

## Leading schools that make a difference to bullying behaviour

Sally Boyd and Elliot Lawes

*New Zealand Centre for Educational Research, Wellington, New Zealand*

### **Abstract**

*Student bullying behaviour is a long-standing concern in New Zealand schools. International studies consistently show high rates of student reports of this behaviour. Research suggests that bullying behaviour is a socioecological and systemic phenomenon that is best addressed via systems-based and multifaceted approaches implemented using collaborative processes. Less is known about the most effective components of these multifaceted approaches. This article analyses New Zealand Wellbeing@School survey data to suggest ways forward for schools. A multilevel model was used to associate two student and two teacher measures from the same schools. The findings indicate that a mix of school-wide actions were associated with lower levels of student aggressive and bullying behaviour. Five sub-groups of actions are discussed in the light of recent New Zealand and international research. The article concludes with a call to locate anti-bullying approaches within a multifaceted and holistic framework which has the overall aim of promoting wellbeing and healthy social relationships. A holistic approach enables schools to foster protective factors such as belonging, and address risk factors that influence bullying behaviour, as well as a range of desirable education and health outcomes for young people.*

**Keywords:** *Bullying behaviour; wellbeing; school systems; collaborative leadership; behaviour management*

### **Introduction: Bullying and aggressive behaviour is a long standing issue in New Zealand schools**

An incident of bullying at a school gets into the media. The community calls for the perpetrator to be expelled. The school is in a rural area with no other local options for students. What can school leaders do to avoid a student being left without a local schooling option, and what could they do to stop these behaviours happening in the future? This article considers what New Zealand research findings from an analysis of Wellbeing@School data can tell us about ways forward for schools.

Wellbeing@School is a self-review toolkit, based on a systems-view of schools, which supports schools to review their practice across different layers of school life. Wellbeing@School was developed from research about strengthening school climates and addressing bullying behaviour (Boyd, 2012). The Wellbeing@School student and teacher surveys focus on the extent to which a school provides a safe and caring social climate. The student survey includes a scale which examines the extent to which aggressive and bullying behaviour occurs at a school, and questions about school climate and students' social wellbeing.

Student aggression and bullying behaviour is a long-standing concern in New Zealand schools. International studies consistently show we have high rates of student reports of these behaviours compared with other countries. The 2007 and 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Martin, Mullis, & Foy, 2008; Mullis, Martin, & Foy, 2008; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2016) included questions about whether students had been shoved, kicked, or hit by other students in the last month. The findings showed New Zealand Year 5 and 9 students report higher levels of these behaviours than their peers from other countries. As one example, 24% of New Zealand students in the 2015 mathematics study reported weekly experiences of these behaviours compared to the international average of 16% (Mullis et al., 2016). Recent Programme for International Student Assessment data from 2015 shows a similar pattern for 15-year-olds. Out of the 70 participating countries, New Zealand was second highest on the Index of Exposure to Bullying developed from the study data (Ministry of Education, 2017a).

New Zealand studies show considerable variation in students' experiences of school. Wellbeing@School data (Lawes & Boyd, 2017) and a Youth 2000 sub-study on school climate (Denny, Robinson, Milfont, & Grant, 2009) found wide variation between schools in the average rates of bullying behaviour students reported, and their views about school climate and safety.

Bullying behaviour has many negative impacts on students. Involvement in bullying behaviour (as a perpetrator or a target) is associated with poorer short and longer-term health and education outcomes for young people such as early school leaving (Wylie, Hipkins, & Hodgen, 2008). Being a target of bullying contributes to suicide behaviours (Fortune et al., 2010). New Zealand has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in OECD countries (Gluckman, 2017; OECD, 2009).

The New Zealand data suggest we need to do more to build safe school environments as well as students' capabilities in managing their social and emotional wellbeing. A sense of wellbeing is central to students' success at school and in life. The National Administration Guidelines (NAG 5) state that New Zealand schools have a responsibility to provide a safe emotional and physical environment for students. The importance of fostering students' wellbeing is clearly stated in the vision of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Recently the Education Act has been updated. As well as focusing on achievement, the act now includes clearer objectives in regard to the wellbeing-related aspects of schooling. These objectives include a focus on schools instilling an appreciation of the importance of inclusion, and promoting the development of "good social skills and the ability to form good relationships" (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p.1).

### ***What is bullying behaviour?***

It is important to understand what bullying behaviour is, and how it is different from other forms of aggressive behaviour. Most definitions of bullying emphasise three aspects, bullying is *deliberate harmful* aggressive behaviour which is *repeated* (or threatens to be repeated), and involves a *power imbalance* (see for example, Jimerson & Huai, 2010). Bullying is different from other forms of aggressive behaviour that might be one-off acts such as sexual harassment or physical assault. However, these, or other types of aggressive behaviour, may be involved in bullying incidents. Bullying is not a single type of behaviour. It comes in four common forms: verbal, social, physical, and cyber.

Bullying behaviour was initially viewed as an individual deficit or an inter-personal problem. More recent research has led to a re-conceptualisation of bullying as a socioecological and systemic phenomenon, that is influenced by those who are being bullied, peers, adults, and parents, as well as by school, home, community, and societal environments and norms (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Orpinas & Horne, 2006; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Socioecological approaches to bullying behaviour are based on systems thinking, whereas traditional interventionist approaches emphasise "remediation, deficits, and weaknesses in individuals" (Slee, 2010, p. 484). Socioecological approaches focus on the active role of individuals and groups in constructing meaning. Thus socioecological solutions to bullying are more likely to emphasise building competency, harnessing individual strengths, and community action. Given the socioecological and systemic nature of bullying behaviour, researchers caution about labelling an individual student as a "bully" since this implies bullying is a stable personality trait. Instead studies show the fluidity of this behaviour as people step in and out of the roles of bully, victim, or bystander (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009).

School leaders often have to manage community views and media coverage that is based on the "personality trait" view of bullying behaviour. Individual students are labelled a bully, and there are calls for them to be punished by expulsion from school. However, removal from school is problematic for young people as it can trigger a trajectory which starts with early school leaving, and then leads to youth offending (Sutherland, 2011), other risk behaviours, and poorer education and health outcomes (Towl & Hemphill,

2016). Short-term solutions such as stand-downs and suspensions can also be problematic as, in some cases, it is not clear who the “bully” is: a student who behaves aggressively may be trying to deal with ongoing experiences of bullying (Towl, 2014).

Socioecological solutions consider how the wider school system and community might better promote a culture of care, and how within this culture, individuals and groups of students might be supported to develop strategies for repairing harm and making and maintaining healthy social relationships. One example of how the system around students impacts on behaviour is the role of bystanders. A seminal study by Salmivalli (1999) established that bullying behaviours often have an audience of peers and bystanders who take on a range of roles. Some roles directly or indirectly maintain norms about bullying behaviours. Many anti-bullying approaches include strategies that aim to promote student action by harnessing the power of bystanders to disrupt the social norms of the system. A focus on mobilising peers is one component of the successful Finnish KiVa programme (Salmivalli, Kärnä, & Poskiparta, 2011). A more local example, in use in New Zealand secondary schools, is the “no blame” approach which develops “under-cover teams” of students who develop strategies to support a peer (Winslade et al., 2015). The team includes students who are socially respected by their peers who model healthy relationships, as well as those who have engaged in bullying behaviour.

Restorative practice is another example of an approach that aligns with a socioecological orientation, as it offers teachers and students training on effective problem-solving dialogue (Matla & Jansen, 2011), and a process for drawing on community strengths to find solutions and maintain relationships (Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007; Macfarlane, Macfarlane, & Margrain, 2011; Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007). In general, students report more experiences of bullying behaviour than are noticed by adults (Wylie & Hipkins, 2006). This lack of visibility to adults is one reason why it is important to use approaches that mobilise peers.

### ***What role can schools have in addressing bullying behaviour?***

We know that school actions make a difference to students’ wellbeing. Students at schools with more positive climates, and well-structured support services, report better wellbeing and lower levels of risky behaviours, than their peers at other schools (Denny et al., 2011). School actions can also make a difference to students’ wellbeing in terms of addressing bullying. The weight of evidence suggests that systemic problems like bullying are best addressed by systemic and multifaceted actions such as Whole School Approaches (WSAs), rather than single solutions, such as a curriculum intervention. WSAs are an effective way of addressing bullying behaviour (Langford et al., 2015; Smith, 2011; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) as well as other health, wellbeing, or behaviour foci (Langford et al., 2015; Stewart-Brown, 2006). However, addressing bullying behaviour in schools is complex and requires a multifaceted and long-term approach (Smith, 2011; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

In New Zealand, Health Promoting Schools and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) School-Wide are perhaps the most well-known examples of WSAs. PB4L School-Wide is the New Zealand adaptation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBiS) initiative developed in the United States (Sugai & Simonsen, 2012). One contributor to the successes of WSAs is the use of collaborative processes to involve the school community in creating a new vision and related actions. Another is that WSAs include a framework of multiple components that aim to modify the different layers of the system that surrounds students to better align with the overall vision.

Although WSAs offer an effective *process* and *framework* to support change, less is known about the most effective components of WSAs that deter bullying behaviour (Bradshaw, 2015). One systematic review has attempted to quantify the contribution of different components of anti-bullying initiatives to the overall impact of the initiative (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). However, this review was mostly based on North American

and European findings spanning 25 years. Due to a paucity of studies about new approaches, the review was not able to incorporate a focus on competency-building approaches such as restorative practices which are common in New Zealand schools.

### Methodology

This article draws on an analysis of Wellbeing@School student and teacher survey data (Lawes & Boyd, 2017, 2018), to describe the extent of aggressive and bullying behaviour in New Zealand schools, and explore the types of school-wide and classroom practices that might make a difference to these behaviours. This analysis explored students' experiences of school and examined whether some practices, or clusters of practices, made a difference to these experiences. Our main question was: Are there practices that are more likely at schools where students report high wellbeing or lower levels of aggressive and bullying behaviour?

We analysed Wellbeing@School data collected from 58,337 students and 3,416 teachers from 400 schools that used the Wellbeing@School surveys from 2013 to 2016. These schools included primary, intermediate, secondary, and area schools with a range of deciles and locations. The Wellbeing@School survey has five scales or measures and a number of sub-scales created from a literature review and analysis of data collected in 2011. We wanted to test these measures from more recent data as well as possibly create new measures to align with our research questions. First, to provide a way of connecting student and teacher data from the same schools within a multilevel model, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis to look for clusters of items that were associated within each of the complete student and teacher datasets. We then used Rasch measurement techniques (Bond & Fox, 2007) to construct two student and two teacher measures that could be linked at the school level.

1. The *student wellbeing* measure includes questions about social and emotional wellbeing such as students' perceptions of belonging and safety at school, and their competencies in managing their social and emotional wellbeing.
2. The *student aggressive behaviours* measure includes questions about the extent to which students experience aggressive and bullying behaviour at school. This measure includes questions about the common manifestations of bullying behaviour as described in a range of studies (Felix, Sharkey, Grief Green, Furlong, & Tanigawa, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2017a).
3. The *school-wide actions* measure (see Table 1) includes questions for teachers about how their school fosters a safe and caring climate, and school-wide practices and procedures that promote wellbeing and deter bullying behaviour.
4. The *teaching for wellbeing* measure (see Table 2) includes questions about practices that teachers use in the classroom to foster social and emotional wellbeing.

We then applied a number of multilevel linear models to link the student and teacher data from 121 schools to understand how differences in student wellbeing and student aggressive behaviours might be associated with differences in school-wide actions, teaching for wellbeing, and school and student characteristics.

### Findings

#### *Schools vary substantially in the extent of bullying behaviour*

The Wellbeing@School data showed that overall, the average proportion of students per school who reported weekly experiences of bullying behaviour was 15% (Lawes & Boyd, 2017). This average figure masks the substantial variation between schools which was from 2% to 42% of students in primary and intermediate schools, and 2% to 26% of students in secondary schools. A similar variation for secondary schools (0% to 23%) was reported from the Youth 2007 survey (Denny, Robinson, Milfont, & Grant, 2009).

The fact that some schools had much lower rates of reported bullying behaviour than others suggested these schools might have more strategies for deterring bullying behaviour. Multi-level modelling confirmed this hypothesis. After accounting for school decile and student gender, ethnic group, and year level, higher levels of teacher agreement that *school-wide actions* were in place was significantly associated with lower levels of *student aggressive behaviours* at the  $p < 0.05$  level. That is, there is a 95% probability that this association is not due to random connections in the data.

### ***School-wide actions make a difference to aggressive and bullying behaviour***

The *school-wide actions* measure included questions about a range of policies and practices. Although higher levels of reported *school-wide actions* were associated with lower levels of *student aggressive behaviours*, none of the policies or practices in the *school-wide actions* measure stood out individually as having higher correlations with lower levels of *student aggressive behaviour*.

One interpretation of this finding is that a combination of school-wide practices, or a multifaceted approach that addresses different layers of school life, is important rather than isolated actions. This interpretation aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of WSAs. As noted earlier, WSAs usually include two features: a multifaceted framework and a process for working which is usually collaborative. These two features are both represented in the questions in the *school-wide actions* measure.

The *school-wide actions* questions are shown in Table 1, along with the proportion of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed, on a 4-point scale, that the practice was in place. The practices are located in five sub-groups: collaborative leadership; creating a wellbeing culture; effective policies and practices; support for students; and prioritising professional learning and development (PLD). The sub-groups in this study are aligned with the initial Wellbeing@School sub-scales. A Cronbach's alpha test was applied to check for internal consistency within each sub-group. The alpha values varied from 0.79 to 0.86 which are within the "acceptable" to "good" ranges for this test, suggesting the items in each sub-group relate to the same construct.

Some of the individual policies and practices were common across schools and others were less so. An example of a common practice was "School leaders promote the school as a caring and culturally inclusive community". A total of 92% teachers agreed or strongly agreed this practice occurred at their school. Practices that were less common included "Behaviour management policies or procedures are applied consistently and fairly to all students" (68%) and "When we start new approaches, school leaders make sure all staff have enough information and training" (66%).

School leaders are in roles that enable them to influence these practices. The next part of this article examines each of the five sub-groups. We explore the extent to which Wellbeing@School and other recent data suggest the practices in each group are in place in New Zealand schools, and make connections between the main focus of each sub-group and New Zealand and international literature.

### ***Working collaboratively***

Collaborative leadership processes is the first sub-group of practices in Table 1. The strengthening of school processes to deter aggressive and bullying behaviour requires a change to school culture and practice. The ability to create a collaborative culture is one of the characteristics of school leaders who are successful in transforming practice (Fullan, 2011; Louis, 2015). Fullan (2011) describes how successful change leaders "democratise" processes by sharing power and harnessing the wisdom of the crowd to move forward. Similarly, in a large study of the influence of leadership on student learning, Louis (2015) found that the leaders who got more results created professional communities that had a sense of shared ownership over key goals. These leaders prioritised whole-school development by engaging all teachers and students with key goals. They shared leadership roles and consulted all teachers about big decisions. The leaders in Louis' study were also "integrative" in that they created bridges between groups that might not be working together, such as between schools and parents.

Table 1. Teacher agreement with school-wide action items

<b>Sub-group</b>	<b>Statements about practices</b>	<b>Agree/ Strongly agree %</b>
Collaborative leadership  (Cronbach's Alpha 0.85)	We listen to, and take action to address, the concerns of parents and whānau	93
	Students are treated as responsible citizens who have a say in what happens	85
	School leaders encourage staff to share ideas rather than compete with each other	83
	The leadership team works collaboratively with staff to set school directions	73
	Staff approach new developments or problems as a team	71
	We seek input from all key stakeholders (staff, students, parents and whānau) when we are making changes	68
Creating a wellbeing culture  (Cronbach's Alpha 0.80)	School leaders promote the school as a caring and culturally inclusive community	92
	Students' successes are shared widely (e.g., in assemblies, staff meetings, newsletters)	91
	Staff treat each other with respect	82
	Staff share a strong collective vision	80
	Staff have a strong sense of belonging	76
Effective policies and procedures  (Cronbach's Alpha 0.86)	We share the school expectations of behaviour with parents and whānau	86
	We actively address student behaviours such as harassment, violence, bullying, and cyber-bullying	85
	We provide a safe social and physical workplace for staff	83
	We have school-wide guidelines that help us recognise and address student behaviour incidents of differing severity	77
	We have a school-wide behaviour management policy or procedure that is easy for our school community to understand	75
	Behaviour management policies or procedures are applied consistently and fairly to all students	68
	We actively address staff workplace harassment and bullying	68
Support for students  (Cronbach's Alpha 0.82)	We have effective support systems for students with special learning needs	86
	We select new approaches or programmes based on student data and needs	85
	We have effective systems for referring students with behavioural concerns (if necessary)	80
	We provide extra support for students who are the target of bullying or harassment (e.g., counselling)	75
	We offer effective support and programmes for students with social or behavioural needs	74
Prioritising PLD  (Cronbach's Alpha 0.79)	All teachers are learners at this school	87
	Professional learning provides opportunities for teachers to work together to develop, trial, and refine new approaches	84
	Professional learning enables teachers to observe their colleagues modelling new practices	67
	When we start new approaches, school leaders make sure all staff have enough information and training	66

In New Zealand, the PB4L School-Wide evaluation provides examples of collaborative leadership (Boyd & Felgate, 2015; Boyd, Hotere-Barnes, Tongati'o, & MacDonald, 2015). The schools that had successes in embedding PB4L School-Wide and changing their culture had strong collaborative processes that involved the whole community right from the start. They worked collaboratively with each group of key stakeholders: teachers, students, and parents and whānau.

In general, the Wellbeing@School data and other studies suggest more could be done to develop collaborative processes that harness the expertise of school stakeholders to assist in creating change. As one example, New Zealand data suggest that offering students input into school actions, decision-making, and leadership roles is an area that needs more development in primary, intermediate (Boyd, Bonne, & Berg, 2017; ERO, 2015a), and secondary (ERO, 2015b) schools.

### *Creating a wellbeing culture*

The second sub-group of practices in Table 1 explores the development of a wellbeing-focused culture that is caring, inclusive, and fosters belonging. A culture such as this is important for both students and teachers. The Wellbeing@School data suggested that the extent to which schools had this culture varies substantially for students and teachers.

To illustrate this for students, we used data from the 183 schools for which we had at least 100 student responses. At these schools the proportion of student respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel I belong at school" varied from 68% to 97%. A sense of belonging or connection to school is important as it is a known protective factor associated with improved longer-term educational and health outcomes for young people (Resnick et al., 1997) and engagement at school (Willms, 2003).

A sense of belonging and a caring environment is also important to improve teacher practice. For example, Louis (2015) found that principals' care for teachers was one of three predictive factors that were related to teachers' sense of professional community which in turn impacted on teaching and learning. The other two predictive factors were shared and instructional leadership.

For teachers, a sense of belonging and a caring environment is exemplified in the items in Table 1 such as "Staff have a strong sense of belonging". Similar to students, the Wellbeing@School data showed that teachers' sense of belonging varied between schools. To illustrate this, we used data from the 133 schools for which we had at least 10 teacher responses. At these schools the proportion of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel I belong at school" varied from 11% to 100%. A cut-off point of 10 teachers was used to ensure we could create a relatively stable average to compare schools. Some New Zealand schools are small and have few teachers. In other schools only a few teachers submitted surveys. Therefore it was not possible to create a meaningful average for these schools.

Other New Zealand data also shows a variation in the extent to which teachers feel their school culture is caring. An analysis of the first year of data from the Teaching and School Practices survey showed substantial variation in teacher views in relation to items in the *Supportive and caring environment* scale (Wylie, McDowall, Ferral, Felgate, & Visser, 2018, p. 47). These various studies suggest that creating a wellbeing-focused and caring culture can have multiple benefits for the wellbeing and learning of students and teachers.

### *Effective behaviour management policies and procedures*

A whole-school and consistent approach to addressing bullying incidents is often cited as one of the core components of an effective school anti-bullying approach. In their systematic review, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) identified that a whole school anti-bullying policy and disciplinary methods were components of more successful anti-bullying initiatives.

In this Wellbeing@School analysis, effective behaviour management policies and procedures are one of the sub-groups of practices in the overall *school-wide actions* measure associated with lower levels of *student*

*aggressive behaviours*. Around three-quarters of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their school had school-wide guidelines that helped them recognise and address student behaviour incidents of differing severity. However, only around two-thirds thought behaviour management policies or procedures were applied consistently and fairly to all students.

A range of other recent reports also show variation in behaviour management approaches in New Zealand schools (Boyd et al., 2017; ERO, 2015a, 2015b). Teachers' responses to the 2016 NZCER national survey of primary schools show variation in consistency between schools. Approaches to behaviour were inter-connected, that is, teachers who strongly agreed one behaviour-related practice was in place, also tended to strongly agree that other practices were in place (Boyd et al., 2017). Examples included "we have a clear school-wide process for addressing behaviours such as bullying" and "we have a consistent approach to behaviour incidents that builds students' relationship skills" (Boyd et al., 2017, p. 40). Principals varied in the extent to which they reported behaviour-related practices were embedded at their schools. Principals at schools that had joined PB4L School-Wide were more likely to report systems were well embedded, for example:

- consistent systems for encouraging positive behaviours
- a consistent approach to behaviour incidents that builds students' relationship skills, such as restorative or problem-solving approaches to behaviour
- a consistent whole school approach to addressing bullying behaviour that builds students' competencies (Boyd et al., 2017, p. 44).

These findings also suggest that the approaches to behaviour management in New Zealand schools place emphasis on non-punitive approaches that build students' competencies. In their review, Ttofi and Farrington (2011) gave examples of disciplinary processes that were associated with successful anti-bullying approaches. Many of these processes were punitive (e.g., serious talks and sanctions). Due to a paucity of studies in areas of emerging practice, Ttofi and Farrington noted they were not able to incorporate a focus on non-punitive practices such as restorative approaches.

As shown in Table 1, only two-thirds of teachers in this Wellbeing@School analysis agreed that behaviour management policies or procedures were applied consistently and fairly to all students. The recent *Education matters to me* consultation with New Zealand students highlighted that building a stronger sense of fairness was one of things students would like to change about their school (Office of the Children's Commissioner & NZ School Trustees Association, 2018a, 2018b).

Findings from international studies suggest that teacher fairness is a contributor to improved outcomes for students. A review of 133 studies on school relationships, and their impact on student mental health and academic learning, found perceived levels of teacher support and fairness were key teacher behaviours (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010). These behaviours fostered good relationships which contributed to positive mental wellbeing for young people. The authors concluded there is a complex "spider-web" of interconnections between relationships, belonging, engagement, and wellbeing and argued for greater pedagogical and policy attention to be paid to this "spider-web". The findings from this Wellbeing@School analysis support this conclusion.

### *Support for students*

Support for students is the fourth sub-group of practices. This support can come in a variety of forms from assistance for students with additional learning or behaviour needs through to guidance, counselling, or health service support for students with social, emotional, or physical wellbeing needs. Forms of support that can be seen as directly relevant to aggressive and bullying behaviour, include support for students with behaviour concerns or social and emotional wellbeing needs.

In the primary setting, most of the schools (86%) in the 2016 NZCER national survey reported having some form of system for identifying groups or students who might need extra social or emotional support (Boyd et al., 2017). There was variation in terms of the type and extent of support provided for vulnerable students. Lower decile schools had more actual supports in place than higher decile schools such as in-school specialists who supported vulnerable students.

In secondary school contexts, social and emotional support for students can be provided through guidance and counselling or health services. An ERO (2013) review of guidance and counselling in secondary schools showed practice varied considerably between schools. Effective schools had, among other things, strong leadership with strategic plans, preventative programmes based on student needs, good referral processes and relationships, and use of data to suggest needs and review programmes. The *Youth 2012* study of New Zealand secondary students and schools (Denny et al., 2014) found that health services varied considerably between schools. Schools that had high levels of in-house support for students by a team of professionals had less depression and suicide risk amongst their students. Looked at together, the findings from this analysis, and other New Zealand studies (Boyd et al., 2015; Denny et al., 2014), suggest that adequate school-based support for students is related to higher levels of student wellbeing and lower levels of aggressive and bullying behaviours.

#### *Prioritising PLD*

The prioritisation of PLD is the fifth sub-group of practices in the *school-wide actions* measure. The data in Table 1 suggests that not all new initiatives are accompanied by adequate PLD for teachers. The importance of adequate PLD to support teacher learning and changes to practice is well-documented in the school change (Timperley, 2011; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007), and anti-bullying literature (Smith, 2011; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Teacher training was one of the components of successful school anti-bullying approaches identified in Ttofi and Farrington's review. Overall, effective professional learning relies on schools developing an organisational learning culture (Fullan, 2005; Louis, 2015; Timperley et al., 2007). In communities that foster organisational learning, teachers are supported to "own" the improvement culture and related school goals, and they seek, try out, and monitor the success of new ideas in collaboration with their peers (Louis, 2015).

#### *Teaching for wellbeing also deters aggressive and bullying behaviour*

What teachers do in the classroom is also important in fostering wellbeing and deterring aggressive and bullying behaviour. WSAs commonly include classroom or curriculum components. For example, classroom rules is one of the components of successful school anti-bullying approaches identified in Ttofi and Farrington's (2011) review.

In this analysis, the *teaching for wellbeing* measure focused on classroom practice. After accounting for school decile and student gender, year level, and ethnic group, higher levels of *teaching for wellbeing* were significantly associated ( $p < 0.01$ ) with higher levels of *student wellbeing*. Schools at which students reported higher levels of wellbeing also had lower levels of *student aggressive behaviours*. Thus there is a relationship between *teaching for wellbeing* and *student aggressive behaviours*, although this is less direct than the relationship between *school-wide practices* and *student aggressive behaviours*.

As well as the overall association between *teaching for wellbeing* and *student wellbeing*, half of the 18 individual statements in the *teaching for wellbeing* measure were moderately correlated with higher levels of *student wellbeing* (see Table 2). Most of these statements are active forms of social and emotional learning that give students opportunities to discuss, develop, or practise strategies for managing emotions and relationships, and address situations such as bullying behaviour. A couple of statements were related to teachers' planning practices.

Table 2: Teaching for wellbeing statements associated with student wellbeing

	Pearson correlation coefficient	Agree/Strongly agree %
<b>Active learning statements</b>		
Students are taught strategies for managing their feelings and emotions in non-confrontational ways ( e.g., using “I” statements)	0.25	78
I use role play or drama activities to support students to develop and practise effective strategies for relating to others	0.25	53
Classroom or form teachers work with students to develop a charter or commitment to a shared set of class values or behaviours	0.25	86
Students are taught ways of intervening in conflict or bullying incidents to support each other	0.23	66
I use classroom discussion time (e.g., form time or circle time) for students to share and resolve any concerns they have	0.23	74
I frequently praise students for helpful and caring behaviour	0.21	97
Students learn and practise strategies they could use to resolve conflicts (e.g., how to deal with cyber-bullying or hold a restorative conversation)	0.20	65
<b>Planning for wellbeing statements</b>		
I tailor teaching materials to students’ skills, needs, and backgrounds	0.21	97
My curriculum or lesson plans include a focus on the social and behavioural skills this school would like students to develop	0.21	73

The *teaching for wellbeing* practices were particularly associated with *student wellbeing* for Year 5–8 students. Most of these practices were more common in primary schools. However, the ordering of practices in terms of commonality was similar for primary and secondary schools. Less common practices included “Students are taught ways of intervening in conflict or bullying incidents to support each other”. A focus on bystander education is a core practice in successful anti-bullying initiatives such as KiVa (Salmivalli et al., 2011), suggesting more focus on this practice could benefit New Zealand students.

International studies suggest that social and emotional learning experiences are associated with a wide range of benefits for students beyond wellbeing. A well-known meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) found social and emotional learning was associated with positive outcomes in six areas: enhanced social and emotional skills; attitudes toward self and others; social behaviours; and academic performance; as well as decreased emotional distress and lower levels of conduct problems (this category including bullying, disruptive class behaviour, aggression, and school suspensions).

School leaders have a substantial role to play in setting the overall direction for classroom practice by creating the conditions that promote whole school planning and consistency of practice between teachers. In the 2016 NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools, 36% of principals reported they had a well embedded school-wide plan to teach emotional skills (Boyd et al., 2017). A further 45% reported this plan was partially embedded. In the 2015 national survey of secondary schools (Wylie & Bonne, 2016), 53% of principals reported that active teaching in everyday classes of strategies for managing feelings was well or partially embedded at their school. A further 26% noted this was not done at their school. Teachers were asked

a similar question. Their responses aligned with principals' reports. Looked at together, these responses suggest more focus is needed on consistent approaches to social and emotional learning across the primary and secondary sectors.

### Discussion and conclusion

This analysis suggests that, to best address student aggressive and bullying behaviour, a multifaceted Whole School Approach is needed that includes a plan with actions which relate to a range of aspects of school practice. This article provides evidence to underpin the selection of these actions.

The actions that deter aggressive and bullying behaviour and promote student wellbeing are interrelated which suggests that, rather than focusing on the "single issue" of bullying, a Whole School Approach is best located within a holistic framework that aims to promote wellbeing and healthy social relationships. A premise underpinning holistic approaches is that many risk and protective factors are similar for different issues (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002). Thus a holistic approach which fosters a range of protective factors, and addresses risk factors, is likely to have positive benefits across a range of "single issues". Two examples of protective factors that feature in this Wellbeing@School analysis, and are associated with improved education and health outcomes, are a sense of belonging or connection to school (Resnick et al., 1997) and classroom social and emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011).

A tension with holistic approaches is that schools will also need to consider how to incorporate a focus on awareness raising about behaviours and actions such as consent and sexual harassment, unconscious bias and racism, and sexism. Like bullying, addressing these behaviours involves examining societal power dynamics, as well as considering how the behaviours might best be addressed in school settings.

One key message we can take from this analysis is that what schools do can make a difference. The findings also suggest much can be done, and needs to be done, to create consistent practice across New Zealand schools. School leaders are in a position to lead the development of a multifaceted wellbeing plan, and influence which school-wide actions and teaching for wellbeing practices are included in this plan. They also need to manage community perceptions that are often based on views of bullying behaviour that are not well-aligned with the findings from research. Processes that harness the expertise of key community members (students, teachers, parents and whānau) are likely to build a stronger shared understanding about unwanted behaviours and contribute to the development of a strategic and multifaceted plan and a caring culture that deters these behaviours. Given the hidden nature of bullying behaviour, and research findings which suggest students can either maintain or disrupt negative peer norms (Salmivalli, 1999; Winslade et al., 2015), partnering with students as co-developers is a vital facet of any approach that aims to promote a caring school culture.

### References

- Bond, T., & Fox, C. (2007). *Applying the Rasch Model: Fundamental measurement in the human sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Boyd, S. (2012). *Wellbeing@School: Building a safe and caring school climate that deters bullying overview paper*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Boyd, S., Bonne, L., & Berg, M. (2017). *Finding a balance – fostering student wellbeing, positive behaviour, and learning. Findings from the NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools 2016*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Boyd, S., & Felgate, R. (2015). *"A positive culture of support": Final report from the evaluation of PB4L School-Wide*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

- Boyd, S., Hotere-Barnes, A., Tongati'o, L., & MacDonald, J. (2015). *"It's who we are": Stories of practice and change from PB4L School-Wide schools*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Bradshaw, C. (2015). Translating research to practice in bullying prevention. *American Psychologist, 70*(4), 322–332.
- Catalano, R., Berglund, M., Ryan, J., Lonczak, H., & Hawkins, J. (2002). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *Prevention and Treatment, 5*(15), 1–111.
- Denny, S., Grant, S., Galbreath, R., Clark, T., Fleming, T., Bullen, P., et al. (2014). *Health services in New Zealand secondary schools and the associated health outcomes for students*. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Denny, S., Robinson, E., Milfont, T., & Grant, S. (2009). *Youth '07: The social climate of secondary schools in New Zealand*. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Denny, S., Robinson, E., Utter, J., Fleming, T., Grant, S., Milfont, T., et al. (2011). Do schools influence student risk-taking behaviors and emotional health symptoms? *Journal of Adolescent Health, 48*(3), 259–267.
- Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development, 82*(1), 405–432.
- ERO. (2013). *Improving guidance and counselling for students in secondary schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- ERO. (2015a). *Wellbeing for children's success at primary school*. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- ERO. (2015b). *Wellbeing for young people's success at secondary school*. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Espelage, D., & Swearer, S. (2010). A socio-ecological model for bullying prevention and intervention. In S. Jimerson, S. Swearer, & D. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 61–72). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Felix, E., Sharkey, J., Grief Green, J., Furlong, M., & Tanigawa, D. (2011). Getting precise and pragmatic about the assessment of bullying: The development of the California Bullying Victimization Scale. *Aggressive Behavior, 37*(3), 234–247.
- Fortune, S., Watson, P., Robinson, E., Fleming, T., Merry, S., & Denny, S. (2010). *Youth '07: The health and wellbeing of secondary school students in New Zealand: Suicide behaviours and mental health in 2001 and 2007*. Auckland: The University of Auckland.
- Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader: Learning to do what matters most*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gluckman, P. (2017). *Youth suicide in New Zealand: A discussion paper*. Wellington: Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor.
- Jimerson, S., & Huai, N. (2010). International perspectives on bullying prevention and intervention. In S. Jimerson, S. Swearer, & D. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 571–592). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Langford, R., Bonell, C., Jones, H., Poulou, T., Murphy, S., Waters, E., et al. (2015). The World Health Organization's Health Promoting Schools framework: A Cochrane systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health, 15*(130). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-1360-y>
- Lawes, E., & Boyd, S. (2017). *Making a difference to student wellbeing*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Lawes, E., & Boyd, S. (2018). *Making a difference to student wellbeing – a data exploration*. Wellington: NZCER.

- Louis, K. (2015). Linking leadership to learning: State, district and local effects. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 2015(3). <https://doi.org/10.3402/nstep.v1.30321>
- Macfarlane, A., Glynn, T., Cavanagh, T., & Bateman, S. (2007). Creating culturally-safe schools for Maori students. *Australian Journal for Indigenous Education*, 36, 65–76.
- Macfarlane, S., Macfarlane, A., & Margrain, V. (2011). Restoring the individual. In V. Margrain & A. Macfarlane (Eds.), *Responsive Pedagogy* (pp. 147–172). Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Martin, M., Mullis, I., & Foy, P. (2008). *TIMSS 2007 international science report*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center.
- Matla, R., & Jansen, G. (2011). Restorative conversations. In V. Margrain & A. Macfarlane (Eds.), *Responsive pedagogy* (pp. 110–127). Wellington: NZCER Press.
- McLaughlin, C., & Clarke, B. (2010). Relational matters: A review of the impact of school experience on mental health in early adolescence. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 27(1), 91–103.
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2017a). *PISA 2015 New Zealand students' wellbeing report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Ministry of Education. (2017b). *Ed Act update 2017: Establishing enduring objectives for the education system*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Mullis, I., Martin, M., & Foy, P. (2008). *TIMSS 2007 international mathematics report*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center.
- Mullis, I., Martin, M., Foy, P., & Hooper, M. (2016). *TIMSS 2015 international results in mathematics*. Boston, MA: TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center.
- OECD. (2009). *Doing better for children*. Paris: OECD.
- Office of the Children's Commissioner, & NZ School Trustees Association. (2018a). *Education matters to me: Key insights*. Wellington: Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- Office of the Children's Commissioner, & NZ School Trustees Association. (2018b). *He manu kai mātauranga: He tirohanga Māori. Education matters to me: Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori*. Wellington: Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- Orpinas, P., & Horne, A. (2006). *Bullying prevention: Creating a positive school climate and developing social competence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Resnick, M., Bearman, P., Blum, R., Bauman, K., Harris, K., Jones, J., et al. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(10), 823–832.
- Salmivalli, C. (1999). Participant role approach to school bullying: Implications for intervention. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22(4), 453–459.
- Salmivalli, C., Kärnä, A., & Poskiparta, E. (2011). Counteracting bullying in Finland: The KiVa program and its effects on different forms of being bullied. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 35(5), 405–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025411407457>
- Slee, P. (2010). The PEACE pack. In S. Jimerson, S. Swearer, & D. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 481–492). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smith, P. (2011). Why interventions to reduce bullying and violence in schools may (or may not) succeed: Comments on this Special Section. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 35(5), 419–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025411407459>
- Stewart-Brown, S. (2006). *What is the evidence on school health promotion in improving health or preventing disease and, specifically, what is the effectiveness of the health promoting schools approach?* Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

- Sugai, G., & Simonsen, B. (2012). *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports: History, defining features, and misconceptions*. Storrs, CA: Center for PBIS & Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, University of Connecticut.
- Sutherland, A. (2011). The relationship between school and youth offending. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand Te Puna Whakaaro*, (37), 51–69.
- Swearer, S., Espelage, D., & Napolitano, S. (2009). *Bullying prevention and intervention: Realistic strategies for schools*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration (BES)*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Towl, P. (2014). Would the real bully please stand up? *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 49(1), 59–71.
- Towl, P., & Hemphill, S. (2016). Introduction. In P. Towl & S. Hemphill (Eds.), *Locked out: Understanding and tackling school exclusion in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 1–7). Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Ttofi, M., & Farrington, D. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programmes to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7, 27–56.
- Vreeman, C., & Carroll, A. (2007). A systematic review of school-based interventions to prevent bullying. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 161(1), 78–88.
- Wearmouth, J., McKinney, R., & Glynn, T. (2007). Restorative justice: Two examples from New Zealand schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 34(4), 196–203.
- Willms, J. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation: Results from PISA 2000*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Winslade, J., Williams, M., Barba, F., Knox, E., Uppal, H., Williams, J., & Hedtke, L. (2015). The effectiveness of “Undercover Anti-Bullying Teams” as reported by participants. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 9(1), 72–99.
- Wylie, C., & Bonne, L. (2016). *Secondary schools in 2015: Findings from the NZCER national survey*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Wylie, C., & Hipkins, R. (2006). *Growing independence: Competent learners @ 14*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Wylie, C., Hipkins, R., & Hodgen, E. (2008). *On the edge of adulthood: Young people’s school and out-of-school experiences at 16*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Wylie, C., McDowall, S., Ferral, H., Felgate, R., & Visser, H. (2018). *Teaching practices, school practices, and principal leadership: The first national picture 2017*. Wellington: NZCER.

### Authors

**Sally Boyd** is a senior researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Sally has a longstanding interest in the ways school and curriculum review and innovation can foster students’ agency, and health and wellbeing, as well as grow students’ capabilities.

Email: [sally.boyd@nzcer.org.nz](mailto:sally.boyd@nzcer.org.nz)

**Elliot Lawes**, PhD, is a psychometrician at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. His interests include the measurement and modelling of student progress based on achievement data collected from assessment tools, and the measurement of non-cognitive constructs such as wellbeing and self-efficacy.

Email: [elliot.lawes@nzcer.org.nz](mailto:elliot.lawes@nzcer.org.nz)