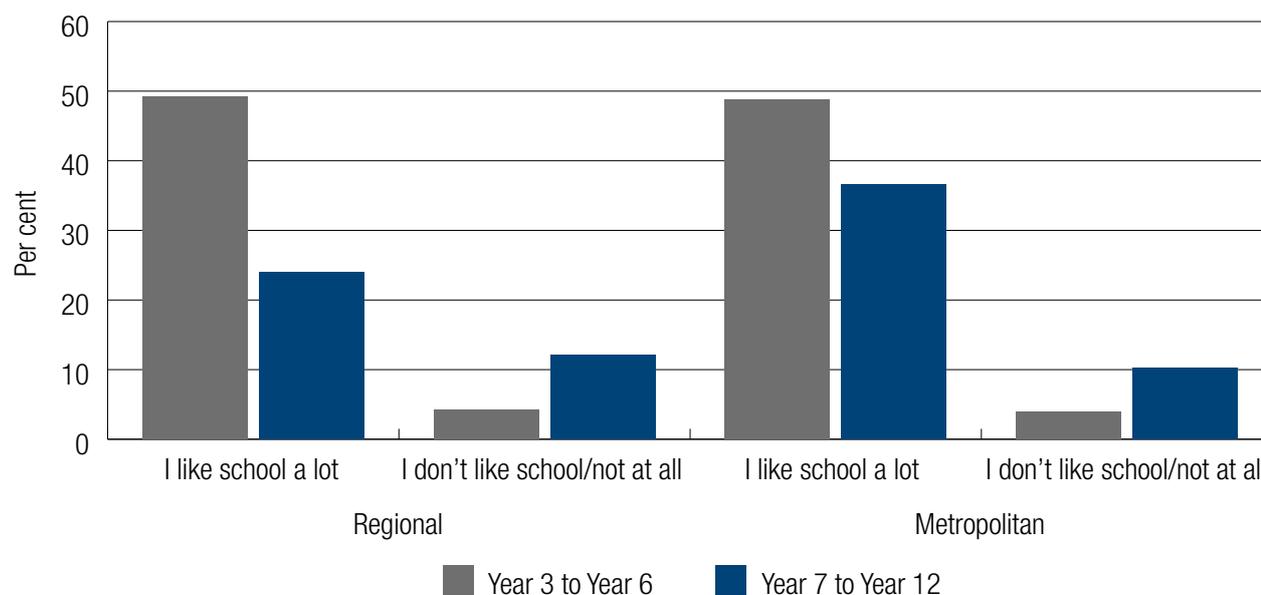


Table 6.1: Proportion of students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don't like school or not at all, by year level and region

| | Regional | | Metropolitan | | Combined Regional | |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 | Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 | Year 3 to Year 6 | Year 7 to Year 12 |
| I like school a lot | 49.2 | 24.0 | 48.8 | 36.6 | 49.3 | 24.5 |
| I like school a bit | 26.2 | 31.7 | 26.0 | 22.8 | 26.6 | 30.5 |
| It's OK | 20.4 | 32.2 | 21.3 | 30.0 | 19.9 | 33.2 |
| I don't like school | 2.9 | 8.7 | 2.6 | 6.8 | 3.2 | 8.2 |
| I don't like school at all | 1.3 | 3.4 | 1.3 | 3.8 | 1.0 | 3.6 |

Positive relationships

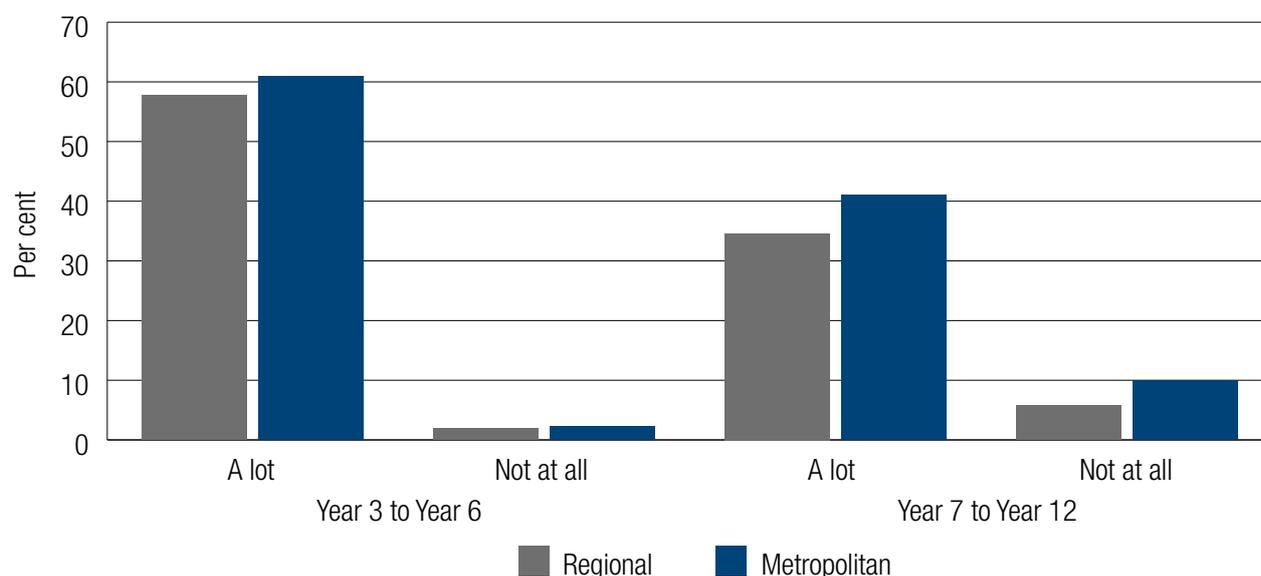
There was little difference between Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional and metropolitan areas in regard to how well they get along with their teachers. Similar proportions of students in both geographic areas reported getting along with their teachers 'always' (57.8% versus 60.1%), 'sometimes' (39.3% versus 38.6%) and 'not at all' (2.9% versus 1.3%).

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, there was a higher proportion of regional than metropolitan students saying they 'usually' get along with their teachers (80.3% versus 75.1%) but the difference was not statistically significant.

In regard to how much students feel that teachers care about them, there was no difference measured between Year 3 to Year 6 students from metropolitan and regional areas (61.0% in metropolitan areas and 57.8% in regional areas said they feel teachers care 'a lot').

For Year 7 to Year 12 students, there was a higher proportion of metropolitan than regional students saying that people at school care ‘a lot’ about them (41.0% versus 34.6%) and also that they do not care ‘at all’ (9.9% versus 5.8%) but as with the preceding question neither difference was statistically significant.

Graph 6.4: Proportion of students feeling teachers care a lot or not at all, by year level and region



In regard to relationships with peers, Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional areas were less likely to report getting along with the kids in their class ‘most of the time’ (74.7% versus 79.1%) and instead were more likely to report getting along ‘sometimes’ (23.1% compared to 19.1%). These differences were not statistically significant.

A significant difference however was measured between the combined sample of regional students and metropolitan students. The proportion of regional students saying they get along ‘most of the time’ was significantly lower than that for metropolitan students saying the same (70.6% versus 79.1%).

The proportion of students saying they do not get along ‘at all’ with the kids in their class was similar for both these groups (2.2% versus 1.8%).

Table 6.2: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with peers most of the time, sometimes or not at all, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|-----------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Yes, most of the time | 74.7 | 79.1 | 70.6 |
| Sometimes | 23.1 | 19.1 | 26.9 |
| No, not at all | 2.2 | 1.8 | 2.4 |

There was little difference measured for Year 7 to Year 12 students in regard to this question.

Table 6.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with peers usually, sometimes, hardly ever, not at all or prefer not to say, by region

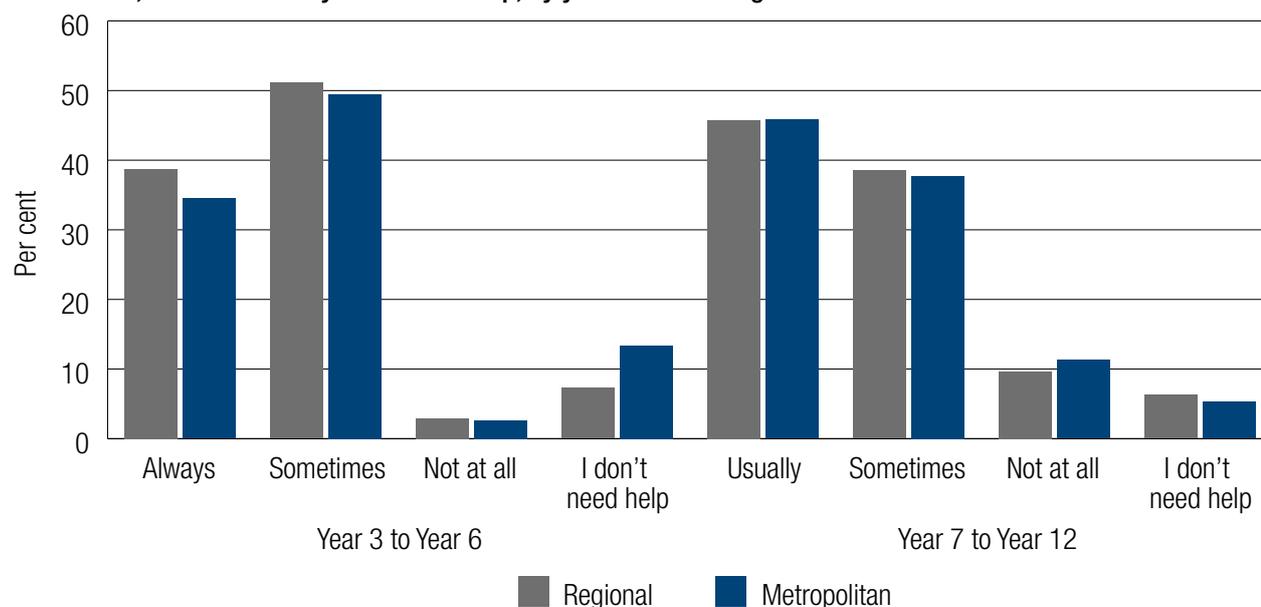
| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|-------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Usually | 78.4 | 77.8 | 77.2 |
| Sometimes | 16.3 | 17.8 | 18.1 |
| Hardly ever | 2.4 | 1.3 | 2.2 |
| Not at all | 1.0 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Prefer not to say | 1.9 | 2.3 | 1.6 |

Help and support

A higher proportion of regional than metropolitan Year 3 to Year 6 students reported 'always' getting the help they need to do their school work (38.7% versus 34.5%) while a higher proportion of metropolitan students said that they 'don't need help' (13.4% versus 7.3%). Neither of these differences however was found to be statistically significant.

For Year 7 to Year 12 students, almost equal proportions of students from regional and metropolitan areas answered they get the help they need 'usually' (45.7% versus 45.8%), 'sometimes' (38.5% versus 37.7%) and also 'hardly ever' or 'not at all' (9.6% versus 11.3%).

Graph 6.5: Proportion of students saying they get the help they need to do their school work always/usually, sometimes, not at all or they don't need help, by year level and region



Attendance

In regard to attendance at school, Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional and metropolitan areas were about equally likely to say that being at school every day is 'very important' (76.7% versus 72.9%) or 'somewhat important' to them (21.7% versus 24.7%).

There was also no significant difference measured in regard to how important students' regular attendance was to their families (89.5% versus 84.4%).

Table 6.4: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to them to be at school every day, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Very important | 76.7 | 72.9 | 76.3 |
| Somewhat important | 21.7 | 24.7 | 21.9 |
| Not important | 1.6 | 2.4 | 1.8 |

Table 6.5: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying their family says that being at school every day is important or not, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Family says it is important | 89.5 | 84.4 | 89.2 |
| Sometimes | 8.9 | 12.4 | 9.1 |
| Family does not say it is important | 1.6 | 3.3 | 1.6 |

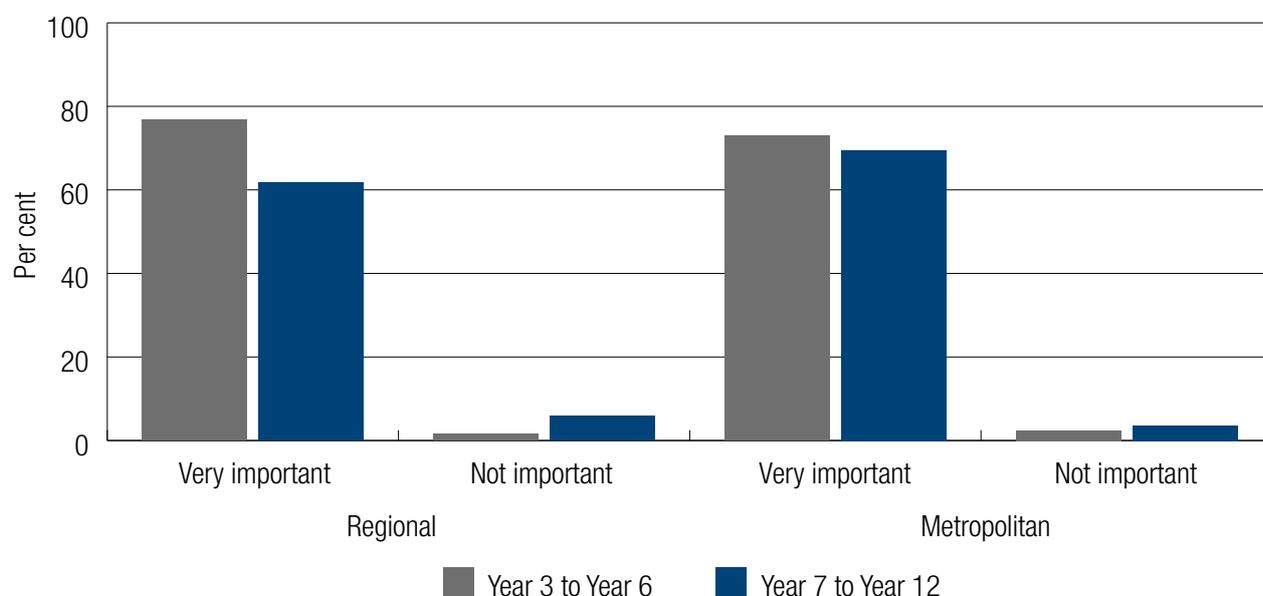
Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, the proportion of regional students saying that being at school every day is 'very important' to them was lower than that of metropolitan students saying the same (61.8% versus 69.5%) but the difference was not statistically significant.

There was however a significant decrease in the proportion of regional Year 7 to Year 12 students saying that daily school attendance was 'very important' when compared to their Year 3 to Year 6 counterparts (61.8% versus 76.7%). In contrast, there was little to no such difference measured between the two age groups for metropolitan students with about equal proportions saying that being at school every day is 'very important' to them (72.9% versus 69.5%).

Table 6.6: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to them to be at school every day, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Very important | 61.8 | 69.5 | 63.1 |
| Somewhat important | 32.4 | 26.9 | 31.1 |
| Not important | 5.8 | 3.6 | 5.8 |

Graph 6.6: Proportion of students saying that being at school every day is very important or not important, by year level and region

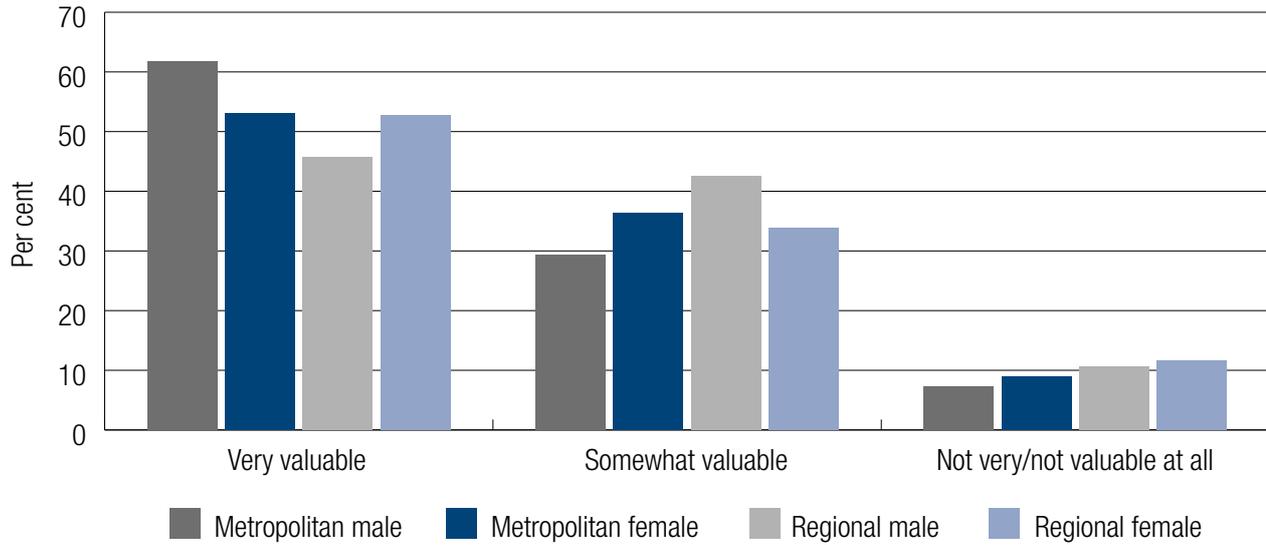


Students valuing what they are learning

A lower proportion of regional than metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students said that what they are learning at school is 'very valuable' to them (49.3% versus 56.1%) and a higher proportion said it is 'not very valuable' or 'not valuable at all' (11.1% versus 8.7%). These differences were not statistically significant.

While there was no significant difference measured between female students in both geographic areas, male students in metropolitan areas were found to be significantly more likely than their regional peers to say that what they are learning at school is 'very valuable' to them (61.8% versus 45.7%).

Graph 6.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying what they are learning at school is very valuable, somewhat valuable or not very valuable/not at all valuable, by gender and region



Safety

Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional areas were significantly less likely to say that they feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (47.0% versus 57.2%) and more likely to say they feel safe ‘most of the time’ (41.5% versus 32.4%).

The proportions of students saying they ‘sometimes don’t feel safe’ or ‘don’t feel safe’ were largely similar for Year 3 to Year 6 students in all areas. A somewhat larger proportion of students in regional areas reported being ‘often’ afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school (10.9% versus 8.9%), and this proportion increased when results from the combined regional sample were compared to the metropolitan results (12.8% versus 8.9%).

Graph 6.8: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe at school all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don’t feel safe or they don’t feel safe, by region

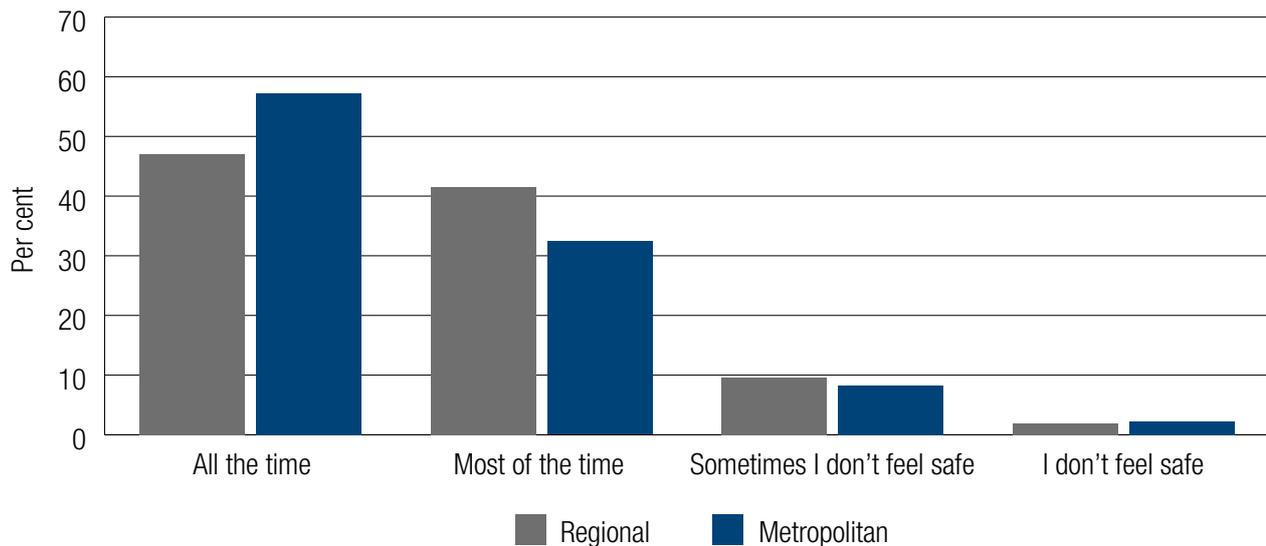


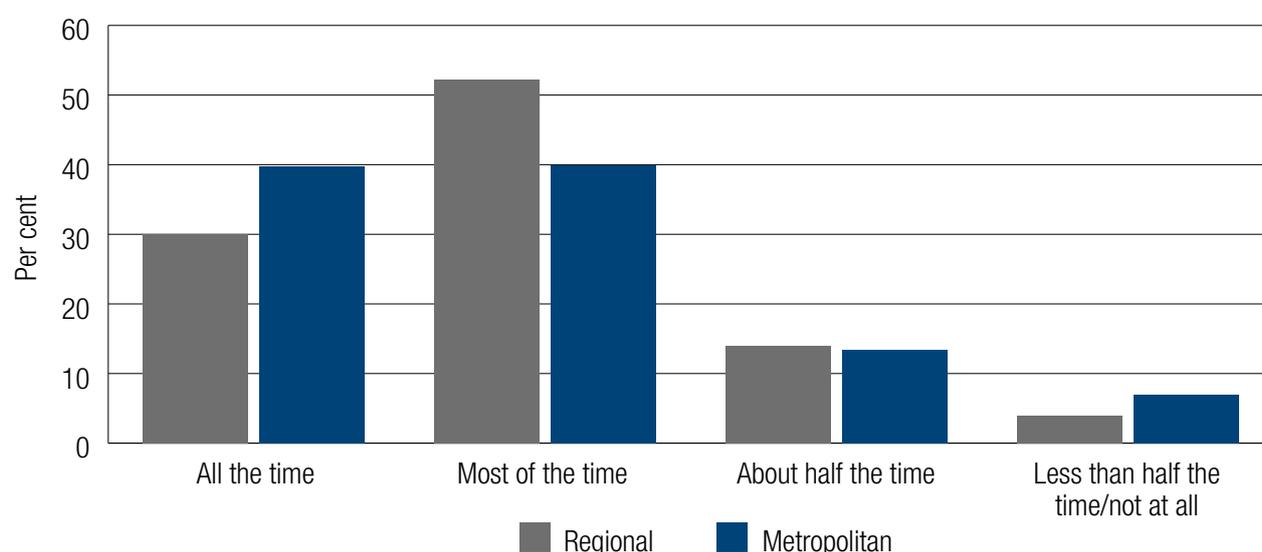
Table 6.7: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|-----------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Never | 43.6 | 45.2 | 45.6 |
| Sometimes | 45.5 | 45.9 | 41.5 |
| Often | 10.9 | 8.9 | 12.8 |

Similar differences were found for the older cohort. Year 7 to Year 12 students in regional areas were less likely to say that they feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (30.0% versus 39.7%) and more likely to say that they feel safe ‘most of the time’ (52.2% versus 39.9%).

The proportions of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying that they feel safe ‘about half the time’ were largely similar across both measured areas however a higher proportion of metropolitan students reported feeling safe ‘less than half the time’ or ‘not at all’ (7.0% versus 3.9% – not statistically significant).

Graph 6.9: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe in their school all the time, most of the time, about half the time or less than half the time/not at all, by region



A higher proportion of regional than metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having been afraid at least once in the current school year that someone will hurt or bully them at school (48.8% versus 42.0%). The difference was only significant when the combined regional sample was compared to the metropolitan sample (51.8% versus 42.0%):

Table 6.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times or 6 or more times been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by region

| | Regional | Metropolitan | Combined Regional |
|---------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Never | 51.2 | 58.0 | 48.2 |
| Once or twice | 32.9 | 25.1 | 34.7 |
| 3 – 5 times | 7.7 | 7.4 | 9.4 |
| 6 or more | 8.2 | 9.6 | 7.7 |

7. Aboriginal students – comparative survey findings

Equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they:

- like school a lot
- feel that teachers care a lot about them
- feel safe at school all the time.

Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students were **less likely** than non-Aboriginal students to report that they:

- get along with the kids in their class most of the time
- always get along with their teachers
- always get the help they need to do their school work.

Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students were **more likely** than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to:

- say that being at school every day is very important to them
- attend school in a regional area.

Equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that:

- being at school every day is very important to them
- they feel part of their school
- they like school a lot
- they feel that teachers care a lot about them
- they feel safe all the time.

Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students were **less likely** than non-Aboriginal students to report that:

- they usually get along with their teachers
- they usually get along with their class mates
- they always get the help they need to do their school work
- what they are learning at school is 'very' or 'somewhat' valuable
- people at school expect them to do well.

Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students were **more likely** than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to:

- attend school in a regional area
- report adverse health outcomes.

The sample

In Year 3 to Year 6, a combined total of 125 students identifying as Aboriginal completed the School and Learning survey (70 students were part of the main sample and 55 students were in the additional sample).

In Year 7 to Year 12, a combined total of 59 students identifying as Aboriginal completed the School and Learning survey (43 students were part of the main sample and 16 students were in the additional sample).

The research aim was to oversample Aboriginal students (through the additional sample) in order to allow for more accurate comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However due to the described limitations of the sampling methodology this was not successful and a smaller than expected number of Aboriginal students participated in the additional sample.

The following chapter presents comparative results for the following three groups of students:

1. Aboriginal students from the main sample (referred to as Aboriginal)
2. Non-Aboriginal students from the main sample (referred to as non-Aboriginal)
3. Aboriginal students from the additional and the main sample combined (referred to as combined Aboriginal).

The results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are the same as in the preceding chapters of this report. The combined Aboriginal results have been added to the tables in this chapter to allow for further and more robust comparison. They have not been discussed separately in the commentary unless a significant difference emerged in the comparison of the combined Aboriginal sample with the non-Aboriginal sample. Combined Aboriginal results for survey indicators not included in this chapter are available upon request.

Comparative results

Generally, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students expressed very similar thoughts, ideas and attitudes towards school and learning. The following chapter highlights some of the differences found between the two groups of students.

Firstly, Aboriginal students in Year 3 to Year 6 were more likely to attend school in a regional area (16.9% of participating regional students identified as Aboriginal compared to 3.7% of metropolitan students). This is largely consistent with current school data.¹³⁸

Secondly, more than one-third of surveyed Year 3 to Year 6 Aboriginal students¹³⁹ reported that their parents usually speak an Aboriginal language (33.6%) or Creole language (7.0%) at home. Around the same proportion of students answered that they speak an Aboriginal language (32.0%) or Creole language (7.0%) well enough to have a conversation in.

For Year 7 to Year 12, the proportion of Aboriginal students was largely similar in the regional and metropolitan samples (6.7% of participating regional students identified as Aboriginal compared to 6.1% of metropolitan students). This is not consistent with actual school data, which shows that regional schools have a significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal students than metropolitan schools.¹⁴⁰

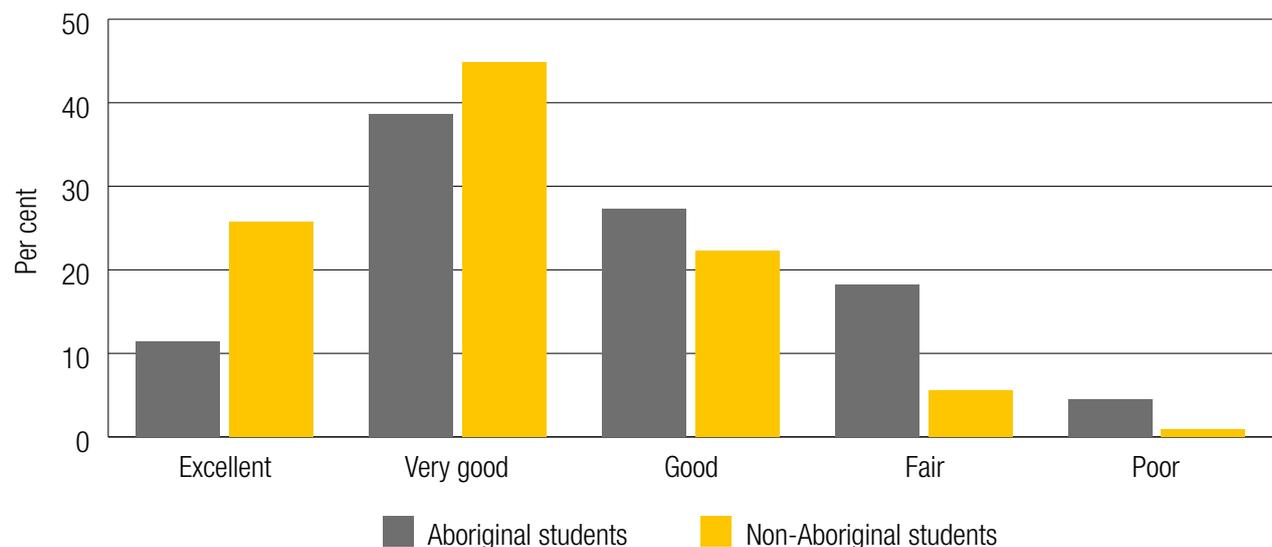
More than one-third of surveyed Year 7 to Year 12 Aboriginal students¹⁴¹ reported that their parents usually speak an Aboriginal language (38.6%) or Creole language (6.8%) at home. Around the same proportion of students answered that they speak an Aboriginal language (31.8%) or Creole language (6.8%) well enough to have a conversation in.

Students' health

In regard to students' health and wellbeing, results from the Year 7 to Year 12 survey show a number of significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

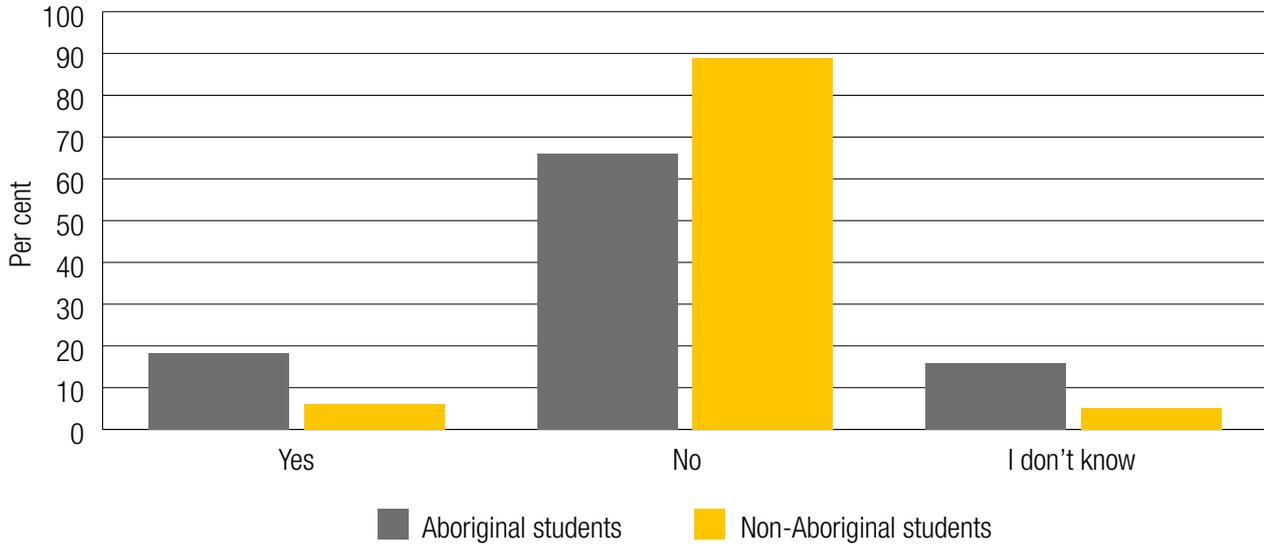
Firstly, Aboriginal students were significantly less likely to assess their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' and more likely to describe their health as 'good', 'fair' or 'poor'.

Graph 7.1: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying their health is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor, by Aboriginal status



Secondly, Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have a long-term disability lasting six months or more (18.2% compared to 6.0%).

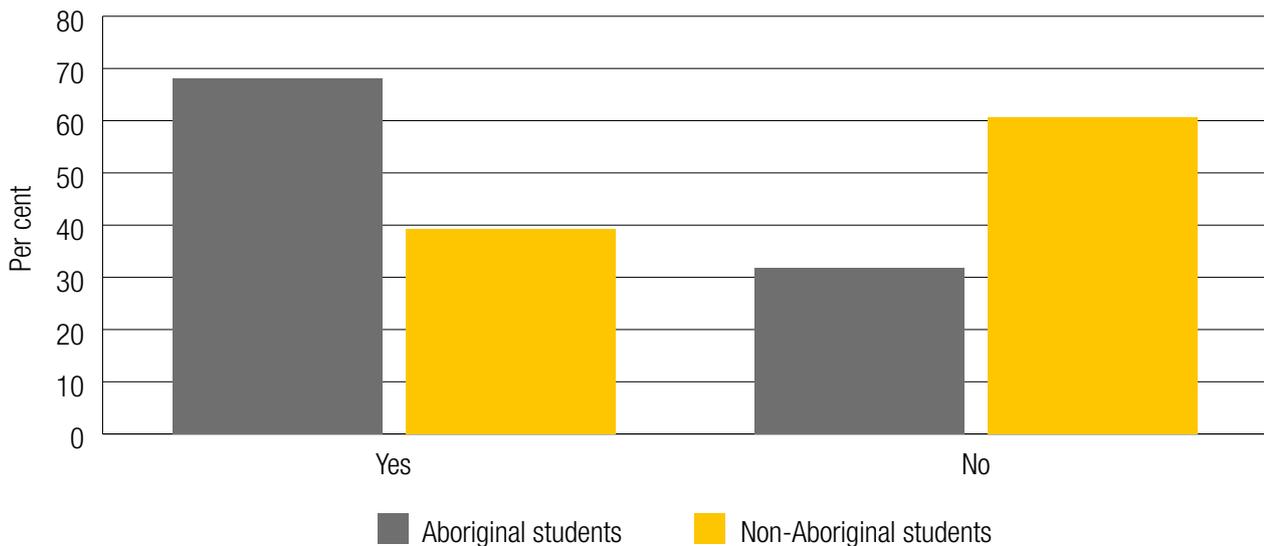
Graph 7.2: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they do or don't have a long-term disability or they don't know, by Aboriginal status



Thirdly, Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to report having to do extra work around their house because someone has a disability, is sick or can't do things (34.1% of Aboriginal students reported this compared to 13.5% of non-Aboriginal students).

And finally, Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students were significantly more likely to report having difficulties in areas such as concentration, behaviours, feelings or being able to get along with other people (68.1% of Aboriginal students reported having such difficulties compared to 39.3% of non-Aboriginal students).

Graph 7.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they do or don't have difficulties in any of the following areas: concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with other people, by Aboriginal status



In summary, Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to report adverse results against all health indicators included in the survey. This is of particular concern given the negative impact of ill-health on all engagement indicators surveyed in this consultation. For more survey findings on the health and wellbeing of students see Chapter 4.8 – Feeling physically and mentally well.

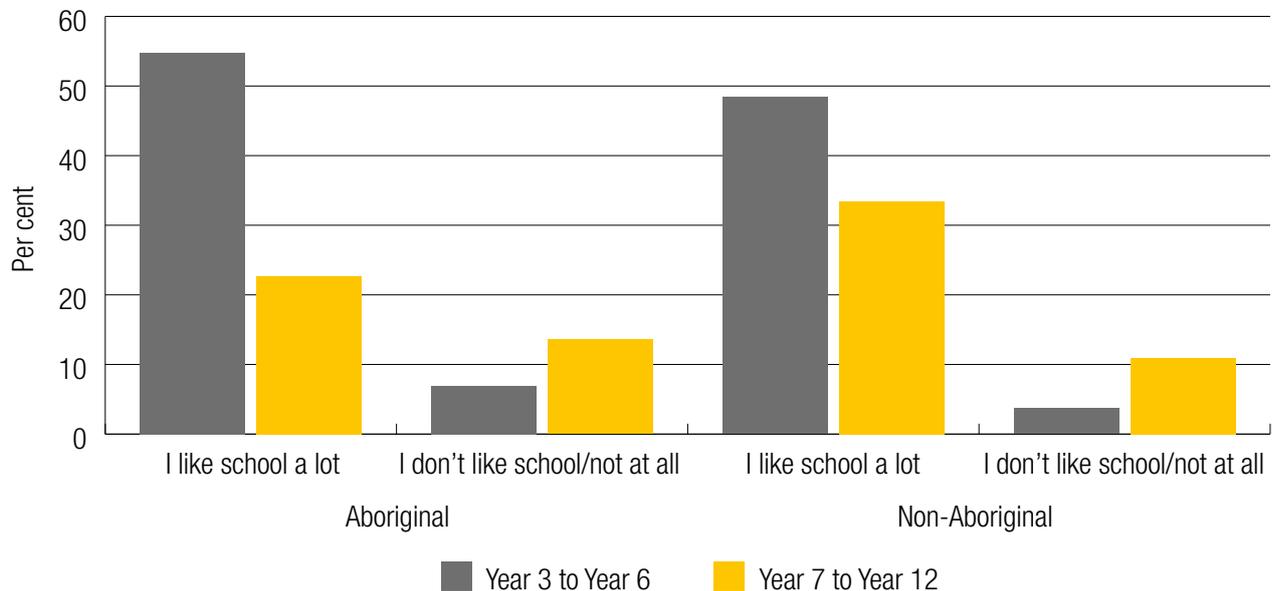
Liking school and sense of belonging

When asked how they feel about school, a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students reported liking school 'a lot' (54.8% versus 48.4%) however the difference was not statistically significant. The proportion of students saying they 'don't like school' or 'don't like school at all' was largely similar for both groups (6.9% versus 3.7% – not statistically significant).

For Year 7 to Year 12 students, a lower proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students said that they like school 'a lot' (22.7% versus 33.4%) but the difference was not statistically significant. In regard to not liking school, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were about equally likely to say that they 'don't like school'¹⁴² (13.6% versus 10.9%).

For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the proportion of respondents saying they like school 'a lot' decreased significantly from Year 3 to Year 6 to Year 7 to Year 12. However, the decrease was greater for Aboriginal students than non-Aboriginal students (54.8% of Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students said they like school a lot compared to only 22.7% of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students. For non-Aboriginal students, the proportion dropped from 48.4% to 33.4%).

Graph 7.4: Proportion of students saying they like school a lot or they don't like school/not at all, by year level and Aboriginal status



In regard to perceived sense of belonging, about equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel like they are part of their school (79.5% versus 74.8%).

Positive relationships with teachers

There were a number of significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how well they get along with their teachers. The proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they 'always' get along with their teachers was lower for Aboriginal students in the combined sample than the non-Aboriginal students in the main sample (46.1% versus 59.9%).

The same was found for Year 7 to Year 12 students: the proportion of Aboriginal students reporting getting along with their teachers 'usually' was lower for Aboriginal students in the main sample (65.1%) and the combined sample (61.0%) than for non-Aboriginal students in the main sample (77.4%).

Table 7.1: Proportion of students saying they get along with teachers always/usually, sometimes or hardly ever/not at all, by year level and Aboriginal status

| | Year 3 to Year 6 | | | Year 7 to Year 12 | | |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
| Always/usually | 53.4 | 59.9 | 46.1 | 65.1 | 77.4 | 61.0 |
| Sometimes | 42.5 | 38.4 | 50.0 | 27.3 | 18.8 | 30.5 |
| Hardly ever/not at all | 4.1 | 1.7 | 3.9 | 9.1 | 3.8 | 8.5 |

When students were asked how much they feel that teachers at their school care about them, similar proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in both year groups answered they feel that teachers care 'a lot'.

However, a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students felt that teachers did 'not [care] at all' (6.8% versus 1.7%).

Table 7.2: Proportion of students saying they feel teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by year level and Aboriginal status

| | Year 3 to Year 6 | | | Year 7 to Year 12 | | |
|------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
| A lot | 63.0 | 59.2 | 60.2 | 40.9 | 39.0 | 39.0 |
| Some | 30.1 | 39.1 | 33.6 | 54.5 | 52.0 | 52.5 |
| Not at all | 6.8 | 1.7 | 6.3 | 4.5 | 8.9 | 8.5 |

More than two-thirds of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed with the statement that 'Some teachers have shown a special interest in my culture or ethnic background'.

Table 7.3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing or disagreeing with the statement 'Some teachers have shown a special interest in my culture or ethnic background', by Aboriginal status

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----------------|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Aboriginal | 27.9 | 39.5 | 18.6 | 9.3 | 4.7 |
| Non-Aboriginal | 9.3 | 22.6 | 42.9* | 16.8 | 8.5 |

*The response options did not include 'not applicable' and it can therefore be assumed that a large proportion of non-ethnic background students would have opted for the response 'neither agree nor disagree'.

Positive relationships with peers

Aboriginal students in both year groups were significantly less likely than non-Aboriginal students to say that they get along with peers ‘most of the time’ (Year 3 to Year 6) or ‘usually’ (Year 7 to Year 12) and instead were more likely to report getting along ‘sometimes’.

The proportion of students saying they ‘do not get along at all’ or ‘hardly ever’ with the students in their class was larger for Aboriginal than for non-Aboriginal students in both year groups.

Table 7.4: Proportion of students saying they get along with peers most of the time/usually, sometimes, hardly ever/not at all or they prefer not to say, by year level and Aboriginal status

| | Year 3 to Year 6 | | | Year 7 to Year 12 | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
| Most of the time/usually | 66.7 | 78.4 | 63.0 | 54.5 | 79.4 | 56.7 |
| Sometimes | 29.2 | 19.9 | 31.5 | 29.5 | 16.5 | 28.3 |
| Hardly ever/not at all | 4.2 | 1.7 | 5.5 | 6.8 | 2.4 | 8.3 |
| Prefer not to say | n/a | n/a | n/a | 9.1 | 1.7 | 6.7 |

Help and support

Aboriginal students in both year groups were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to report that they ‘always’ (Year 3 to Year 6) or ‘usually’ (Year 7 to Year 12) get the help they need to do their school work and instead were more likely to report getting help ‘sometimes’.

The type of help that was most commonly required by Year 3 to Year 6 Aboriginal students was ‘my teacher to explain it’ – this was mentioned by two-thirds of Aboriginal students (66.4%) – followed by ‘more time to complete my work’ (35.9%).

Table 7.5: Proportion of students saying they always/usually, sometimes, hardly ever/not at all get the help they need to do their school work or they don’t need help, by year level and Aboriginal status

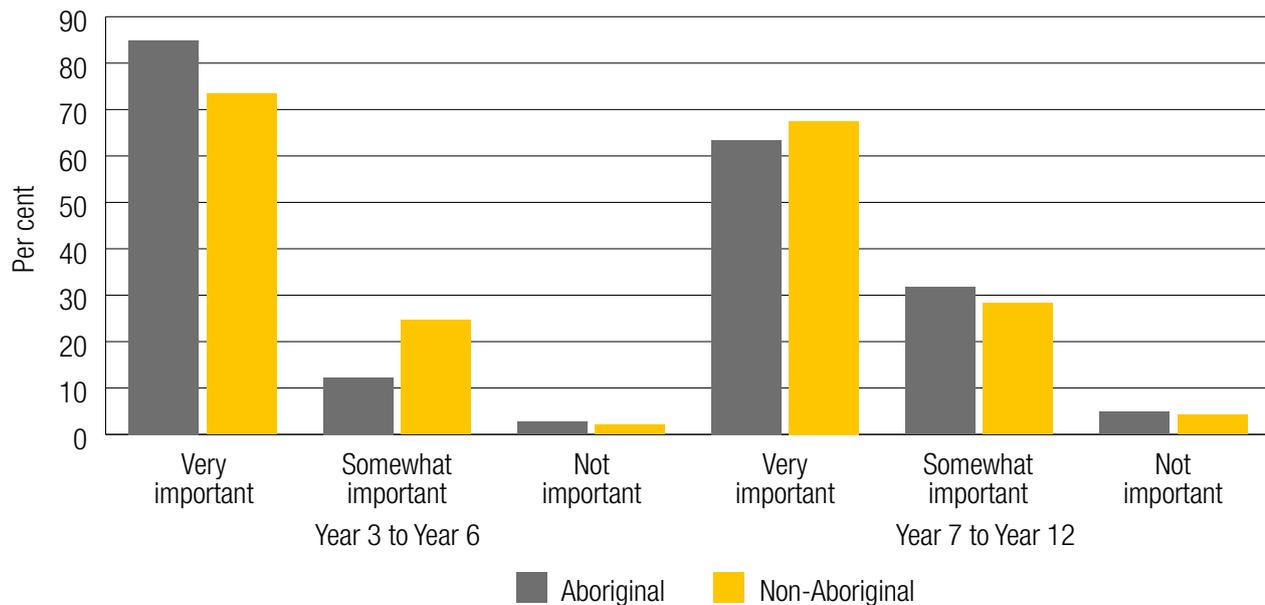
| | Year 3 to Year 6 | | | Year 7 to Year 12 | | |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
| Always/usually | 26.0 | 37.2 | 32.0 | 34.1 | 46.5 | 38.3 |
| Sometimes | 63.0 | 48.9 | 58.6 | 47.7 | 37.2 | 40.0 |
| Hardly ever/not at all | 2.7 | 2.7 | 3.9 | 6.8 | 11.0 | 11.7 |
| I don’t need help | 8.2 | 11.2 | 5.5 | 11.4 | 5.3 | 10.0 |

Attendance

A significantly higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students answered that being at school every day is very important to them (84.9% versus 73.4%).

A similar difference however was not found for Year 7 to Year 12 students. Around two-thirds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (63.4% and 67.5%) said that being at school every day is 'very important' to them, a little less than one-third (31.7% and 28.3%) felt it was 'somewhat important' and the remainder (around 5% for both groups) felt it was 'not important' to them.

Graph 7.5: Proportion of students saying that being at school every day is very important, somewhat important or not important, by year level and Aboriginal status



The proportion of students saying their regular attendance at school is important to their families was similar for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Changing schools

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students in both year groups reported having attended three or more schools however the differences were not statistically significant (24.6% versus 16.1% for Year 3 to Year 6 students and 13.7% versus 7.5% for Year 7 to Year 12 students).

Table 7.6: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students having been a student at one, two, three, four or five or more primary schools, by Aboriginal status

| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
|----------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 (just this school) | 41.1 | 55.0 | 39.1 |
| 2 | 34.2 | 29.0 | 35.9 |
| 3 | 13.7 | 9.7 | 11.7 |
| 4 | 4.1 | 4.0 | 4.7 |
| 5 or more | 6.8 | 2.4 | 8.6 |

Table 7.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students having been a student at one, two, three, four or five or more high schools, by Aboriginal status

| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
|----------------------|------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 (just this school) | 56.8 | 76.0 | 58.3 |
| 2 | 29.5 | 16.5 | 28.3 |
| 3 | 9.1 | 5.5 | 10.0 |
| 4 | 2.3 | 0.9 | 1.7 |
| 5 or more | 2.3 | 1.1 | 1.7 |

Valuing learning

Three-quarters of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that what they were learning at school was 'very' or 'somewhat valuable' however this was a significantly smaller proportion than that of non-Aboriginal students saying the same (89.9%). Almost one in five Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that what they were learning was 'not very valuable' or 'not valuable' to them (20.4% versus 8.8%).

Aboriginal students also felt less confident than non-Aboriginal students about people at school expecting them to do well – one-quarter of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students felt 'unsure' about this and almost seven per cent said that people don't expect them to do well.

Safety

About equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students reported feeling safe at school 'all the time' (54.8% versus 52.9%). A significant difference however emerged when results from the combined Aboriginal sample were compared to the non-Aboriginal sample of students. Here, Aboriginal students were significantly more likely to feel safe at school 'all the time' (62.5% versus 52.9%).

For Year 7 to Year 12 students the results were similar with a higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students saying that they feel safe at school 'all the time' (43.2% versus 36.2%) however the difference was not statistically significant (and also not significant for the combined sample results).

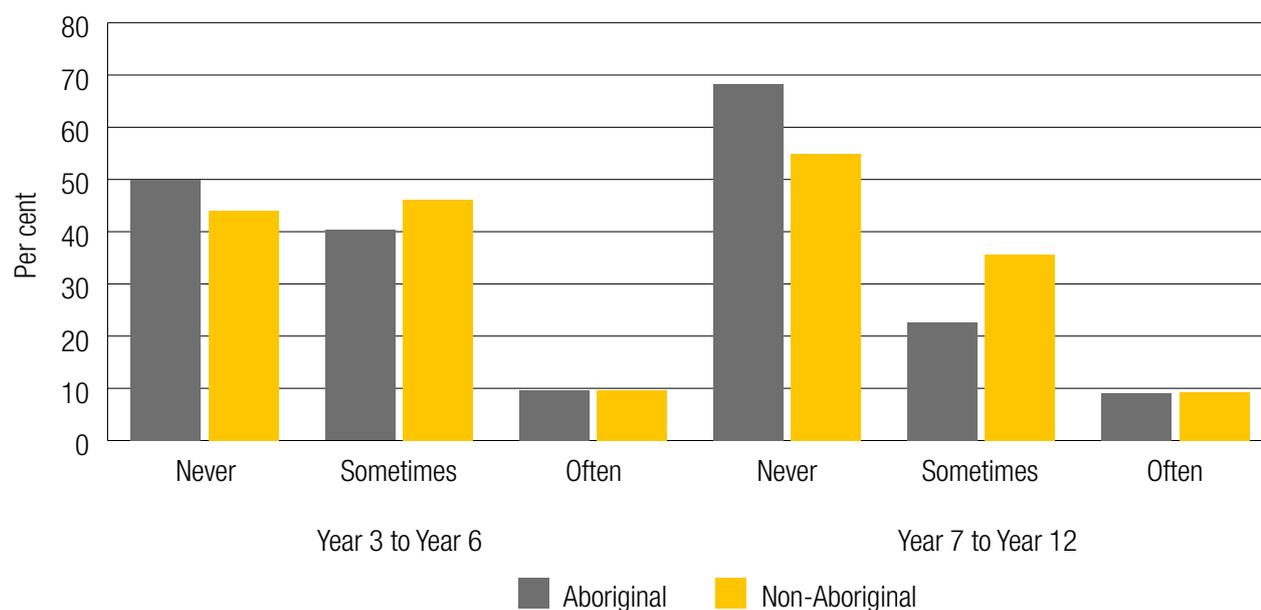
Table 7.8: Proportion of students saying they feel safe at school all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don't feel safe or they don't feel safe, by year level and Aboriginal status

| | Year 3 to Year 6 | | | Year 7 to Year 12 | | |
|--|------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal | Aboriginal | Non-Aboriginal | Combined Aboriginal |
| All the time | 54.8 | 52.9 | 62.5 | 43.2 | 36.2 | 43.3 |
| Most of the time | 32.9 | 36.4 | 25.8 | 34.1 | 44.3 | 36.7 |
| Sometimes I don't feel safe/ about half the time | 11.0 | 8.5 | 9.4 | 11.4 | 13.7 | 11.7 |
| I don't feel safe | 1.4 | 2.1 | 2.3 | 11.3 | 5.8 | 8.3 |

One-half of Aboriginal Year 3 to Year 6 students (50.0%) and more than two-thirds of Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students (68.2%) reported that in the current school year they have never been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school; non-Aboriginal students in both year groups were less likely to say this (44.1% for Year 3 to Year 6 and 55.0% for Year 7 to Year 12).

Equal proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in both year groups reported having been afraid 'often' (Year 3 to Year 6) or '6 or more times' (Year 7 to Year 12) that someone will hurt or bully them at school – with one in 10 students saying this.

Graph 7.6: Proportion of students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by year level and Aboriginal status



8. Parents' views

Parental engagement has a significant and ongoing impact on the academic outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.¹⁴³ However, there is a paucity of research on parents' views of their child's engagement with school and learning.¹⁴⁴

The following chapter explores the factors that parents viewed as contributing to their child's engagement with and enjoyment of school and learning and to their own sense of connectedness to the school. Given the significant influence of parental engagement, hearing parents' views about what facilitates engagement provides insight into areas of action for schools, and the education system.

Throughout this chapter the term 'parents' is used to encompass parents, carers, step-parents or other caregivers who provided consent for a student to participate in the consultation, and who then completed the Parent Survey. Further detail about the process of consent and participation is detailed in the chapter Undertaking the School and Learning Consultation.

In interpreting the results, consideration must be given to the representativeness of parents who participated in the survey. As noted, the study design is likely to have resulted in a sample of students and families that can be described as having a higher level of engagement than the broader population as a whole. Additionally, the responses from parents suggest that many of them were actively involved in their child's education and had the resources to participate in school activities. This is not necessarily typical of the circumstances of all parents across WA.

8.1 Parent profile

A total of 421 parents of students participating in the School and Learning survey completed an adapted parent version of the survey. Each participating parent had a child attending Year 3 to Year 12 who had participated in the School and Learning consultation through their school. The design of the survey was such that individual responses of a parent and their child cannot be linked. The following chapter predominantly discusses the responses of 358 parents who were part of the main sample. An additional 63 parents also provided responses – their children were part of the additional sample of students.

The parents who participated in the survey were predominantly mothers (91.0% of participants were female and 9.0% were male) and 51 per cent held a bachelor or higher degree. Seventy-one per cent of parents were born in Australia, 22 per cent in the United Kingdom and the remaining seven per cent had been born elsewhere.

Of the participating parents:

- 30 per cent reported having a child who attends school in a regional area
- 70 per cent had a child attending school in the metropolitan area
- 17 per cent of parents had a child who was born outside of Australia
- 2.5 per cent had a child who is Aboriginal
- 21 per cent said that their child has a long-term health condition and/or disability.

8.2 Parent perceptions of students' experiences of school and learning

Survey findings – closed survey responses

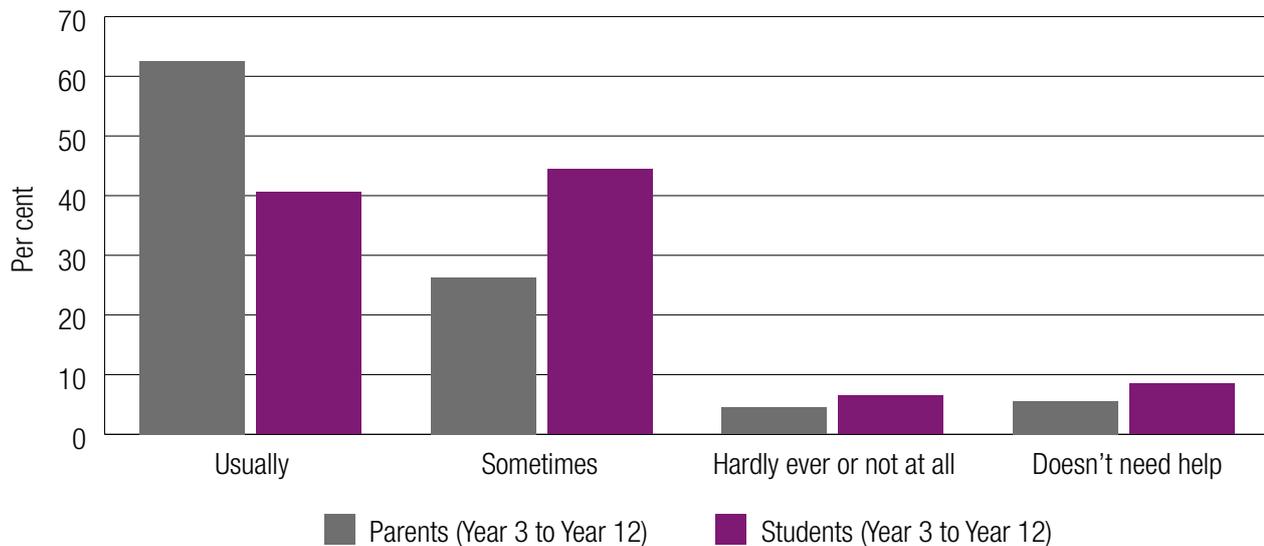
Parents reported that what their children most enjoy about school is seeing their friends (86%) and learning new things (79%). This was followed by sports (59%), arts/music (58%) and incursions/excursions (56%).

Most participating parents said their child likes school either 'a lot' (55%) or 'a bit' (22%). Nearly seven per cent of parents felt that their child 'doesn't like school' or doesn't like it 'at all'. The proportion of parents saying their child likes school 'a lot' is larger than the proportion of students saying the same (41% of Year 3 to Year 12 students said they like school 'a lot'), while the proportion of parents saying that their child does not like school is comparable to that of students (7% of Year 3 to Year 12 students said they 'don't like school' or 'not at all').

Eighty-three per cent of parents reported that their child feels part of the school community. This compares to 75 per cent of students saying the same. Twelve per cent of parents reported being unsure about whether their child feels part of the school community and six per cent said they didn't. This compares to 20 per cent of students being unsure about this and five per cent saying they didn't feel part.

In regard to support for learning, 63 per cent of parents felt their child 'usually' gets the help they need to learn. This compares to only 41 per cent of students reporting the same. Five per cent of parents felt their child 'hardly ever' or 'never' gets the help they need to learn. Almost seven per cent of students said the same.

Graph 8.1: Proportion of respondents saying student usually, sometimes, hardly ever/never gets the help they need or student doesn't need help, by parent response and student response



School-parent relationships – the perspective of parents

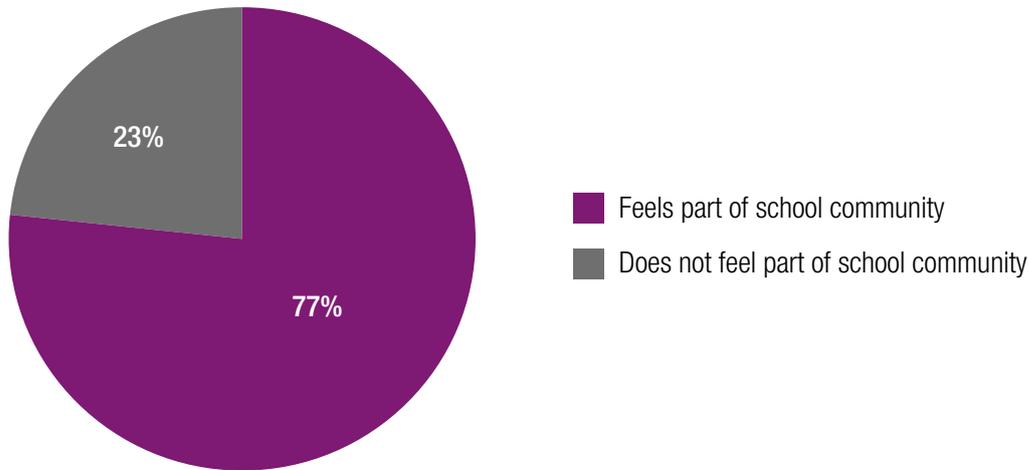
In terms of school-parent relationships, the majority of parents agreed that their child’s school is welcoming, takes parents’ concerns seriously, that there is good communication with parents and that the school encourages parents to be involved in their child’s learning activities. Parents also overwhelmingly found staff at their child’s school approachable and easy to talk to. Around three-quarters (76.8%) of parent respondents also said that they feel part of the school community.

There was however a sizeable proportion of parents who disagreed with some or all of the statements about their child’s school or who were undecided. Almost one-quarter (23.2%) said they did not feel part of the school community.

Table 8.1: Proportion of parents agreeing or disagreeing with selected statements about their child’s school

| | Strongly agree or agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree or strongly disagree |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Staff at this school take parents’ concerns seriously | 74.6 | 14.8 | 10.6 |
| This school has good communication with parents | 73.2 | 13.4 | 13.4 |
| Staff at this school are approachable and easy for parents to talk to | 82.4 | 12.3 | 5.3 |
| This school encourages parents to be involved in their child’s learning activities | 71.8 | 15.9 | 12.3 |
| This school is welcoming to parents and families | 79.6 | 15.4 | 5.0 |

Graph 8.2: Proportion of parents saying they feel or don’t feel part of the school community



Survey findings – open narrative survey responses

“Make school fun and not a chore.”

The majority of parents who participated in the survey were satisfied with their child’s school. Most felt a sense of belonging to their child’s school, as did their child. Many reported that their child had positive experiences at school, which contributed to engagement in learning and to parental satisfaction with the school.

“I feel very fortunate that my child (and his older sister no longer at the school) have had the opportunity and experiences afforded to them by attending this school. I will be forever grateful.”

“As I am able to compare schools with my sister who has children of the same age at elite private schools in Melbourne, I am glad to say that academically my children are on par or above with their results and attend a small independent government country school. I am very happy with the quality of the teachers and the schooling being provided to my children.”

“When I first registered my child with this school, I was very apprehensive because of its reputation but both of my kids have blossomed and improved massively compared to their previous school.”

In many ways, the views of parents were similar to those of students across Year 3 to Year 12, particularly with regard to factors that were significant for engagement with school and learning. Significant influences included:

- sense of belonging
- relationships with peers and teachers
- engaging learning experiences in a safe and supportive learning environment
- support for student wellbeing.

Parents acknowledged the substantial role of school staff in contributing to the factors above and highlighted that systems must support school staff in their role.

In terms of their own sense of connectedness to their child's school, parents emphasised the importance of effective communication, relationships with school staff and other parents and school leadership. For some parents, their own sense of connectedness influenced their child's perceptions and experiences, thus having implications for student engagement with school and learning.

Engagement indicators

“They feel like they are connected to the school which makes them more engaged in learning.”

The open narrative responses of the parent survey were largely framed around hearing parent perceptions on ways to improve student enjoyment of school and learning, and student sense of belonging. Thus in terms of the engagement indicators, sense of belonging and liking school were largely discussed by parents.

What was indisputably clear from parents' responses was that a sense of belonging at school contributed positively to student motivation, behaviour, wellbeing and engagement. Belonging was experienced through positive relationships with other students and teachers – emphasising these important foundations for engagement.

“It [a sense of belonging] is important because it is hard to want to be somewhere if you do not feel like you belong.”

“A sense of belonging is part of the motivation to go, and provides a sense of safety to be able to learn.”

“She needs to be happy about going there. 12 years could seem like a lifetime if she wasn't fitting in.”

“If they didn't think they belong, then they wouldn't want to be there and wouldn't want to learn. They would have a negative experience that would affect their future.”

Some parents were concerned about emphasis on academic achievement. They wanted the education system to consider learning progress and to develop skills for learning (organisation, research, studying, time management, note-taking, etc). Knowledge beyond literacy and numeracy and consideration for student wellbeing were important factors for parents.

“A more connected and personal environment where he feels valued for who he is and what his capabilities are. Less emphasis on results and fitting within the box.”

“Taking emphasis away from standardised testing and ranking students and monitoring each student on an individual basis to see if they are progressing in their own learning or do they need some more assistance. If they are improving then it shouldn't matter what the class average is.”

“Learning skills more than specifics. HOW to learn is more important than WHAT she learns, at least initially.”

“Academic performance is prized over creativity and original thought – children are not encouraged to think freely and creatively. My son is an average learner and as such there is little to incentivise excellence as his talent lies in creative pursuits which are not nurtured and go unrecognised.”

Student sense of belonging

Largely parents felt their child experienced a sense of belonging within their school. Parents referred to the school culture and relationships with peers and school staff as contributing to a sense of belonging for their children. This section explores parent's views on the school culture, student participation and school programs. The influence of relationships with other students and school staff is explored in further detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Schools that created an environment in which students felt supported, valued and known were important for a sense of belonging. Parents suggested that when students felt happy, safe and confident at school, they developed a sense of ownership and pride in their school. Parents recognised that the actions of school staff and other students greatly influenced the school culture.

"My child's school has a fantastic community group and spirit. Teachers, parents and students all work together collaboratively including after school sport, music and community functions."

"Enjoys the learning environment, being part of something bigger than himself."

"The teachers and staff know him (they appear to know all children that attend the school). It is a relaxing and child-focused school."

"They have a group of peers, which assists that sense of belonging. Although despite being great young people who contribute to their community in many varied ways, they consistently get told they are the worst group of students ever – just because of a few students making different choices. This does not contribute to their sense of belonging, and they have become resentful of the school because of this."

Practices to support student sense of belonging

Participation of students

Parents suggested a sense of belonging was facilitated when students were positioned as valued individuals and provided with ways to meaningfully contribute to the school. Parents felt acknowledgement of the individual strengths of students was also an important practice that promoted belonging.

"The way this school involves the children is fantastic, getting them to participate as much as possible with different responsibilities and the older children interacting with the younger children (buddy system) is another positive."

"I think he feels valued as a class member thanks to his teacher who encourages that."

"My child attends a small community-run school where much emphasis is placed on belonging and ownership within the school and classroom. The school explicitly encourages participation, independence and responsibility, and respect for the child."

"At their school, they are respected as an individual and celebrated for their strengths rather than making them feel like they need to be at the same level as everyone else."

Similar to students, parents intimated that choice and having a say on decisions that affect them increases belonging and engagement. Suggestions for schools to implement strategies for participation included seeking the opinions and ideas of students, involving students in decision making and supporting students to organise events or programs. Such strategies, parents suggested, would develop in students a sense of ownership, citizenship, purposefulness and connection to the school.

"Seek their ideas and feedback on school initiatives/programs."

"If schools support their creativity and support to make things come from students, they will find some areas that can be owned by students."

"Ask the children how they feel and whether they like school."

"I believe the students have a voice and are able to express their needs. I moved from another school because this was important to me."

"The school could include the students in some decision-making or planning for a school event. Also ask the students for ideas to make the school better. Teach the children from early age to care for each other. So everyone will be feeling as a part of the school."

"Talk with the students and ask them [what would] make coming to school fun and not a thing that they have to do."

"Encourage them to do something FOR the school or others at the school."

Inclusivity

"We are new to this school and it works differently from regular schools but already he feels accepted. I think generally though schools need to work harder on being inclusive, not just saying the words but demonstrating this daily by the actions and attitudes of teachers and their expectations of the way students behave."

Inclusivity within schools creates an environment in which all students, staff and parents feel welcomed and valued. An inclusive school environment promotes student development and engagement with education, rather than school avoidance and the negative effects of exclusion. Some schools had clearly developed a culture of inclusion.

"[My child's school] is a superb school. The culture of inclusion is palpable in the students."

However, parents indicated a more inclusive environment, with respect for diversity, would make their child feel a greater sense of belonging at school. For parents, this process needed to incorporate education and discussion with students about difference and treating others with respect. In some cases education was also required for school staff so as to better support individual students and inclusive practices.

"Educating students about other students who have special needs and what they can do to make them feel they are valued."

"Build a culture of acceptable behaviour in and outside the classroom. Teaching that you don't have to be best friends but you do have to listen with an open mind and respect others."

"No racism."

"The school should also work on teaching kids how to interact with their peers. Including everyone in their games. Not making [others] feel excluded or different. [...] Kids should be able to do what they like and not feel like what they do is wrong. Schools should teach kids about tolerance and acceptance."

Opportunities through school programs

Sense of belonging and relationships were also facilitated by participation in school programs. Activities included peer mentoring, music, sports, science and academic extension programs, school councils and extracurricular activities. Parents noted that involvement in these programs increased the number of peers students socialised with, thereby increasing their friendship group and support network, supported learning and made students feel valued – all of which contributed to a sense of connection to the school.

"At the moment she has been working on a music production, where she doesn't realise the positive impact the reading and singing is making on her literacy skills."

"My child's school has a great sense of community and seems to be very inclusive. Being a part of extra activities such as school choir seems to also enhance that sense of belonging."

"He is involved in a number of the school programs and feels he can contribute to help others."

"Being involved in two schools-within-schools i.e. the Gate Music Program and the Academic Extension Program has provided social and pastoral safety nets within a very large organisation. They have also afforded the opportunity for her to be surrounded by like-minded and similarly able students, as well as the opportunity to engage socially and academically across a range of year levels. All of these factors have led to an excellent assimilation into the school environment."

Several parents expressed concerns regarding the selection processes for involvement in some programs. Parents suggested that some students were not provided the opportunity to participate or felt the process was based on popularity rather than equality of opportunity. Effective structures, processes and relationships should be in place to enable all students to participate and to demonstrate they are valued members of the school community.

Relationships at school

"My child feels this way [a sense of belonging] because she thinks her school is safe and her friends and teachers are always caring and nice."

"Currently, as my son feels, there is really not much else positive about school, except for the care shown by the staff and other students."

Strong relationships developed resilience, motivation and self-confidence, and provided students with a variety of sources of support and belonging. The responses from parents underscored the importance of quality interpersonal relationships with peers and school staff, highlighting the range of ways relationships positively influence engagement with school and learning.

The comments from parents who stated that their child did not feel like they belong at the school referred to relationships, largely with other students, as influential. A few comments referred to the actions and behaviours of parents as influencing opportunities for friendships, the school culture or the attitude of their child.

"He is often excluded because he is not like many of the boys in the year who are alpha males. I find the parents pushy and don't socialise with them which has unfortunately excluded him from some peer groups/sport groups etc."

"I feel that she may not feel "connected" with her peers because as a community not a school community, parents aren't respecting one another enough, therefore placing this disrespect ultimately on the children."

"They feel that the school is more focused on sport rather than academic studies."

"Because he struggles to fit in with the socially accepted norm. The school system mostly expects all kids to fit in the same box and when they don't they can feel criticised or punished."

"He doesn't want to participate in anything."

Relationships with friends and other students

The relationships students had with peers influenced student dispositions towards school and learning and the perceptions of themselves. Quality interpersonal relationships with peers were identified by parents as essential for belonging, self-esteem, sense of safety and comfort, enjoyment of school and engagement with learning. In a difference to the comments from students, parents did not comment on the importance of friendships for learning, whereas students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke extensively and strongly on this aspect of friendships. Many parents also referred to stability in schooling as contributing positively to relationship development across the school.

Parents felt improved relationships with peers would increase their child's sense of enjoyment and belonging at school. Being excluded, bullying, the volatility of friendships and the complexity of developing and navigating friendships detracted from a sense of inclusion. Similar to students, preventative approaches and proactive responses to bullying were important to parents.

| Why do you think your child feels like they belong at their school? | What do you think would help your child like school more? |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"Because they enjoy the social interaction they get at school with people of their own age."</i></p> <p><i>"Last year she asked to move schools, as she was having issues with friends, but once we resolved that she has stopped saying that she hates school and wants to move."</i></p> <p><i>"They have friends and feel valued."</i></p> <p><i>"She has many friends. She feels safe and respected."</i></p> <p><i>"Because of his friends. If not for his friendships, I would try and move schools as his primary school is terrible."</i></p> <p><i>"I am not sure anything would [make my child enjoy school more] she is a typical teenager who enjoys school for the social aspects more than the learning."</i></p> | <p><i>"A wider friendship group, very small school not a lot of like-minded friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Peers in her class being friendlier."</i></p> <p><i>"If the school has more control over bullying and zero tolerance/anti-bullying strategies put in place, my child would be a happier kid."</i></p> <p><i>"Knowing she can go to school without being bullied and the ability to make genuine friendships."</i></p> <p><i>"He really struggles with the social aspect and doesn't feel he has meaningful relationships with his peers. Has anxiety about the demands placed on him by so many teachers, subjects and assessments."</i></p> <p><i>"New to the school and proving hard to break into existing friendships within the small cohort."</i></p> <p><i>"Her autism and anxiety prevents her from making supportive friendship groups; Her anxiety/depression makes it difficult for her to focus and learn; the majority of students appear to not be interested in their education."</i></p> |

Practices to support relationships with friends and other students

Many parents suggested it would be beneficial for schools to provide support for students to develop and navigate friendships, and employ teaching practices that encourage interaction and socialisation. This suggestion is similar to that of students across Year 3 to Year 12, who requested support for friendships – as discussed in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues. Several parents acknowledged the positive work by school staff to foster relationships between students through learning opportunities and various school programs.

"Her main difficulty has been with other children making her upset or not wanting to play with her. It would be beneficial if the curriculum included more social topics, like conflict resolution, inclusion, etc."

"Doesn't enjoy school because of the social side. Not really the school's issue, he needs to work more at making and being a friend."

"More attention to social skills in Year 5 and 6 e.g. the Girl Power program, others and at times my child also really struggles with the dynamics and teachers do not guide or coach actively or successfully."

"Because the teachers are very supportive and made her feel comfortable and helped her to make friends when starting at her school."

"Strong school values, teachers provide interactive learning amongst children who don't always play together. Strong sports culture."

Relationships with teachers and other school staff

“On the whole, my child is fortunate to attend this school. I do think that the child’s relationship with the teacher is the most important foundation of learning. Children thrive when they feel their teacher likes them and is passionate about teaching them.”

Relationships with school staff, and in particular teachers, were noted by parents as affecting student experiences of school and learning. Parents referred to school staff as influencing student sense of belonging, their enjoyment of learning and whether students felt they were valued members of the school community. Parents spoke of the qualities which they liked or would like in the school staff working with their child. Teachers who were friendly, caring, respectful, encouraging and who knew students made students feel comfortable within school. Many parents referred to the stability of school staff as a positive factor in relationship development, which was also mentioned by some students in the consultation.

“Our school has a strong sense of community, the teachers are exceptionally caring, and know who each student is, whether they have taught them or not.”

“As a small school he knows everyone. Also has great male teachers who have stood in as role models – personal connection.”

“When he felt he belonged up until this year, he loved going to school, learning and striving for his best. This year with a sub-standard teacher, he often feels he doesn’t belong and doesn’t care about school or giving his best.”

“Because she feels as though the teachers pick on her for not having better grades; because her so-called friends are nice one day and bully her the next – bullying happens more often than not.”

“If the school and teachers have a positive approach towards learning and to the students. Students become more confident and feel they are safe where they belong.”

Teacher characteristics and practices contributing to student sense of belonging and enjoyment of school and learning

“He is very fortunate to have a teacher this year who focuses on children being in charge of their own learning and allowing them freedom to pursue their interests. He is also an emotionally supportive and kind teacher. Unfortunately, this seems to be rare though in our experience.”

Parents recognised and emphasised the critical role of teachers for engagement in learning. They spoke positively of many teachers or expressed the qualities they desired to see in teachers. Similar to students, parents wanted teachers who were passionate, enthusiastic, who knew their curriculum content area, who were caring and helpful, who used positive behaviour management, enabled students to have positive learning experiences and developed a sense of agency in students.

“Really good quality teachers who are really passionate about their subject and who are really able to convey that passion and enthusiasm to their students.”

“My child’s teacher is very experienced, organised, creates engaging lesson plans, has a warm personality and goes to a lot of effort to make the learning experience enjoyable.”

“Something wonderful happened this year. My child got 70% for an assessment and the teacher said, “Well done, you got 70%. You did this, this and this right”. She did not mention what [he] did not know. She gave not one word of misery to taint his happy memory. He is now highly motivated to work hard in that teacher’s class. He feels valued. He feels capable. He knows what he has to do and he will do it for that teacher and for the joy of doing well and being rewarded for it. – Please more positive teachers like this.”

“I genuinely believe we need better teachers, particularly in senior schools. We need teachers who genuinely like adolescents and who understand their unique needs at this time in their lives. I think if we had these sorts of teachers, kids generally would feel happier at school and more accepted and valued.”

Consideration of student’s personal circumstances and wellbeing was noted by parents as a factor that would enhance engagement. Parents wanted school staff to listen, understand individual needs and consider the impact on learning, self-esteem and relationships.

"Teachers to listen more and have empathy and understanding, educated in anxiety and other mental health conditions."

"Teachers that look after children's self-esteem."

"Having a more understanding teacher who is sympathetic and helpful in regard to her emotional needs."

"More pastoral care from his teacher."

Parents expressed compassion towards teachers, stating that they felt there was significant pressure on teachers exerted by a range of influences. Parents recognised that to be enabled to undertake their core work, teachers must be supported by the administration and the education system more broadly. Through their comments, parents referred to the wellbeing of teachers and teacher professional knowledge, noting the impact these have on students.

"Treat children with respect. Do not disregard/dismiss their concerns. Work through their worries understanding the big picture. For teachers to do this they need support from admin and other staff. Not cutting staff would also help. Lots of pressure on staff to do, be and understand all. Disability training – at both student and teacher level."

"[...] But primarily to have a teacher (and other school staff) who has fantastic emotional wellbeing themselves and can hence provide a safe and positive environment. The teacher's knowledge themselves pales into insignificance compared to how warmly they can relate to children and their own emotional regulation."

"Prioritising the emotional health of teachers and providing teachers who have emotional regulation issues with appropriate psychological support."

"Also teachers are not trained enough in classroom behaviour management, how to help unusual kids, how to keep the bullies in a better place, and also they need support themselves. It's a tough job."

"The school is great, but the teachers are over-worked and over-stressed. I think it's the same for teachers all over the country. Over-stressed and under-paid."

Learning and the classroom environment

"They like learning if there is relevance to the learning. If it can be applied to real situations. They like learning when there is a good relationship with the teacher, when the teacher treats them with respect and trusts them to problem solve the challenges. A bit of humour goes a long way too! They like learning when they can move and get into nature. They LOVE learning when they are not in front of a laptop or screen all the time."

The majority of the parents felt their child was engaged with learning because of the enjoyment they experienced. Many stated their child had an innate enjoyment or curiosity, with some highlighting that this had been instilled from a young age through the home environment. Other parents specified their child was excited by learning new things and enjoyed sharing their knowledge (particularly with siblings), the challenge of solving problems and experiencing success or saw value in education.

"Natural love of learning and curiosity. As a family we value this and they do too. Some teachers have contributed to this but more so it evolved from the home and family."

"My child is excited when she learns a new topic with ease or when she overcomes a difficult area of learning to now understand it clearly. I think she sees the value in learning new things."

"He enjoys using his knowledge and skills in the world around him. He also likes us to be proud of him, so he will often recite what he has learnt."

"They feel great success when they learn a new skill and subject."

Practices to support engagement with learning

Parents provided a variety of suggestions as to what would increase their child's enjoyment of, and subsequently engagement with, school and learning. Responses largely related to learning and mirrored those of students across Year 3 to Year 12. That is, learning that was hands-on, collaborative, relevant, appropriately challenging, enabled choice, incorporated breaks, and to receive assistance with learning as required.

"Teacher influence. Making it fun and exciting to learn."

"More space/freedom for their thinking and creativity, hands-on with less rigid restriction, flexibility of teacher in dealing with different kids (e.g. different personality, intelligence...). A teacher that works with heart matters all."

"Varied curriculum, less pressure to learn to NAPLAN/standardised testing. More varied teaching styles that suit childhood and adolescent development."

Pedagogy

Parents commented that their child's perceptions of school and learning were greatly influenced by their experiences within the classroom. For some, this meant that boredom stemmed from learning experiences that were not stimulating or not appropriately challenging for the child's academic level. For others, learning experiences that were too challenging or rushed negatively affected their child's self-esteem and feelings towards school. High expectations from teachers were important, however learning experiences needed to be scaffolded for students to experience success. Several parents expressed unease regarding the use of technology in classrooms, referring to the amount of screen-time and postural concerns, while others noted technology increased interest in learning. Parents stressed the importance of active pedagogies, learning outdoors and breaks from learning.

"My son gets very bored at school, he would like it more if he was given harder or more challenging work."

"As my son struggles with his classwork, it makes him feel like a 'dumb' kid, and so this affects his self-esteem. He hates to go to school, as this is where his weakness is exposed."

"My daughter needs clear explanations, positive reinforcement and enough time to complete tasks – if rushed or when she feels pressured she becomes very stressed."

"Alternative style of learning, more outdoor opportunities, nature based play, more male staff available at school, better rewards system for good behaviour, more sport, more patient teaching staff, more singing and art."

"Now that we have sought help he is now enjoying school. When he couldn't concentrate and complete his classroom work he felt like he was stupid and didn't like school. Being kept in during recess and lunch didn't help him as he then missed out on crucial socialisation skills needed to interact with his peers."

"Encouragement to expand thinking, not just give the 'right' answer."

Support for learning

Individualised or tailored support for learning was noted by parents as a way to increase enjoyment of school and learning and was noted by many as the type of support needed by their child. Some parents referred to specific curriculum content areas as the focus of support. Others referred to particular strategies, including one-on-one assistance, modification to student's specific learning requirements, smaller classes or small group work, proactive 'checking in', prompt feedback and clear explanations. Several parents felt the need to consistently advocate for learning support for their child.

"Presentation of material in a range of ways so that she can understand it."

"He needs to be reminded if he is struggling or does not understand something to ask for help."

"A lot of her teachers don't explain things differently. Only read from what is in the book and not try and explain it differently. As each kid learns things differently. There is no point repeating exactly what the teacher has said, if the student doesn't understand what they are saying."

"Since it is distance learning sometimes it would help to be able to get clarification directly and promptly from the teachers."

"If they don't understand the activity or if they particularly get something wrong. It doesn't seem to get explained, especially the wrong bit. The need to go over work a bit more individually."

Several parents with children who had a long-term disability or long-term health condition spoke positively of the support received, particularly in education support centres. However, some expressed frustration that support was not always readily available in all settings or commented on the knowledge of school staff, suggesting further professional development was required. Where support was not available, parents outlined the personal financial cost and time required to ensure their child received adequate support at school. Some indicated that learning strategies to support their child would also benefit the broader class, minimise the perception of difference and support inclusion.

"Teachers who understand special needs and how to convey/teach autistic children and support them on their learning journey. Better teaching styles and more hands-on."

"EA assistance, basic 'key word signing', assessments done by written work or iPad recording. Picture cards for basic situations e.g. need help, need toilet, finished."

"[...] The strategies beneficial for dyslexic kids are also of benefit to the balance of the class, therefore meaning no one needs to be singled out for a different approach. No funding is available for dyslexia, which places enormous pressure on the teachers and school. Not to mention the need to obtain support for our child in the private market at substantial expense. The support my son needs relies heavily on home programs. This affects my ability to work the hours that I'd like [...]."

"From p/p to Year 3 he was at [an education support centre], which was a wonderful experience for him and us. They were trained to deal with kids like him, had a lot more small group work, one-on-one learning, plus lots of positive programs that were implemented right from Kindy throughout the whole school, including mainstream and made it consistent, predictable and positive for all students. Teacher skills, understanding, compassion and communication skills made it a positive and safe learning experience for him and ideally he would have loved to stay and would have benefited so much more instead of having to transit to a mainstream school. Not such a great experience back at mainstream. Lack of all things listed above has made the rest of his primary school years a hard slug and not very positive for either him or parents [...]."

"It has taken us a long time to get appropriate support for our son. Once this happened this has made a huge difference to his learning, self-esteem and how he views school. This was due to a misdiagnosis and not fitting the funding criteria. I realise this is down to budgeting constraints however if a child is not performing at the required level for their age and year level then they need support."

Parents commented on the resourcing of schools more broadly, with many demanding more appropriate support for student learning. Suggestions included smaller class sizes, single-year classes, an increase in assistants/aides, adequate technology (particularly for students studying remotely) and specialised programs. Rural schools were noted by some parents in particular as requiring more funding to ensure students received equality of service.

"The system is failing the kids who fall behind, as they go up in grades the gaps get wider as the support dwindles off. The schools need more funding for specialised programs and ed assistance for the kids with learning difficulties that don't qualify for aid time."

"I think this school tries hard but it cannot help every student's individuality, and cannot be expected to, under-resourced and all that."

Learning environment

A learning environment that was characterised by support, encouragement and positive behaviour management was suggested by parents as facilitating engagement with learning. Similar to the comments from students, parents noted it was sometimes difficult for students to receive the help they required for learning if the teacher was responding to other students' behaviour or requests for assistance.

"He likes learning but his current environment makes it difficult for him to feel engaged and valued."

"He loves math but is quiet in class so he gets overlooked. The teacher seems to engage with the louder more boisterous children and spends a lot of time keeping the badly behaved ones in check."

"Not having witnessed her brother with autism receiving punitive consequences for his behaviour relating to his disability."

"By getting the help she needs with schoolwork without being ridiculed for not being a fast learner with low grades."

"A different teacher. She has had a hard time this year as her teacher does not seem to appreciate or is able to cope with the differing abilities of all the children in the class. My daughter is bored and no longer finds school stimulating or challenging."

Support for student wellbeing

"School should be a safe environment for children and a place that is 'theirs' to be in."

From the perspective of parents feeling accepted influenced student wellbeing, attitude to school and learning and ability to engage with learning. A sense of belonging created an environment in which students felt safe, happy, comfortable, respected and valued for who they are.

Parents outlined that for students with mental health concerns, experiences of trauma or who perceived themselves as 'different', feeling a sense of belonging was particularly important for feeling that school was a safe and enjoyable place to be.

"They need to belong, be a part to feel comfortable/relaxed, ready and willing to learn."

"She likes to feel as if she is part of something – that she matters to those around her – she has experienced trauma in her life so she needs a caring and consistent school world – it helps with her anxiety."

"Feeling like you belong promotes a happy healthy state of mind. Mental health and wellbeing is just as important as physical. It is easy to forget how you feel impacts your ability to function in daily life. Stress, depression or feelings of loneliness can be very isolating and difficult to explain."

Throughout the survey, parents made a clear connection between experiencing a sense of belonging through relationships and the impact on feeling ready and able to learn. Safety and belonging increased self-confidence, attitude and motivation, and parents perceived students were better able to engage in learning. Such responses are similar to those from students across Year 3 to Year 12, which indicated feeling safe and accepted was an important precursor to learning.

Parents described a lack of belonging as a distraction from learning, explaining that feeling excluded negatively impacted on students' wellbeing. Parents held the same view as students in that worrying about 'fitting in', safety, or the emotions associated with feeling excluded – feeling sad, lonely, confused, worthless – affected student ability to concentrate on learning, their interest in school and learning, and help-seeking behaviour.

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| <p><i>"If they are socially happy they are more receptive to learning. Unhappy kids are distracted from learning and their low self-esteem can impact learning confidence."</i></p> <p><i>"A safe learning environment makes her feel more relaxed, so that she is able to feel comfortable asking questions if she is unsure, it also means that she develops a sense of herself as someone who values education, because the school values education."</i></p> <p><i>"If he's comfortable and accepted at school he will be calmer and more switched on to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Belonging relaxes you, makes you feel safe, [...] ready to learn."</i></p> <p><i>"Feeling part of a school community empowers children to communicate with other students and teachers and try new activities no matter their ability."</i></p> | <p><i>"Feeling excluded has reduced my son's enjoyment of school and love of learning."</i></p> <p><i>"Well in a previous school that our child attended, he did not feel like he fitted in. He was quite unhappy and this impacted on his emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and generally resulted in him underachieving for his potential."</i></p> <p><i>"If they have to worry about fitting in or who they are going to avoid at recess/lunch, it takes valuable time, energy and concentration from learning and creates a negative environment before school, during and after which affects everyone from the family unit to the school and teachers. A child must feel like they belong or things will start to go very wrong in many ways."</i></p> <p><i>"If they feel unwelcome they will zone out in class, not ask for help from teacher or other class members. Or feel they can't ask for help."</i></p> <p><i>"If they don't feel they belong they become withdrawn, then don't ask for help, they don't make friends as easy. They become hermits in the class. There but not."</i></p> <p><i>"If they feel like they don't belong, disengagement starts. Once this starts, negative attitude creeps in and before long, the student starts performing poorly in class, which can often lead to masking this with poor behaviour, which leads to suspension, missing more school and falling further behind and they then begin the vicious cycle of disengagement."</i></p> |
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For those few parents that stated a sense of belonging was not important for learning they explained that their child was self-motivated to learn.

"She tends to just get on with things and try to make the best of every situation. Her learning and school work is the focus."

"They find satisfaction in learning – the motivation is internal. She takes pride in being a tomgirl and not as girly as the majority."

"My son is top of the class in most subjects even though he sometimes feels different from the others."

Practices to support wellbeing

Many parents expressed a desire for their child's wellbeing to be protected and promoted to facilitate safety and belonging. This included students' social emotional wellbeing, dietary requirements, and physical needs. Similar to the supportive environments described by students across Year 3 to Year 12, parents wanted school staff to proactively check-in with students and build relationships that students could place trust in, knowing their concerns would be heard and responded to appropriately. Parents also suggested strategies to position students to have positive learning experiences, to develop confidence, or support for developing quality interpersonal relationships.

"Ask the child often if they are OK."

"She becomes very anxious when she has to start new things such as a new year or a new term. Her teachers need to be mindful of this anxiety and assist her in grounding herself in order for her to settle and begin learning."

"Sometimes mentoring with friendship issues."

"Assistance is more in the area of building self-esteem and confidence rather than issues with curriculum."

"Listen to them when they say something is wrong and not automatically dismiss them, treat them with respect. I believe that kids learn a lot from teachers/staff behaviour a lot of which would never be acceptable in a workplace with adults."

"My child needed more positive care. He needed to feel his educators liked him and he needed to feel that when he went to them for help with bullies that they would help him."

"More psychological support for troubled children."

Parents suggested students would benefit from practices that promote wellbeing. Suggestions included relaxation techniques, mental health education, breaks from learning and physical activity. Such practices would better position students to focus on learning and to respond to feelings of stress and pressure, which were sometimes associated with learning. Holistic support provided through collaboration between professionals (such as teachers and social workers) and within the school environment was proposed as beneficial for students and school staff.

"Mindfulness, meditation and yoga-style practices to give the child some relaxation strategies and therefore a better chance of coping with academic pressures and peer pressure."

"Have mental health tuition classes; i.e. awareness of mental illness, relaxation techniques and awareness and acceptance of themselves which helps improve emotional intelligence."

"Have a strong pastoral care program where students are known well by student leaders and staff. They need to have opportunity to 'shine' in something so that their inclusion is reinforced as being valuable and needed by the group. Our school does this well."

"More counsellors for vulnerable students, more whole school fun activities to engage and boost pupil morale."

Families and school

"It is a community school where parents are very involved. You are made to feel welcome and that you have something to give."

The survey responses indicated that the majority of participating parents can be described as actively involved in their child's education. Active involvement is demonstrated through behaviours such as direct participation in the school or school activities, encouraging homework completion or showing interest in school and learning through asking questions and talking with their child. While parents aspired to engage in such behaviours, they also outlined challenges, such as competing demands impacting on available time and capacity, a lack of communication from schools or a school culture which they felt did not invite or value family involvement.

Direct participation in school

The majority of the parents were actively involved in their child's school which contributed greatly to a sense of belonging. Engagement with the school included serving as members on the board, the Parents and Citizens/Friends Associations (P&C/P&F) or other committees, volunteering in the classroom, school programs, canteen, uniform shop, library or school events, supporting school fundraising activities, providing input or feedback into school planning, or attendance at school events. Many parents stated they purposefully made an effort to get involved in these activities to support their child, and to build relationships with school staff and other parents.

"I attend as many functions at the school as possible and am welcomed by staff and other parents [...]. Others may not attend and may not feel as connected."

"I have made the effort to be a part of the community – and having done so – have been warmly accepted."

"I choose to be actively involved – can't do a lot during the day as I work, but member of P&C and board – through this kept well-informed, and opportunity to ask questions, seek clarifications and contribute to the school."

"I am involved with the school as a parent helper and on the P&C which has enabled me to build relationships with teachers and parents, and be informed about what is happening at the school."

Some parents noted the challenges in direct participation in school activities particularly within school hours, given a range of other commitments or if their child was attending boarding school or learning via distance education. Several parents felt their level of attendance at events was their 'own fault' and that the onus was on them to put in more effort, rather than consideration from schools regarding the lives of families.

"I work and feel that most activities are organised while I am at work."

"Participate as much as we can, although limited with parents both working full time. Have made friends within the school community."

"This is my own fault, I am a full time working mother of 4 and too busy to be involved a lot with the school."

"I am encouraged to attend and be part of events. Unfortunately I work fulltime but make efforts with supplying cakes and classroom stuff to make up for my lack of time."

"As a working parent I have less time to give to the school so this is partially my fault."

Practices to support family participation

Communication

Parents made clear through the survey that they valued communication from the school. Communication contributed to making parents feel welcomed within the school and welcoming of their involvement. Parents were interested in hearing about upcoming events, the learning progress, engagement, behaviour and development of their child, curriculum requirements, school concerns and the reasoning behind decisions of the school. For parents, effective communication was regular, available in a variety of formats and responsive. Effective communication was particularly important for parents that were unable to participate in school activities and for developing familiarity with the school and the education system. Occasionally, parents felt there were assumptions underpinning orientation to a new school and stated all families should receive a comprehensive orientation.

"I'm always updated of what is happening in the school as well as the status of my child in terms of learning, physical and behaviour abilities."

"I would appreciate a parent-teacher meeting even when the teacher says there is nothing to discuss – it's good to meet and ask how they're getting on even when there aren't any problems."

"I would like it if the school educated parents more about what they are doing and why."

"I believe the school's general communication with its community is extremely poor and many parents feel very disconnected and unhappy with the school. A school MUST communicate constantly and consistently with its community, addressing issues head on (instead of deliberately avoiding them), providing explanation for decisions, information about curriculum/programs."

"The program our child is involved in does not really have opportunities for parents to get involved. I would however like more feedback about his progress and his results on a more frequent basis, through parent portals etc."

School culture

For many parents, the culture of the school contributed most strongly to their sense of belonging or lack thereof. Parents who felt a sense of belonging referred to the school as inclusive, a community, welcoming, that they felt valued and their contributions or questions were welcomed. Those parents who did not feel a sense of belonging to the school referred to schools as unfriendly, not welcoming, cliquey, inflexible, and characterised by a lack of communication, opportunities for parental involvement or events.

The actions of the school staff and parents developed the culture of the school, with many parents referring to feeling part of the school community through their interactions with others.

Many parents spoke positively of their relationships with school staff and parents, which contributed to a sense of belonging. Parents felt welcomed when school staff (teachers, administration and leadership teams) and other parents were friendly and approachable. They also noted when school staff made an effort to greet them, were responsive and whether relationships between staff and students were respectful.

"Teachers and staff are always friendly and the school community is generally welcoming."

"Everyone makes you feel welcome and everyone has something to contribute."

"It is an inclusive environment."

"Parents are always welcome to help out at school or in classrooms. The teachers listen to your views and respect your wishes."

"As it is a boarding school and high school parent participation is more difficult but administration staff are friendly and helpful."

"The high school teachers are approachable and I know they will respond and help if I have a concern."

"Headmistress as well as other teachers say hello when I visit the school and I believe they know which are my children."

"There is very little to encourage parents to be involved. Contacting the school can be an intimidating process at times."

"Poor school communication. Staff generally not welcoming and inclusive. Difficult to ask questions without staff becoming defensive. No parent/teacher interviews held."

"Admin is not terribly worried about the normal people."

"High school – told explicitly by the school not to come into school unless invited."

"Not enough information coming out of the school, parents rarely invited to school activities."

For some, relationships with other parents created a sense of belonging where the culture was absent from the school. However for others, other parents within the school made them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. Parents also noted that relationships among parent groups can be variable between year groups and affect relationships between students.

"I don't feel part of a school community which is set up and led by the school – there simply isn't one. However, through creating our own bonds with parents and the P&C I feel welcomed by my peers and my children's teachers."

"Other parents and own network. Good relationships with some teachers. Not felt that this comes from the current leadership team, where there is poor engagement and communication."

"Other parents include me via email despite being a full time worker and only turning up to school once a week and in high vis clothing."

"I have always felt part of the school community with my daughter but she will leave next year and that feeling will go. Sadly the cohort my son is in are cliquy, pushy and have excluded a group of us who have been at the school for some time. The staff are very inclusive though."

"Many parents don't practise their faith, not attending church and not catechising their kids in the same way I'd like."

"Cliquy parents."

"The parents in the school are generally not very friendly to new families that haven't had their children as long in the school."

Leadership

“This school used to have a principal and a leadership team who encouraged a strong sense of community and ownership – the new leadership team lack warmth and care for both students and parents. I no longer feel welcome to discuss concerns with the principal. It is very cold, clinical and by the book and I no longer feel like my views or ideas are sought or valued.”

Parents noted that the leadership strongly influenced the culture of the school and subsequently their sense of belonging. Many spoke positively of effective leadership and the flow-on effects for school staff, students and families. School leadership affected morale of staff, relationships within the school, parental involvement and whether parents had confidence in the school, in terms of educating children and responding to concerns from parents.

Some parents were less confident in or supportive of the leadership of their child’s school.

“It is critical to the success of children’s education to have committed and enthusiastic teachers, administration staff and as much positive parent involvement as possible. [...] An open and responsible administration team results in a positive relationship between teachers and parents, which creates fantastic outcomes for our kids.”

“Happy with [my child’s school]. Great principal, who is heavily involved with the community feel of this school, as he is always around before/after school, to greet students and parents.”

“I really appreciate the fact that the school principal takes the time to say hello and knows my children’s name. It is a big primary school but I feel it means a lot to know he knows who my kids are.”

“The teachers and principal have made me (and many parents) feel like we belong and are important too. I help as much as I can when I can with my children’s teachers etc.”

“The principal is a “sound bite on legs”, full of jargon but doesn’t deliver. The teachers don’t communicate with parents and are lazy, complacent. I feel very disheartened and worn down. In fact I have given up on being involved at the primary school.”

“The culture of schools and engagement with community is very important. The leadership team needs to have a good relationship with its community. This takes time to establish and needs to be genuine. I feel sad our school is no longer one I feel I can recommend, despite some good teachers.”

“Lack of communication to parents led by principal.”

“I moved my child from another school based on how I felt the principal handled my concern. I felt if I was unable to speak with the principal, how would my child be able to communicate as he grew older.”

“[The school my child attends] has a sense of closure or cliquiness, starting with management. The principal is very dictating and does not tend to consult with staff or parents on school matters. This filters down to the teaching staff, although most teachers are fabulous with the students, they are very reluctant to form a relationship with any parents due to fear of repercussion from the principal.”

“The discipline at the school is lacking and there is a culture of ‘don’t care about anything’ that has changed my child’s motivation to learn.”

Endnotes

- 45 It is important to note that the involvement of Year 12 students was low due to the consultation being held in terms 3 and 4 when Year 12 students are in their final exam period.
- 46 Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 47 Refer to Appendix 2 for the full list of survey questions.
- 48 Goodenow C 1993, 'The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates', *Psychology in the Schools*, Vol 30 No 1, pp. 79-90, p. 80.
- 49 Goodenow C & Grady KE 1993, 'The Relationship of School Belonging and Friends' Values to Academic Motivation among Urban Adolescent Students', *The Journal of Experimental Education*, Vol 62 No 1, pp. 60-71.
- 50 Ma X 2003, 'Sense of Belonging to School: Can Schools Make a Difference?', *The Journal of Educational Research*, Vol 96 No 6, pp. 340-349.
- 51 Includes students who answered 'I don't like school' and 'I don't like school at all'.
- 52 Includes students who answered 'I don't like school' and 'I don't like school at all'.
- 53 The difference between Year 3 to Year 6 and Year 7 to Year 12 students is statistically significant.
- 54 n=31
- 55 Reasons not listed in the multiple choice list.
- 56 Reasons not listed in the multiple choice list.
- 57 Murray S et al 2004, *Student disengagement from primary schooling: A review of research and practice – a report to the CASS Foundation*, CASS Foundation.
- 58 Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p. 25.
- 59 Hancock K et al 2013, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*. Report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Centre for Child Health Research and University of Western Australia, p. 14.
- 60 Hancock K et al 2013, *Student Attendance and Educational Outcomes: Every Day Counts*. Report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Centre for Child Health Research and University of Western Australia.
- 61 Barker J et al 2013, *What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence? Part 1: Literature Synthesis*, Hanover Welfare Services.
- 62 Hopkin R 2015, *An Australian and New Zealand review of education support for children with chronic health conditions*, The Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute.
- 63 Warren D & Edwards B 2017, 'Young carers', in *The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual Statistical Report 2016*, eds Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Institute of Family Studies, pp. 85-118.
- 64 Jensen B 2010, *Measuring What Matters: Student Progress*, Grattan Institute Report No. 2010-1 Reissue, Grattan Institute.
- 65 Torii K & O'Connell M 2017, *Preparing Young People for the Future of Work*. Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 01/2017, Mitchell Institute.
- 66 Goss P 2017, *How to improve our schools – Grattan Institute submission to the House of Representatives committee*, submission to the Inquiry into the school to work transition, Commonwealth of Australia.

- 67 Wilms J 2003, *Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation. Results from PISA 2000*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- 68 While there are varying views among researchers regarding the specific components, academic self-concept is generally understood to refer to an individual's knowledge and perceptions about themselves in achievement situations. For further discussion see Bong M & Skaalvik E 2003, 'Academic Self-Concept and Self-Efficacy: How Different Are They Really?', *Educational Psychology Review*, Vol 15 No 1, pp. 1-40.
- 69 This result is likely to be a reflection of one or both of the following: 1) Due to the nature and limitations of the sample as detailed within the chapter – Undertaking the School and Learning Consultation, participating students are more likely to be in the top half of the distribution of school achievement. 2) Students are overestimating their achievement relative to other students.
- 70 Martin A & Dowson M 2009, 'Interpersonal Relationships, Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement: Yields for Theory, Current Issues, and Educational Practice', *Review of Educational Research*, Vol 79 No 1, pp. 327-365.
- 71 Laursen B et al 2007, 'Friendship Moderates Prospective Associations Between Social Isolation and Adjustment Problems in Young Children', *Child Development*, Vol 78 No 4, pp. 1395-1404.
- 72 Bowker J et al 2006, 'Behavioural Characteristics Associated with Stable and Fluid Best Friendship Patterns in Middle Childhood', *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly Journal of Developmental Psychology*, Vol 52 No 4, pp. 671-693.
- 73 Rubin K et al 2004, 'Attachment, Friendship, and Psychosocial Functioning in Early Adolescence', *Journal of Early Adolescence*, Vol 24 No 4, pp. 326-356.
- 74 Hopkins K et al 2015, 'Relationships between Psychosocial Resilience and Physical Health Status of Western Australian Urban Aboriginal Youth', *PLoS ONE*, Vol 10 No 12.
- 75 Bagwell C et al 1998, 'Preadolescent Friendship and Peer Rejection as Predictors of Adult Adjustment', *Child Development*, Vol 69 No 1, pp. 140-153.
- 76 Multiple responses were possible for this question.
- 77 $n < 10$
- 78 Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People, WA.
- 79 Ungar M 2014, *Report of the 2014 Thinker in Residence: Resilience*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 80 Zubrick S et al 2014, 'Social Determinants of Social and Emotional Wellbeing', in *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, eds Dudgeon P, Milroy H & Walker R, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, pp. 93-112.
- 81 Ungar M 2014, *Report of the 2014 Thinker in Residence: Resilience*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 82 21st century skills are variously referred to by different terms, including capabilities, non-cognitive skills and enterprise skills. For further explanation (using the term capabilities), see Torii K & O'Connell M 2017, *Preparing Young People for the Future of Work*. Mitchell Institute Policy Report No. 01/2017, Mitchell Institute.
- 83 Berry D & O'Connor E 2010, 'Behavioural risk, teacher-child relationships, and social skill development across middle childhood: A child-by-environment analysis of change', *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Vol 31 No 1, pp. 1-14.
- 84 Hamre B & Pianta R 2001, 'Early Teacher-Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children's School Outcomes through Eighth Grade', *Child Development*, Vol 72 No 2, pp. 625-638.

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- 85 Birch S & Ladd G 1997, 'The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment', *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol 35, pp. 61-79.
- 86 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2015, *Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13*, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University.
- 87 The number of Year 7 to Year 12 students who participated in the survey and reported their gender as 'other' was small (<10).
- 88 Henderson A & Mapp K 2002, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Education Development Laboratory.
- 89 Emerson L et al 2012, *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.
- 90 Desforges C & Abouchar A 2003, *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review*, Research Report No 433, Department for Education and Skills UK.
- 91 Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p. 20.
- 92 Ungar M 2014, *Report of the 2014 Thinker in Residence: Resilience*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 93 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2011, *Building spaces and places for children and young people*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 94 Goss P et al 2017, *Engaging students: Creating classrooms that improve learning*, Grattan Institute.
- 95 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2016, *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 96 Angus M et al 2009, *The Pipeline Project: Trajectories of classroom behaviour and academic progress: A study of engagement with learning*, Edith Cowan University.
- 97 Sullivan A et al 2014, 'Punish Them or Engage Them? Teachers' Views of Unproductive Student Behaviours in the Classroom', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol 39 No 6, pp. 43-56.
- 98 A 'meme' is a humorous image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied (often with slight variations) and spread rapidly by internet users.
- 99 Hattie J 2003, *Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?*, paper presented to the Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us Australian Council for Educational Research Conference, Melbourne, October 2003.
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Lawson M & Lawson H 2013, 'New Conceptual Frameworks for Student Engagement Research, Policy, and Practice', *Review of Education Research*, Vol 83 No 3, pp. 432-479.
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- 104 Lawson M & Lawson H 2013, 'New Conceptual Frameworks for Student Engagement Research, Policy and Practice', *Review of Educational Research*, Vol 83 No 3, pp. 432-479.

- 105 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2016, *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 106 'Lit' is a slang term meaning 'excellent' or 'exciting'. It is also used to describe a cool person or an exciting event.
- 107 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2016, *The Australian Curriculum v8.3*, <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>>.
- 108 Lawson M & Lawson H 2013, 'New Conceptual Frameworks for Student Engagement Research, Policy and Practice', *Review of Educational Research*, Vol 83 No 3, pp. 432-479.
- 109 Collard P 2011, *Report of the 2011 Thinker in Residence: Unlocking Creativity*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 110 21st century skills are variously referred to by different terms, including capabilities, non-cognitive skills and enterprise skills. For further explanation (using the term capabilities), see Torii K & O'Connell M 2017, *Preparing Young People for the Future of Work*. Mitchell Institute Policy Report No. 01/2017, Mitchell Institute.
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- 114 Moore T 2017, *Protection through participation: Involving children in child-safe organisations*. CFCA Practice Paper, Child Family Community Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- 115 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2016, *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 116 Article 3, United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.
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- 119 Cross D et al 2010, 'Three year results of the Friendly Schools whole-of-school intervention on children's bullying behaviour', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol 37 No 1, pp. 1-25.
- 120 Hopkins K et al 2015, 'Relationships between Psychosocial Resilience and Physical Health Status of Western Australian Urban Aboriginal Youth', *PLoS ONE*, Vol 10 No 12.
- 121 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2016, *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 122 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2015, *Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13*, Center for Child Development, Harvard University.
- 123 Ibid.
- 124 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2009, *Mental Health: Issues Paper 3*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

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- 125 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2013, *Are you listening? Guidelines for making complaint systems accessible and responsive to children and young people*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 126 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2016, *Child Safe Organisations WA: Guidelines*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 127 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2014, *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People – Edition Two*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p. 48.
- 128 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2013, *Speaking Out About Disability*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 129 United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.
- 130 United Nations 2006, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner.
- 131 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2013, *Speaking Out About Disability*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 According to Department of Education WA figures, there were 4,345 students enrolled from Kindergarten to Year 12 in government-run education support centres in WA in 2015-16. Source: Department of Education WA 2016, *Department of Education Annual Report 2015-16*, Department of Education WA, p. 160.
- 134 In the Catholic education system, in WA there were 31 education support centres located in both primary and secondary schools in 2017. A total of 1,495 students from Kindergarten to Year 12 in both education support centres as well as mainstream schools were receiving support in 2017. Source: Catholic Education Western Australia 2017, custom report.
- 135 These 46 students all attended mainstream schools at the time of the research.
- 136 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2015, *Submission to the Inquiry into current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support*, submission to the Senate Education and Employment Committee, Commonwealth of Australia.
- 137 Education and Employment References Committee 2016, *Access to real learning: the impact of policy, funding and culture on students with disability*, Commonwealth of Australia.
- 138 In Semester 2 2016, Aboriginal students represented 18.0 per cent of all regional primary school students and 3.7 per cent of all metropolitan primary school students. Source: Department of Education WA 2016, *Statistical Reports, Detailed Reports*, 'Aboriginal student numbers by Education Sector and Education Region', Semester 2 2016, <<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolinformation/detcms/navigation/statistical-reports/?page=2#toc2>>
- 139 This includes respondents from the main and the additional sample.
- 140 In Semester 2 2016, Aboriginal students represented 21.8 per cent of all regional high school students and 3.2 per cent of all metropolitan high school students. Source: Department of Education WA, *Statistical Reports, Detailed Reports*, 'Aboriginal student numbers by Education Sector and Education Region', Semester 2 2016, <<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolinformation/detcms/navigation/statistical-reports/?page=2#toc2>>
- 141 This includes respondents from the main and the additional sample.
- 142 Includes students who answered 'I don't like school' and 'I don't like school at all'.

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- 143 Emerson L et al 2012, *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: Lessons from research*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.
- 144 Hancock K & Zubrick S 2015, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p. 8.
- 145 The Commissioner of Children and Young People WA had no control over how schools selected individual students to participate.
- 146 Clark TC et al 2013, *Youth'12 Overview: The health and wellbeing of New Zealand secondary school students in 2012*, The University of Auckland.
- 147 There was variation between the questions for younger and older students e.g. 'What do you like about school' vs. 'What do you most enjoy about school' – simplified, more accessible language for younger students chosen.
- 148 See Chapter Undertaking the School and Learning Consultation for further detail on the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Advisory Committees and two additional schools that assisted.

Appendix 1 - Technical notes

Sampling method and strategy

A stratified random sample of children and young people enrolled in Year 3 to Year 12 (in 2016) across WA was drawn. The sampling frame of 1,069 schools comprised all schools in WA teaching the relevant years.

Stratification was by geographic location (metropolitan and regional) and educational sector (government, Catholic, independent).

The desired sample size for the main sample was 1,400 students (random sample) and for the additional sample 600 students (non-random sample). The anticipated response rates were 80 per cent for schools and 10 per cent for students.

A list of 166 schools was selected (141 selected randomly, 25 non-randomly). Schools were selected in three stages following a lower than expected response rate from schools.

A direct approach was made to principals of all selected schools to request the involvement of students in their school.

Of the 166 invited schools:

- 104 school principals agreed to participate (this represents a response rate of 63%)
- 2 schools participated remotely (no CCYP staff member present)
- 6 schools cancelled consultations due to a zero-response rate from students
- 80 schools were part of the main sample
- 18 school were part of the additional sample
- 47 schools were in a regional area
- 4 schools were education support centres
- 1 school was a remote community school.

When the principal's consent was obtained specific year levels from Year 3 to Year 12 within those schools were then selected, determined by the size of the school and the needs of the school and its students (for example, Year 12 students had limited availability due to exams).¹⁴⁵ Students and their parents/guardians in the selected year levels were provided with information about the consultation including consent forms for both students and parents/guardians.

In total, 1,812 students across 98 schools participated in the survey and 1,174 students participated in the group discussion.

Sample characteristics

The characteristics of the student sample are presented in Table A2.1.

The characteristics of the sampled schools are in Table A2.2.

Table A2.1: Sample characteristics (main sample only)

| | N | Student sample % | Population % |
|---|-------|------------------|--------------|
| Gender | | | |
| Male | 611 | 42.0 | 51.0 |
| Female | 838 | 57.6 | 49.0 |
| Other* | 6 | 0.4 | n/a |
| School year | | | |
| Primary (Year 3 to Year 6) | 774 | 53.2 | 43.3 |
| Secondary (Year 7 to Year 12) | 681 | 46.8 | 56.7 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Status | | | |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 113 | 7.8 | 6.9 |
| Not Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 1,342 | 92.2 | 93.1 |
| Where born | | | |
| Australia | 1,161 | 79.8 | 80.2 |
| Elsewhere | 294 | 20.2 | 19.8 |
| Location of student's school | | | |
| Metropolitan | 934 | 64.2 | 78.5 |
| Regional | 521 | 35.8 | 21.5 |
| School sector | | | |
| Government | n/a** | n/a** | 66.5 |
| Non-government | n/a** | n/a** | 33.5 |

* Gender option 'other' not available in Year 3 to Year 6 survey.

** Not available and not asked.

Source: Includes data from Department of Education WA 2016, *Statistical Reports* [various], <www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolinformation/detcms/navigation/statistical-reports/?page=1#toc1>; ABS 2017, *Migration, Australia, 2015-16*, cat. no. 3412.0, <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3412.02015-16?OpenDocument>; ABS 2016, *Australian Demographic Statistics, Jun 2016*, cat. no. 3101.0, <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3101.0Jun%202016?OpenDocument>

Table A2.2: School characteristics (main sample only)

| | N | Student sample % | Population % |
|---|-----|------------------|--------------|
| Location of school | | | |
| Metropolitan | 52 | 65.0 | 64.0 |
| Regional | 28 | 35.0 | 36.0 |
| School sector | | | |
| Government | 57 | 71.3 | 72.0 |
| Non-government | 23 | 28.8 | 28.0 |
| School tier (primary or secondary) | | | |
| Primary (Year 3 to Year 6) | 42* | 48.8 | 63.8 |
| Secondary (Year 7 to Year 12) | 44* | 51.2 | 36.2 |

* Includes six schools teaching both primary and secondary year levels.

Source: Includes data from Department of Education WA 2016, *Statistical Reports* [various], <www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolinformation/detcms/navigation/statistical-reports/?page=1#toc1>; ABS 2017, *Migration, Australia, 2015-16*, cat. no. 3412.0, <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3412.02015-16?OpenDocument>; ABS 2016, *Australian Demographic Statistics, Jun 2016*, cat. no. 3101.0, <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3101.0Jun%202016?OpenDocument>

Individual student survey

Separate surveys were developed for Year 3 to Year 6 students and Year 7 to Year 12 students based on selected questions from the New Zealand Youth'12 Survey, the most recent survey in New Zealand's Youth2000 national survey series.¹⁴⁶ Some additional demographic questions were added and the wording of other questions amended to reflect the Western Australian context.¹⁴⁷

In contextualising the survey for Western Australia, feedback was sought from the Reference Group and the survey was trialled with the Commissioner's 2016 Advisory Committees and two groups of primary school students.¹⁴⁸ These groups of students provided feedback on the wording of questions, the timing and the process of completing the survey. The final Year 7 to Year 12 survey comprised 68 questions and took between 20 and 35 minutes for students to complete. The Year 3 to Year 6 survey comprised 31 questions and took between 10 and 25 minutes for students to complete.

Further modifications were made to the Year 3 to Year 6 Survey to develop a survey for students in education support centres and schools.

See Appendix 2 for the survey questions.

The full version of each survey is available from the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA's website and upon request.

The surveys were delivered through the online platform SurveyGizmo. Audio versions of the survey questions were embedded in the survey to assist students with low English literacy.

Students completed the survey individually using hand-held internet devices and with the support of the Commissioner's and school staff (if and when required). A wireless internet connection was used to facilitate access to the survey, rather than relying on individual schools' networks.

Group discussions

The group discussions explored in more detail the themes identified in previous consultations by CCYP with children and young people and the themes underlying the survey questions. The four themes were learning, relationships, support and family. The final question of the individual survey was used as the introductory question for the group discussions.

The Reference Group provided feedback on the group discussion questions and they were trialled with the Commissioner's 2016 Advisory Committees and two groups of primary school students, who also provided feedback.

See Appendix 3 for the group discussion questions.

Most students sat in small groups (usually of three) for the discussion and responded independently to questions by writing on prepared A2 sheets, with the Commissioner's staff (and sometimes school staff) moving between groups to facilitate. For some schools a whole group discussion was facilitated and scribed by the Commissioner's staff.

For almost all students who took part in the group discussion it followed the individual survey. The majority of students completed the introductory question and then two other questions, however, factors including time constraints meant there were variations to this process.

The group discussion worksheets were transcribed then coded and analysed using NVivo 11 Pro software. Thematic analysis was used to identify, explore and report on themes arising from the analysis of group discussion data.

Parent survey

A parent survey was developed to explore parent's views on their child's experiences of school and learning. The questions for parents were closely aligned with the questions in the Year 7 to Year 12 individual student survey.

The parent survey comprised 34 questions. It is available from the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA's website and upon request.

Parents/guardians who provided consent for their child's participation in the consultation were asked to provide their email contact if they wished to participate in the parent survey. A link to the survey on SurveyGizmo was then provided to them following their child/children's participation.

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Appendix 2 - Survey questions

Below is the full list of questions for students in Year 7 to Year 12. Survey logic was used to filter survey questions dependent on each student's responses. Year 3 to Year 6 students and students in education support centres completed an abbreviated and amended version of the survey.

The complete version of each survey is available from the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA's website and upon request.

Demography

- Question What Year level are you at school?
- Question How many high schools have you been a student at?
- Question What is your gender?
- Question Where do you go to school?
- Question Where were you born?
- Question Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?

Cultural background

- Question What nationality and cultural background(s) do you have?
(you may choose as many as you need)
- Question What language(s) do your parents or the people who look after you usually speak?
(you may choose as many as you need)
- Question Which language(s) can you speak well enough to have a conversation in?
(you may choose as many as you need)

Health

- Question In general how would you say your health is?
- Question Do you have any long-term health problems or conditions (lasting 6 months or more)?
(e.g. asthma, diabetes, depression)
- Question Does this health problem or condition cause you difficulty with, or stop you doing...
(you may choose as many as you need)
- Question Do you have any long-term disability (lasting 6 months or more)?
(e.g. sensory impaired hearing, visual impairment, in a wheelchair, learning difficulties)
- Question Does this disability cause you difficulty with, or stop you doing...
(you may choose as many as you need)
- Question How about the other people in your home?
Do you do extra work around your house because someone has a disability, is sick or can't do things?
- Question Does this stop you doing, or cause you to have less time to do...
(you may choose as many as you need)
- Question Overall do you think you have difficulties in any of the following areas:
concentration, behaviour, feelings or being able to get along with other people?
- Question Do the difficulties upset or distress you?
- Question Do the difficulties interfere with your everyday life in the following areas?
(you may choose as many as you like)

School and learning

- Question How do you feel about school?
- Question Why don't you like school? (you may choose as many as you need)
- Question What do you most enjoy about school? (you may choose as many as you need)
- Question Do you feel like you are part of your school?
- Question What makes you feel like you are part of your school?
- Question What are some of the reasons that make you feel like you are not part of your school?
- Question Do you belong to any school sports team?
- Question Do you belong to any groups or teams at school other than sports teams?
(e.g. musical, science, arts or debating)
- Question Do you do activities to help others at school?
(e.g. peer support, tutoring, coaching, being a leader, helping others with their work)
- Question How much do you feel that people at school care about you?
(like teachers, other school staff or the principal)
- Question How often do the teachers at your school treat students fairly?
- Question Have you ever been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher?
- Question Why do you think that was?
- Question Do people at your school expect you to do well?
- Question Do you get along with your teachers?
- Question Think about teachers you like. What do you like about them?
- Question How important is it to you to be proud of your school work?
- Question How well do you do at school (what are your school results)?
- Question At school, do you get the help you need to do your school work?
- Question What type of help do you need? (you may choose as many as you need)
- Question Do you get along with your class mates?
- Question How important is it to you to have a close friend or friends in your class?
- Question How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?
- Question How important is it to your parents or the people who look after you that you go to school every day?
- Question Has anyone in your family done any of these things in the last 12 months?
- Question Does anyone in your family ask about or help you with your homework/school work?
- Question How important is it to you to be at school every day?
- Question What are some of the things that are more important to you than being at school?
- Question This school year, have you wagged school for a full day or more?
- Question About how many days altogether have you wagged school this year?
- Question Do your parents or the people who look after you know when you wag school?
- Question Why did you wag school this year? (you may choose as many answers as you need)
- Question Have you ever been suspended from school (been sent home for a few days for doing something wrong)?

-
- Question How many times have you been suspended from school this year?
- Question Following your suspension, has an individual behaviour management plan been put into place for you?
- Question Have you ever received an in-school suspension?
- Question How many in-school suspensions have you received this year?
- Question What do you think will be the last Year at secondary school for you?
- Question Currently in WA, compulsory education continues until the end of Year 12.
Do you think this should be changed?
- Question How valuable is what you are learning at school to you and your future?
- Question Why is what you are learning at school not valuable to you?
- Question Why is what you are learning at school valuable to you? (you may choose as many as you need)
- Question What do you plan to do when you leave secondary school? (you may choose as many as you need)

School and safety

- Question Do you feel safe in your school?
- Question This school year, how often have you been afraid that someone will hurt or bully you at school?
- Question How many times this year have you not gone to school because you were afraid someone might hurt or bully you?
- Question How often do the teachers take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied?
- Question Does the action that the teachers take help or make the situation better?
- Question If there was one thing you could change about your school what would it be?

Appendix 3 - Group discussion questions

Introductory question (also the last question on the survey)

If there was one thing you could change about your school what would it be?

Question 1 (Theme: Learning)

Think about a time when you really liked learning at school. Why did you like it?

What helps other kids like learning at school?

What makes it hard for some kids to learn?

Question 2 (Theme: Relationships)

Friends

Is it important to have friends at school?

Why are friends at school important?

What happens if you don't have friends at school?

Teachers and other school staff

Is it important to get along with your teachers at school? Why?

Think about a teacher that you like. What do they do that helps you get along with them?

What are some ideas to improve the way students, teachers and school staff get along?

Question 3 (Theme: Support)

What help or support do kids need?

What makes it hard for kids to get the help or support they need?

Question 4 (Theme: Family)

In what ways can families help kids do well at school and learning?

What ways might families not be helpful?

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