

Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence

Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools



**Our
WATCH**

End violence against
Women And Their Children

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Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence

Lessons from a multi-year
pilot in primary schools

Final evaluation report

September 2020

Prepared by Our Watch and the
Strategic Research Centre in Education,
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While the Queensland and Victorian Governments participated in this research, this report represents the views of the authors and is not an endorsed position of either government.

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Section 1: Executive summary

‘And last year, I didn’t – I had always come up with excuses to ... not come to school because I didn’t like it that much. But now, I am starting to really like it because we have respectful relationships.’ (student)

Gender-based violence can take many forms, including domestic and family violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and financial and emotional abuse. Preventing these forms of violence has been identified as a national priority. International and Australian studies have shown that respectful relationships education is one of the most promising strategies to achieve this ambitious goal ([Commonwealth of Australia, 2019](#); [World Health Organization/ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010](#)).

Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school-based primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools – as both education institutions and workplaces – to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence. Respectful relationships education is informed by current evidence that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality. This includes individual attitudes towards gender as well as institutional cultures and practices, and the structures and norms that inform how people behave and what is acceptable.

Data obtained from studies to date suggest that for respectful relationships education to be effective it must be delivered through a whole-of-school approach. Until recently, the whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education had been piloted and evaluated largely in secondary schools.

In 2016 the Myer Foundation, the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the Queensland Department of Education funded Our Watch to implement a pilot of respectful relationships education in primary schools in Victoria and Queensland. As part of this initiative, Our Watch engaged with 18 primary schools, beginning in mid-2017. The focus of the Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools Pilot (the pilot) was on implementing and evaluating a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in primary schools, focusing on Years 1 and 2 (students aged five to seven years) in particular. The evaluation also explored structural and systemic opportunities for the continued take-up of respectful relationships education.

The evaluation of this pilot yields initial evidence that it is possible to implement a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in a primary school setting, and to see early signs of change. Encouragingly, after only six months, Year 1 and 2 students showed signs of diminishing stereotypical gender attitudes regarding jobs and activities (Our Watch et al., 2015). Such changes are early signals of success and should be viewed within a long-term commitment to whole-of-school change.

The 18 participating schools demonstrated an existing readiness and commitment to respectful relationships education. Moreover, the baseline school staff culture survey results suggested all participating schools had cultures that were receptive and open to gender equity, which is an enabling factor in implementing respectful relationships education. Some school staff did, however, experience discomfort related to concepts of gender equality and gender-based violence that were raised through the initiative. It is clear from the pilot that the implementation of respectful relationships education can challenge some educators' individual core beliefs about gender, and as such, there needs to be a focus on professional learning. Evidence regarding organisational change indicates that a long-term commitment is required to explore what the pattern of change, from a whole-of-school perspective, looks like over time.

For a summary of the pilot outcomes, see Figure 1, on the following page.

The findings and opportunities for consideration from this pilot are consistent with the learnings from piloting respectful relationships education in a secondary schools context ([Kearney, Leung, Ollis, Joyce, & Gleeson, 2016](#); [UN Women, 2016](#)). They point to the importance of age-appropriate gendered curriculum, comprehensive professional learning, effective workforce support for schools, clear and proactive communication, and a long-term approach to implementation and increasing take-up of programs within and across schools.

Ultimately, the changing of culture in order to end gender-based violence – the long-term aim of respectful relationships education – is a multi-generational process.

Figure 1: Summary of pilot outcomes¹

Student attitudes	<p>Gendered attitudes of boys and girls tended to be less stereotypical at the end of the pilot. Statistically significant changes in attitudes related to which gender should perform traditionally masculine and feminine jobs and activities, and interest shown in feminine jobs and activities by both boys and girls.</p> <p>Some students who participated in interviews for this evaluation identified respectful relationships education as a program that enhanced their personal wellbeing at school.</p>
School culture	<p>Commitment to respectful relationships between and among staff was high throughout the pilot. There were slight fluctuations in results for some staff according to site.</p>
Commitment to respectful relationships education and school readiness	<p>Agreement on the importance of providing respectful relationships education was high throughout the pilot. However, there were slight fluctuations in results for some staff according to site.</p>
Teachers' capacity to deliver	<p>Teachers' feedback indicated that professional development was key in supporting their capacity to deliver a gendered approach to respectful relationships education. The pilot also indicated that some teachers remained resistant to the need for an approach to respectful relationships education that addresses the gendered drivers of violence.</p>
Parents	<p>Very limited data was able to be collected as part of the pilot about parent support for respectful relationships education. However, the small number of parents that provided feedback indicated they were supportive of and interested in finding out about respectful relationships education.</p> <p>Engagement of parents in respectful relationships education is an important but underexplored aspect of research and evaluation.</p>

[Text-equivalent description of Figure 1 in Appendix E](#)

¹ See [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#) for further details.

Summary of findings and opportunities for consideration

Drawing on a range of data that includes survey responses, focus-group discussions, classroom observations and interviews with stakeholders, this evaluation found numerous enablers and barriers to the implementation of good practice respectful relationships education in primary schools and within the broader education system. The findings of this mixed-method evaluation of a sample of 18 schools have informed the opportunities for consideration presented below and in [Section 5: Findings and opportunities for consideration](#).

1. Whole-of-school approach

Key findings

This pilot suggests that, with adequate support, it is possible for primary schools to implement a whole-of-school approach that addresses the drivers of gender-based violence. Key elements of the approach and related findings are outlined below.

Teaching and learning

- Throughout the project, teacher confidence in understanding, teaching and integrating respectful relationships education into everyday work was, on average, moderate. Access to professional learning and receiving government commitment to respectful relationships education were identified as enablers in fostering staff confidence.

Responding to disclosures

- While some staff reported confidence in responding to students' disclosures of violence, others requested further professional learning on the topic. Access to professional learning, specialist personnel and agencies were identified as enablers to safeguarding student and staff wellbeing in the implementation of respectful relationships education.

Parent and family engagement

- As a result of barriers to collecting data from parents and families, parents' attitudes towards and understanding of respectful relationships education could not be determined as part of the evaluation. This is a notable data gap, given the role of the family in influencing attitudes and beliefs in the home. The available data – from a small group of parents of Year 1 and 2 students in two schools – suggests there is support for and interest in respectful relationships education. The lack of data from parents remains an evidence gap in evaluation and research on respectful relationships education.

Community partnerships

- While some schools engaged with external partners to support the delivery of certain aspects of respectful relationships education (such as disclosure support), more attention is required to understand the emerging practice around community partnerships within a whole-of-school approach, as there was limited consistency demonstrated. Departmental staff identified the strengthening of links between schools and community organisations as an opportunity for improvement.

Opportunities for consideration

1. Education jurisdictions support schools to engage with families as part of a whole-of-school approach. For example, this could be by:
 - a. Developing resources to support schools to engage families as part of the school readiness stage of implementation.
 - b. Developing a communications strategy and templates for schools, with clear messages for internal and external stakeholders (staff, teachers, students and families) at key points throughout the respectful relationships education journey.
2. Education jurisdictions recognise that respectful relationships education can raise issues related to personal experiences of violence for staff as well as students. Mechanisms such as access to employee assistance programs and family and domestic violence response services need to be in place prior to implementation, to enable staff to access support outside the school setting.
3. Schools engage with external organisations, such as domestic and family violence services and agencies, to support professional learning about respectful relationships education and responses to staff or student disclosures. This engagement should be informed by guidance from relevant experts and a comprehensive self-assessment, planning and review process undertaken by the school.

2. Addressing the drivers of gender-based violence

Key finding

After only six months, Year 1 and 2 students' stereotypical gender attitudes showed signs of diminishing. These improvements to students' gendered attitudes were correlated with explicit teaching of age-appropriate, gendered content in Years 1 and 2. Staff in a number of schools demonstrated signs of having new insights into gender inequality and the ways in which it impacts on school culture.

Opportunities for consideration

4. Education jurisdictions deliver teaching and learning materials that address the drivers of gender-based violence as part of respectful relationships education programs (see the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum materials, Topic 7 Gender and identity and Topic 8 Positive gender relations) ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018a](#), April).
5. Education jurisdictions, with support from prevention experts, undertake regular reviews of the respectful relationships education curriculum materials to ensure they reflect best practice primary prevention of gender-based violence.
6. Teaching and learning materials that address the drivers of gender-based violence are delivered every year in each classroom, across each year level and on a regular and consistent basis by the classroom teacher.

3. Supporting school readiness

Key findings

- Enabling cultures and commitment to respectful relationships education were evident among participating schools.
- Staff in some schools demonstrated signs of having new insights into gender inequality and the ways in which it impacts on school culture.
- All 18 participating schools demonstrated an existing readiness and commitment to respectful relationships education, as illustrated by high ratings in the school culture surveys. In large part, these encouraging results can be attributed to strong school leadership and a phased, opt-in approach to school recruitment.
- Commonly, staff involved in the pilot recognised and were motivated by the knowledge that some of their students witness and experience violence at home. This understanding may contribute to school cultures that are highly responsive to students' needs.
- Among some pilot schools, there were improvements to reported commitments to respectful relationships between staff and students, and lack of tolerance towards gender discrimination and sexual harassment, following their participation in the pilot.
- There was evidence of some resistance to and misunderstandings about discussing gender roles and relations, as illustrated by feedback from some teachers. Research suggests resistance occurs when existing structures are being challenged and that it is a normal part of the change process.

Opportunities for consideration

7. With support from education jurisdictions, schools develop their understanding of resistance (from staff, families and community) and integrate a response plan into their whole-of-school approach as part of the school readiness stage of implementing respectful relationships education.

4. Professional learning

Key finding

Staff involved in the pilot identified that professional learning allowed them to explore their personal positioning in relation to gender and to apply this lens to their school. Professional learning helped build the confidence of teaching staff in delivering the curriculum. The pilot suggests that classroom teachers, rather than external providers, are well positioned to deliver this content, as it allows for an ongoing conversation tailored to the students' developmental stage.

Opportunities for consideration

8. With education jurisdiction support, schools develop an ongoing professional learning strategy for all staff (both teaching and non-teaching), addressing:
 - Key concepts such as gender, gender lens,² gender equality/inequality and gender-based violence, and how these concepts are translated in their school and workplace contexts.
 - A whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education, including the implementation cycle that facilitates continual improvement and measurement of intended outcomes.
 - Appropriate and safe responses to staff, student and family disclosures of violence, including referral to domestic and/or family violence response agencies with appropriate expertise; professional learning on responding to student disclosures to be delivered prior to classroom delivery of teaching and learning materials.³
 - Systematic sharing of good practice approaches between schools.
9. Prior to classroom delivery, comprehensive professional learning opportunities are provided for teaching staff to enable them to deliver curriculum materials in a safe and supportive environment, with the support of their peers. Schools are resourced, where possible, to enable staff to engage in professional learning activities on the delivery of respectful relationships education, such as through departmental or school-based professional development opportunities.

5. Long-term commitment

Key finding

Pilot participants noted that a long-term government commitment to respectful relationships education (through time and investment in areas such as professional learning) supports the implementation of a whole-of-school approach.

Opportunities for consideration

10. Increasing the take-up of respectful relationships education within jurisdictions, guided by an implementation strategy that incorporates:
 - An implementation plan that takes a staged approach and allows schools to opt in to participate, acknowledging that school readiness and planning for respectful relationships education can take up to a year.
 - Support for school leaders to plan for the implementation of respectful relationships education. This could include budgeting and staff resourcing, professional learning, curriculum mapping, and the provision of existing evidence-based tools and resources to assist in self-assessment and action planning.

2 A gender lens is a way of analysing how things such as policies, procedures, systems and programs impact and affect people of different genders in different ways (VicHealth, 2016).

3 Support for dealing with disclosures of violence should be aligned with [mandatory reporting laws and procedures in each state and territory](#).

6. Collaboration and coordination

Key findings

Workforce

- A skilled department of education workforce was identified as a critical enabler for implementation of a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education.

Authorising environments

- Policy environment and infrastructure (such as Queensland's *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland Taskforce Report*, the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026*, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the *Free from Violence Strategy*, and the establishment of Respect Victoria) was recognised as an enabling platform for the future of prevention work.

Communication and messaging

- Media coverage and misinformation about respectful relationships education were identified by participants as barriers that can potentially undermine the implementation and broader take-up of respectful relationships education.

Broader work to shift community attitudes

- Respectful relationships education sits within a broader program of work to prevent gender-based violence. Work to shift violence-supportive attitudes, norms and structures undertaken by schools and education jurisdictions must be complemented by work in the public service and broader community.

Opportunities for consideration

11. Education jurisdictions develop a communication and engagement strategy for government, media and broader community stakeholders on respectful relationships education. This could include media reporting of positive change stories and outcome data. Education jurisdictions engage in dialogue with stakeholders (such as parents' groups, principals' associations, education unions, and gender-based violence response and primary prevention sectors) about why schools undertake respectful relationships education, what is involved, and with what results.
12. Government departments implement strategies to address the gendered drivers of violence against women among their staff and the broader community, to reinforce and support progress made in schools. For example, strategies could include:
 - Undertaking a whole-of-government/multi-departmental program to deliver messaging to the community about the prevention of violence against women, to support community engagement in respectful relationships education.
 - Developing a professional learning strategy for personnel – especially those responsible for supporting schools undertaking respectful relationships education – to develop knowledge and skills in preventing violence against women. This strategy should be developed in concert with the implementation plan (as described under [5. Long-term commitment](#)).

7. Evaluation and monitoring

Key finding

Although this evaluation yielded evidence that positive change related to the gendered drivers of violence can be achieved through respectful relationships education, the pilot was limited to a small number of sites, over a short period of time. Future evaluations could engage a broader number of sites and student year levels. Longitudinal evaluations are needed to examine the sustainability of changes to student and staff attitudes and to explore the perspectives of families.

Opportunities for consideration

13. Education jurisdictions, in collaboration with schools, undertake further evaluation into the processes and impact of implementing respectful relationships education. Future insight is needed to address evidence gaps as identified in this evaluation. This could include assessment of the outcomes for students at all primary levels and the perspectives of parents, families and community partners.
14. Education jurisdictions, in collaboration with schools, should establish school-level and state-wide evaluation mechanisms to monitor uptake of respectful relationships education in the education sector and to measure outcomes and longitudinal change. These evaluations would collect data from students and families to inform a full assessment of impact.

Section 2: What is respectful relationships education?

International evidence indicates that school-based interventions such as respectful relationships education are among approaches to the prevention of violence against women that have shown promising results ([World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010](#)). Drawing on this evidence, Our Watch defined respectful relationships education in the 2015 *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper* (the Evidence Paper) as follows:

Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence. ([Gleeson, Kearney, Leung, & Brislane, 2015](#))

In recent years there has been substantial advocacy for and commitments made to respectful relationships education across Australia. In the *Third action plan 2016–2019 of the national plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010–2022* ([Commonwealth of Australia, 2016](#); [Council of Australian Governments, 2010](#)), the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments agreed to:

Support schools and teachers to deliver age-appropriate and evidence-based respectful relationships education to all school children covering sexual violence, gender equality issues and a range of other relationship issues and tailored to vulnerable cohorts (Key Action 1.3).

In the context of these strong policy and research platforms, respectful relationships education is a key example of a population-wide approach to the prevention of gender-based violence. Evidence-based and resourced respectful relationships education can help create the generational change needed to free Australia from gender-based violence (see [Glossary of terms](#)).

Why focus on schools?

A decrease in the prevalence of violence against women – and the shifting of what drives it – relies on the coordinated investment in and implementation of systems and strategies on a large enough scale to achieve impact (Our Watch, 2017). Australia's national framework for the primary prevention (see [Glossary of terms](#)) of violence against women, *Change the story* (Our Watch et al., 2015), identifies the following gendered drivers of violence against women (also depicted in [Figure 6](#)):

- the condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
- rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

A vital part of addressing the gendered drivers of violence is quality population-wide prevention programming across settings where people live, learn, work and play (Our Watch, 2017). The education system is therefore a crucial setting in the prevention of gender-based violence for three key reasons:

1. **Reach:** Work through schools has the potential to reach an estimated 3.7 million students across Australian primary and secondary schools, as well as a workforce of more than 250,000 teachers ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)).
2. **Engaging young people:** Young people are exposed to and influenced by gender-based violence and gender inequality and tend to hold more violence-supportive attitudes than the general population ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)).
3. **Schools as workplaces:** Primary prevention in schools offers scope to influence not only education programs and curricula but the whole education environment, as education institutions are not only places of learning, but also workplaces and community hubs ([Our Watch, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, & Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2015](#)).

From birth, children are exposed to gender stereotypes which can limit their ability to be who they want to be and form equal, healthy relationships. Primary school is an opportune time to engage children in age-appropriate respectful relationships education to ensure they have the skills to reject aggressive behaviour and discrimination, and challenge stereotypes. Respectful relationships education in primary schools offers children the skills to analyse and challenge the violence-supportive and gender-stereotyping norms and practices they encounter in their own lives.

What does respectful relationships education look like in schools?

Taking a whole-of-school approach to change

A whole-of-school approach (see [Glossary of terms](#)) to respectful relationships education understands that schools are **not only educational institutions, but also workplaces and community hubs**. It therefore involves engaging not just students but school staff, families and the wider school community in the process of cultural change, and undertaking actions across the school in an ongoing, coordinated and mutually reinforcing way. This approach helps to embed and sustain positive cultural change.

Policy and program design and implementation should support schools to recognise and understand the role of gender inequality, and other forms of intersecting discrimination (such as racism *and* sexism), in driving and reinforcing gender-based violence and should **support schools to promote and model gender equality and respect.**

Schools, education departments and school authorities should be supported to recognise that a wide range of policies, practices, activities and behaviours have the potential to reinforce existing gender inequities. Best practice approaches seek to:

1. build understanding about the multiple ways that the drivers of violence against women can manifest in schools as educational institutions, workplaces and community hubs; and
2. provide staff in schools, education departments and school authorities with the skills and knowledge to implement whole-of-school strategies to address these drivers.

Using age-appropriate curriculum to addresses the drivers of gender-based violence

Evidence demonstrates that respectful relationships education is most effective when it includes age-appropriate teaching that supports students to understand and critically analyse gender roles, stereotypes, norms and relations. If respectful relationships education is going to meet its aim of preventing violence against women, curriculum must include learning objectives and/or units specifically on gender and power, and tailor approaches for a range of groups.

Materials in this pilot have been tailored to be appropriate for young children in Years 1 and 2 ranging from five to seven years old. For this age group, topics covered may include examining gender stereotypes, for example jobs or toys considered suitable for boys or girls. Just as we would not expect the same mathematics content to be delivered to Year 10 as to Years 1 and 2, respectful relationships education content also has to be age-appropriate.

Curriculum materials should support the delivery of gender equality and respectful relationships materials across all curriculum areas, not only those pertaining to health, wellbeing, and social and emotional capability. The content of other areas of learning, such as science, geography and literature, can, where relevant, provide mutually reinforcing messages across different teaching and learning activities. Well-trained and supported teachers can find ways to highlight and proactively address the drivers of gender-based violence through their delivery of learning materials and all of their interactions with students. This approach to embedding learning across multiple areas, topics and activities supports the development of deeper understandings among students and enhances the potential for cultural transformation.

In line with good practice curriculum development, curriculum materials should be sequential, evidenced -based, developed by experts and supported by a whole-of-school approach and taught every year throughout schooling using consistent, age-appropriate messages across all age groups.

Why take a whole-of-education approach?

A decrease in the prevalence of violence against women – and the shifting of what drives it – relies on the coordinated investment in and implementation of systems and strategies on a large enough scale to achieve impact ([Our Watch, 2017](#)). Australian and international research specifies (see [Appendix D: Rapid review of relevant literature](#)) that respectful relationships education, as a whole-of-population approach to addressing the gendered drivers of violence, comprises a number of key elements. Evidence-based respectful relationships education must:

- address the drivers of gender-based violence
- have a long-term vision, approach and funding
- take a whole-of-school approach
- establish mechanisms for collaboration and a coordinated effort
- ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement
- provide resources and support for teachers
- use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.

These elements are expanded upon in [Section 5: Findings and opportunities for consideration](#).

Section 3: Pilot overview

In 2016 the Myer Foundation funded Our Watch to deliver a three-year program, Creating a Violence-Free Future: Respectful Relationships Education in Australian Primary Schools. The overarching aim of the Myer Foundation-funded initiative was for every Australian child to receive best practice respectful relationships education in primary school. Recognising that this aim would not be realised within the three-year period of funding, four objectives guided activity over this period:

1. **Collaborate** for informed and effective **planning** of whole-of-school respectful relationships education implementation across Australian primary schools⁴
2. **Develop** and **pilot** a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in up to 20 primary schools
3. **Engage** the community to promote awareness and support for respectful relationships education⁵
4. **Enable** scaling for **sustainable** wider rollout.

As part of Objective 2, Our Watch established the Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools Pilot (the pilot) of respectful relationships education in 18 primary schools, beginning in mid-2017. Following an Expression of Interest process to Our Watch's government members, in September 2016 the Victorian and Queensland governments joined the initiative as partners and committed additional funding to support the evaluation of the project.

The pilot focused on implementing and evaluating a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education that aims to prevent gender-based violence. The pilot was designed to focus on two year levels. Year 1 and Year 2 were selected for practical reasons: they are not considered transition years, and do not overlap with the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). At the time of this evaluation, no findings from the evaluation of the implementation of respectful relationships education with this age group had been made publicly available.

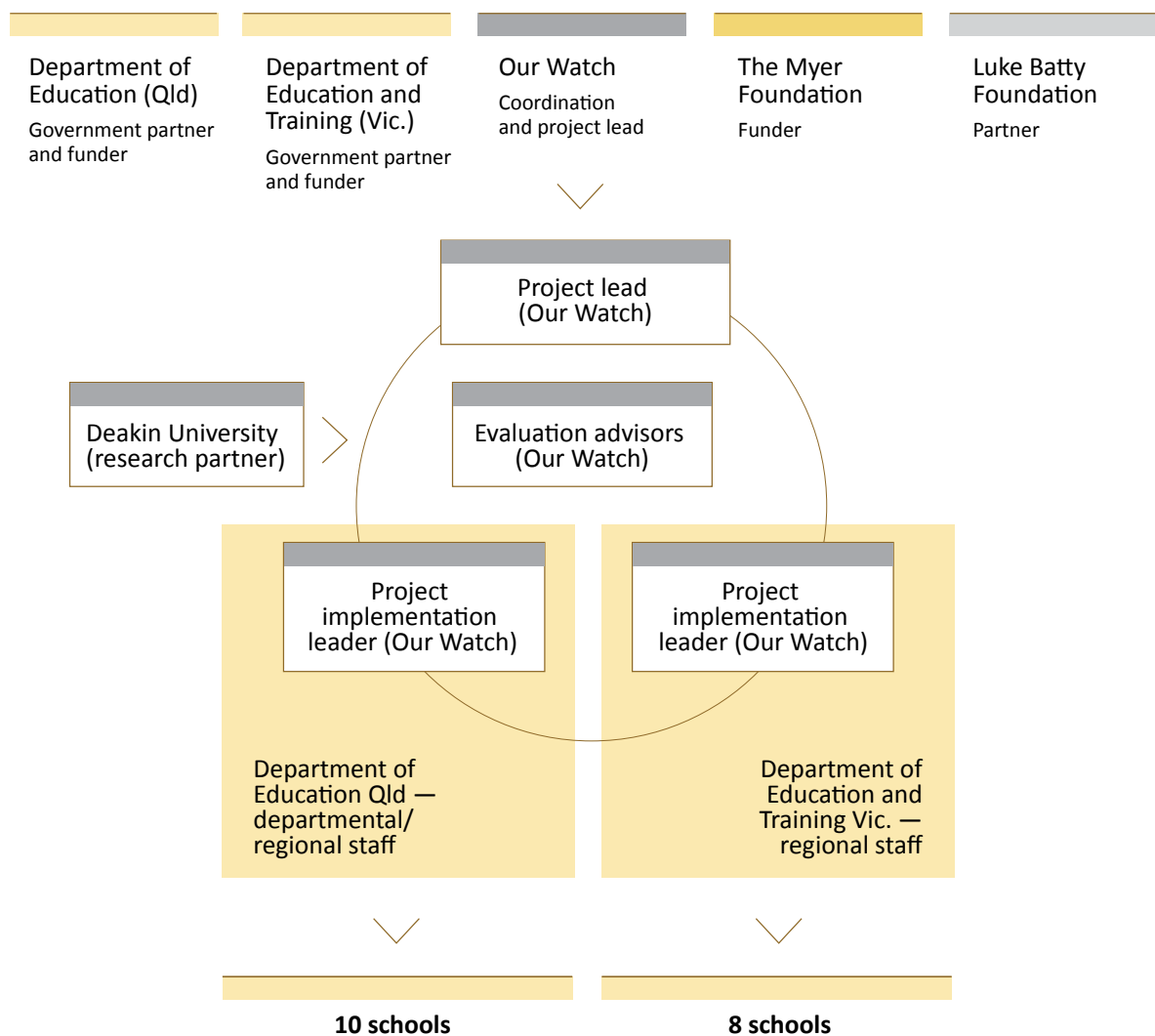
-
- 4 In support of Key Action 1.3 of the National Plan and as part of the 'collaborate' objective of the Myer-funded pilot, Our Watch led the establishment and coordination of the National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Group (the Expert Group). The Expert Group aimed to bring together key stakeholders in respectful relationships education, including all education departments, key education peak bodies from across Australia, and selected non-government organisations with an interest in this area.
 - 5 In June 2018 it was announced that the Luke Batty Foundation would cease operation, with funding distributed to support domestic and family violence prevention and response programs in Australia. As a result, Objective 3 of the Creating a Violence-Free Future initiative was de-prioritised.

Pilot structure

The pilot was informed and governed by a collaborative partnership including two government departments, an academic partner and a team of staff from Our Watch. It also brought together the Myer Foundation as a funder of the pilot and the Luke Batty Foundation as a partner during the first half of the pilot. See Figure 2, below, for an overview of the partners involved in the pilot.

Figure 2: Partnership and implementation structure

Partners



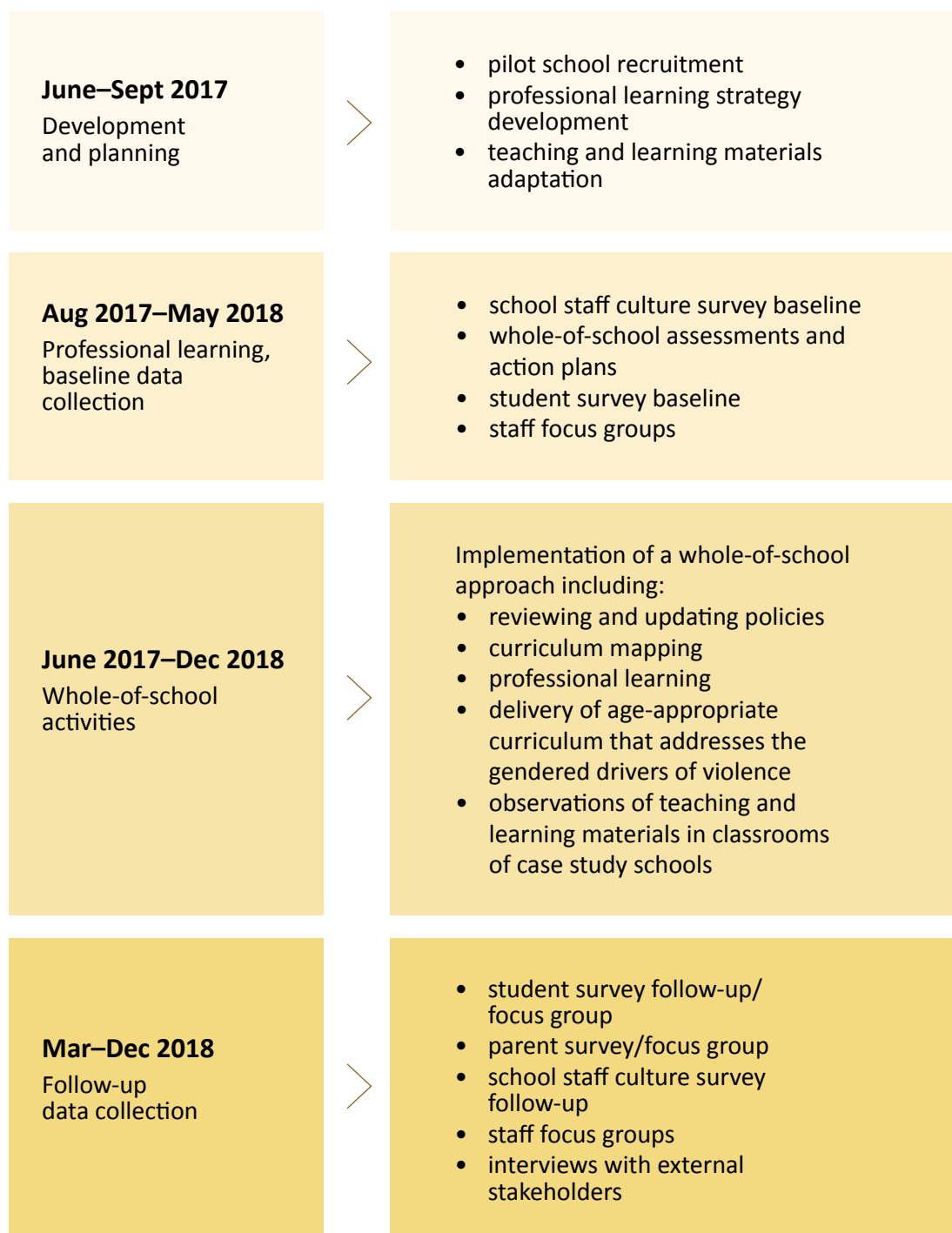
[Text-equivalent description of Figure 2 in Appendix E](#)

Activity

Pilot activities included professional development for staff, the auditing of current school policies and processes, and support for schools to engage parents in reinforcing messages of respect and equality. It used the *Our Watch Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit*, which is a step-by-step guide for schools in developing an individualised whole-of-school approach to implementing respectful relationships education ([Our Watch, 2015](#)).

Our Watch recruited senior education advisers to support participating schools. The pilot activities included a whole-of-school self-assessment and the development of an action plan based on this assessment. See Figure 3, below, for more information on pilot activities.

Figure 3: Pilot overview⁶



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 3 in Appendix E](#)

⁶ Due to staggered implementation timeframes, certain schools undertook data collection activities at different points during the pilot. Data collection was timed to inform school implementation activities. In some instances, data was collected differently according to location. For example, a student survey was conducted in one location and student focus groups were undertaken in another.

Policy contexts

National

Australia's national policy context for respectful relationships education is supported by a number of frameworks and commitments by state and territory governments. At a national level, the *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010–2022* (the National Plan) is the primary policy direction for Commonwealth, state and territory governments to reduce violence against women and their children, with a focus on prevention. Outcome 2 of the National Plan recognises the importance of respectful relationships education in fostering more equal and positive relationships. The measure of success articulated by the National Plan for this outcome is 'improved knowledge of, and the skills and behaviour for, respectful relationships by young people' (Council of Australian Governments, 2010, p. 18). Evaluation of respectful relationships education initiatives is one of the mechanisms that will inform this outcome.

The Australian Curriculum, as a framework for levels Prep to Year 10 in all Australian schools, authorises schools to implement respectful relationships education. However, while the Australian Curriculum provides a useful framing, it does not explicitly contain a 'how to' on respectful relationships education. The Australian Curriculum positions respectful relationships education content under the Health and Physical Education learning area, specifically the relationships and sexuality focus area. Many state and territory departments of education are implementing some form of relationships or social and emotional wellbeing teaching and learning through the Australian Curriculum. However, these approaches do not always include an explicit focus on gender. Evidence suggests that for respectful relationships education to be effective in supporting the prevention of gender-based violence, a focus on the gendered drivers of violence is an essential component (Gleeson et al., 2015).

Queensland

In 2015 the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence delivered the *Not now, not ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland* taskforce report detailing the landscape of domestic and family violence in Queensland, along with recommendations for a long-term vision and strategy for the Queensland Government to address domestic and family violence (Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015). Specifically, the Special Taskforce report outlined opportunities for consideration that addressed three elements of respectful relationships education in schools:

Recommendation 24: The Taskforce recommends that the Queensland Government leads and facilitates the introduction of programs in state schools to embed through the school life of all secondary and primary state schools a culture that emphasises:

- developing and maintaining respectful relationships
- respecting self
- gender equality.

Respectful relationships, in all education settings, was a key outcome of the Queensland Government's subsequent *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026* ([Queensland Government, no date-a](#)).

In response to this strategy, in 2016 the Queensland Department of Education developed the *Respectful Relationships Education Program* (RREP). The P–12 curriculum, assessment and reporting framework specifies that Queensland state schools are required to provide health and wellbeing education as part of the Australian Curriculum or as part of the school's pastoral care program. The program spans Prep to Year 12, aligns with the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education, and was written from *Curriculum into the Classroom* materials. Queensland state schools deliver respectful relationships education through Health and Physical Education (HPE) and/or pastoral care programs. Many schools use more than one approach to ensure that the learning is responsive to student needs.

Within the Department of Education's Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework ([Queensland Government, 2018](#)), respectful relationships, as demonstrated between staff, students, parents and members of the community, are noted as an approach to creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Supporting schools to implement respectful relationships education was included within the Queensland Government's *Second Action Plan of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–17 to 2018–19*.

Embedding respectful relationships education in Queensland schools, through teacher capacity building and promotion of a whole-of-school approach, remains a key priority within the Queensland Government's *Third Action Plan of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2019–20 to 2021–22*.

Victoria

In 2015 Our Watch was funded by the Victorian Government to undertake a pilot and evaluation of the whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in secondary schools ([Kearney et al., 2016](#)). The secondary schools pilot coincided with a number of related initiatives and announcements. Findings of the pilot evaluation informed the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which subsequently recommended the expansion of respectful relationships education in secondary and primary schools ([State of Victoria, no date-a](#)).

In 2016 the Victorian Government announced the rollout of respectful relationships education to all Victorian schools, with a \$21.8 million funding commitment ([State of Victoria, no date-b](#)). An additional commitment of \$22.8 million was announced in 2018 to continue the rollout in Victoria until 30 June 2020 ([State of Victoria, 2018](#)). In 2018 the Department of Education and Training announced the provision of respectful relationships professional learning for up to 6000 early childhood educators ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018b](#)).

The Victorian Department of Education and Training also released the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* teaching and learning materials for social and emotional learning and respectful relationships ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018b](#)) – *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* is discussed further, under [Using age-appropriate curriculum to addresses the drivers of gender-based violence](#). In Victoria, respectful relationships education is incorporated within one of the four priorities of the Department of Education and Training's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes model ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018b](#)).

The participating Victorian schools in this primary schools pilot were part of the Department of Education and Training lead and partner schools, implementing a whole-of-school approach. As such, some were already utilising the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* learning materials.

During the life of the pilot, more than 1000 schools joined the state-wide rollout of respectful relationships education. More broadly, the Victorian Government invested \$2.7 billion in family violence reforms and developed several key strategies and agencies including:

- *Ending Family Violence – Victoria’s plan for change* ([State of Victoria, no date-a](#))
- *Safe and strong – A Victorian gender equality strategy* ([State of Victoria, no date-d](#))
- *Family violence rolling action plan 2017–20* ([State of Victoria, no date-b](#))
- *Free from violence: Victoria’s strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women* ([State of Victoria, no date-c](#))
- *Dhelk Dja: Safe our way – Strong culture, strong peoples, strong families* ([State of Victoria, 2018](#))
- Family Safety Victoria
- Respect Victoria.

Section 4: Evaluation approach

This evaluation aims to show evidence of impact across norms, practices and structures relating to a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education in primary schools, specifically as a strategy to prevent gender-based violence (see [Appendix A: Evaluation approach](#) for further explanation). In particular, the evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

- What was the impact of the pilot (outcomes for students, schools and parents)?
- What is the capacity of schools to deliver a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education?
- What are the considerations for scale-up and systematisation of a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education for the prevention of gender-based violence?

Of the 18 participating schools, five agreed to be case study schools (see [Section 3: Pilot overview](#)). This entailed that they participate in more in-depth qualitative data collection.

The evaluation adopted an action research approach, allowing all 18 schools and the project implementation leaders the opportunity to reflect on their own data and respond accordingly. Data collection tools included:

- school staff culture surveys (pre- and post-pilot, all schools)
- Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey (pre- and post-pilot; two case study schools only)
- focus groups with school leadership, teachers and staff (case study schools only)
- classroom observations (case study schools only)
- stakeholder interviews
- parent survey (two case study schools only)
- professional learning evaluation surveys (teachers and school leadership, all schools)
- collection of case studies to illustrate instances of change in schools.

See [Appendix A: Evaluation approach](#) and [Appendix B: Data collection methods](#) for more detail on the above data collection tools.

Additionally, the participatory design of the evaluation enabled key informants from Our Watch and departmental staff to contribute to the evaluation from a broader perspective, informing the evaluation with regard to more systemic implementation considerations.

Developing opportunities for consideration

To locate the findings of this evaluation within existing research, a rapid review of literature was undertaken. The purpose of the rapid review was to identify findings of Australian and international evidence published since 2015 with respect to the key features of respectful relationships education as a primary prevention approach. Overall, evidence published since 2015 does not offer new insights, but rather confirms findings of the effectiveness of school-based interventions based on the core elements as reported in the Evidence Paper ([Section 2: What is respectful relationships education?](#)). Refer to [Appendix D: Rapid review of relevant literature](#) for details on the methodology of the rapid review and its key findings.

Figure 4, on the following page, illustrates how this evaluation has triangulated analysis from multiple data sources, balancing data collection from case study schools with perspectives given by informants who have a broader view of the pilot.

The development of opportunities for consideration reflects the different levels of data collection and analysis facilitated by this methodology.

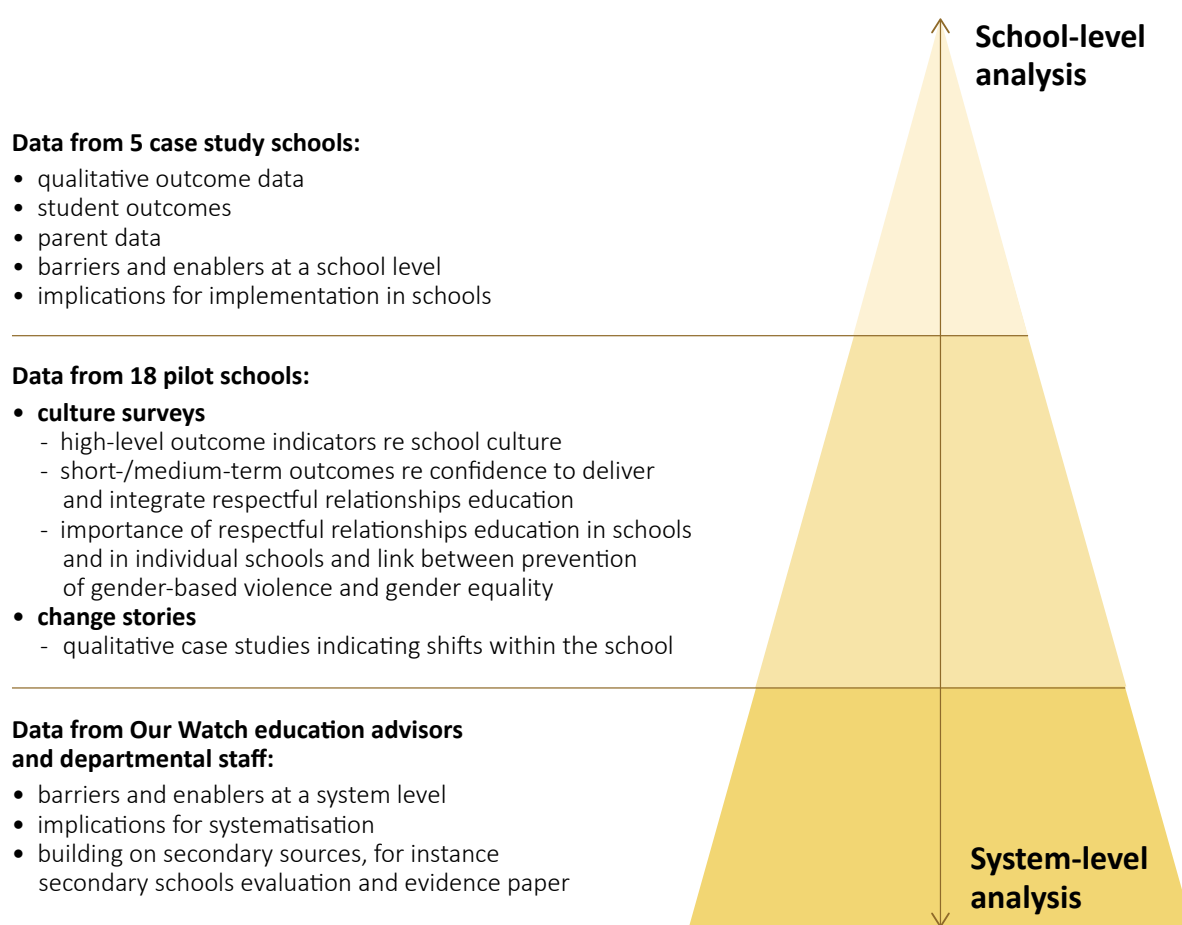
Evaluating pilot programs to prevent violence against women

Evaluation has emerged as a necessary component of violence prevention initiatives. Evaluations can be used to find out whether policies and programs work, in what ways and for whom. They aim to provide information to support further policy and program development ([Flood, 2013](#)), which is the case for this evaluation of the Respectful Relationships Education in Primary Schools Pilot.

Pilot policies and programs allow for initiatives to be tested, evaluated and adjusted where necessary, before being rolled out on a larger scale. Relevant literature from Australia and overseas about evaluations of pilots ([Cabinet Office, 2003](#); [Evans, Krogh, & Carmody, 2009](#)) suggests pilots are an initial stage in a continuous process of evaluation to gather information on which to base future policies and programs. Since pilot evaluations often collect a depth of data from a small number of sites, a level of extrapolation is required for suggestions to be made at a systemic level.

This evaluation explicitly sets out to understand and propose opportunities for consideration that inform a broader systematisation of respectful relationships education in primary schools.

Figure 4: Overview of data sources



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 4 in Appendix E](#)

Limitations

The evaluation had some limitations. These included the complexity of measuring attitudinal shifts with children, recruitment barriers in gathering data from parents and families, challenges associated with taking an intersectional approach (see [Glossary of terms](#)) to the data collection, limitations of the sample size, the need to balance data from the five case study schools against data from the other 13 participating schools, and the challenges of demonstrating impact in a limited timeframe (the 18-month implementation period). See [Evaluation limitations](#) in [Appendix A: Evaluation approach](#) for a more detailed discussion of methodological limitations.

A particular challenge was how to show the impact of initiatives designed to prevent gender-based violence within a limited timeframe. The 18-month duration of this pilot included significant planning and capacity building with staff and stakeholders prior to the implementation of activities within the schools. *Counting on change: a guide to prevention monitoring*, estimates it would take approximately six to ten years to start to see measurable changes against the drivers of gender-based violence, once quality prevention programs are in place ([Our Watch, 2017](#)).

The evaluation and all methods described above were approved by the relevant human research ethics committees – Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee in Victoria and Queensland Department of Education Research Services – to ensure the pilot and data collection were conducted safely and ethically.

See [Appendix A: Evaluation approach](#) and [Appendix B: Data collection methods](#) for a more detailed discussion of the evaluation approach, data collection tools and limitations of the evaluation.

Section 5: Findings and opportunities for consideration

The following section presents an analysis of the findings and opportunities for consideration emerging from this evaluation, linking to the broader evidence base as outlined in [Section 2: What is respectful relationships education?](#).

Evaluation findings are reported in seven areas:

- [1. Whole-of-school approach](#)
- [2. Addressing the drivers of gender-based violence](#)
- [3. Supporting school readiness](#)
- [4. Professional learning](#)
- [5. Long-term commitment](#)
- [6. Collaboration and coordination](#)
- [7. Evaluation and monitoring](#)

1. Whole-of-school approach

Key findings

This pilot suggests that, with adequate support, it is possible for primary schools to implement a whole-of-school approach that addresses the drivers of gender-based violence. Key elements of this approach and related findings are outlined below.

Teaching and learning

- Throughout the project, teacher confidence in understanding, teaching and integrating respectful relationships education into everyday work was, on average, moderate. Access to professional learning and receiving government commitment to respectful relationships education were identified as enablers in fostering staff confidence.

Responding to disclosures

- While some staff reported confidence in responding to students' disclosures of violence, others requested further professional learning on the topic. Access to professional learning, specialist personnel and agencies were identified as enablers to safeguarding student and staff wellbeing in the implementation of respectful relationships education.

Parent and family engagement

- As a result of barriers to collecting data from parents and families, parents' attitudes towards and understanding of respectful relationships education could not be determined as part of the evaluation. This is a notable data gap, given the role of the family in influencing attitudes and beliefs in the home. The available data – from a small group of parents of Year 1 and 2 students in two schools – suggests there is support for and interest in respectful relationships education. The lack of data from parents remains an evidence gap in evaluation about respectful relationships education.

Community partnerships

- While some schools engaged with external partners to support the delivery of certain aspects of respectful relationships education (such as disclosure support), more attention is required to understand the emerging practice around community partnerships within a whole-of-school approach, as there was limited consistency demonstrated. Departmental staff identified the strengthening of links between schools and community organisations as an opportunity for improvement.

Discussion

Effective respectful relationships education requires consideration of all aspects of how a school operates, in order to build a culture among both staff and students in which gender stereotypes are challenged, gender-based discrimination is not accepted and gender equality is actively promoted and modelled ([Our Watch, 2015](#)). Figure 5 provides an overview of the components of a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education.

Figure 5: Whole-of-school approach adapted from Department of Education and Training Victoria (2018)



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 5 in Appendix E](#)

The following section presents findings and discussion related to the components of teaching and learning, engaging families, supporting staff and students, and engaging community partnerships.

Teaching and learning

Observation of classroom practice in all five case study schools clearly showed a high level of skill by teachers in adapting the content to ensure it was relevant and engaging. Teachers displayed proficiency in modifying the respectful relationships education lessons to suit their students and their own teaching styles. They also demonstrated inclusive teaching practice, passion and openness, by referring to local examples that made the content meaningful for students.

‘It has gone so much smoother. We were thinking from the start the extreme of what could happen, what could be asked. But it actually hasn’t been asked, they haven’t asked questions. Every question that they’ve asked we’ve answered, whether it’s something that we’ve just given a quick answer to and hope[d] that the kids move on and they have, or whether it’s something that has ended up being a discussion.’ (teacher)

Consistent with other studies on respectful relationships education in schools ([Kearney et al., 2016](#); [Ollis & Dyson, 2017](#)), a number of factors support teachers' confidence and professional satisfaction in teaching respectful relationships education. These include:

- adequate professional learning
- easy to administer curriculum resources
- time for planning
- implementation and reflection
- school and community support for the initiative.

There were varied results across schools with different results in school staff's self-reported confidence in understanding, integrating and teaching respectful relationships education. In some schools, confidence levels were moderate at the start of the pilot and remained static. In the others, confidence levels improved marginally at the end of the pilot.⁷ It is difficult to determine what factors were most influential on these different patterns. However, feedback from staff across both pilot states highlighted the importance of ongoing and widespread access to professional learning and practical application of the theory. Teaching staff indicated the following concerns:

'How to teach the link between gender equity/RR [respectful relationships] and violence against women in a way that doesn't trigger or alienate.'

'... ways of delivering such a sensitive and contentious topic. So far we have only really covered the barriers to teaching this topic, but not particularly ways to overcome these barriers.'

'I feel more time should [have] been put into going through the day-to-day running of the lessons in the classroom.'

The pilot demonstrated the value of professional learning in building the capacity of teachers and principals to implement respectful relationships education. Almost all (90%, n = 18) Year 1 and 2 teachers who participated in a two-day 'Implementing Respectful Relationships Education' professional learning felt more equipped to contribute to the teaching and learning component of the whole-of-school approach, and 100% (n = 20) felt more equipped to apply a gender lens to the Australian Curriculum. Similarly, 89% (n = 17) of leadership staff who participated in the 'Leading Respectful Relationships' professional learning felt they had some or strong familiarity with what they could do to contribute to the prevention of violence against women, and generally felt that the training had increased their knowledge, skills and confidence in undertaking prevention work. See [Table 1](#) and [4. Professional learning](#) for further discussion of this professional learning model.

These results highlight the requirement for school-wide professional learning (see [4. Professional learning](#)), coupled with a long-term commitment to the initiative, if teacher confidence is to progress.

7 In one state, 323 staff participated in the pre- (or baseline) survey and 192 staff completed the post- (follow-up) survey. In the other, 256 staff across all eight schools participated in the pre- (or baseline) survey and 174 staff completed the post (or follow-up) survey. The pre and post surveys covered the same content. See [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#) for more detail on outcomes.

Adequate time to plan, prepare and teach

Teachers acknowledged the importance of the existing relationship between the teacher and the students in facilitating safe and appropriate discussions about sensitive topics such as gender and violence. Adequate time to plan, reflect and embed the curriculum (alongside comprehensive professional learning – see [4. Professional learning](#)) was seen as crucial by all teachers and stakeholders in schools:

‘Time like this where we get time release [for professional learning] and it’s not during my planning time, somebody is taking my class, that’s actually probably one of the really valuable things, that we get to learn about it and taught about it in a really structured, proper way and paid to do it. Not just expected to do it some other time or in our planning time.’ (teacher)

A common theme among teachers at case study schools was the importance of having ongoing conversations about the pilot as part of professional learning, especially in relation to teaching and learning. Teachers felt discussions and planning were enhanced by having more than one teacher attend any professional learning, and wanted regular opportunities to discuss and contextualise the information they were given in the professional learning sessions. They highlighted the importance of this to the process of tailoring and applying learnings to individual school contexts. Some schools found ways to build the capacity of the broader school by working with teachers who had attended professional learning as facilitators or by using team-teaching models.

Case study 1: Approaches to delivering curriculum materials within pilot case study schools

Recognising the varied approaches schools take to embedding new curriculum, the pilot allowed for flexibility in how teaching and learning materials were delivered. Across the pilot, case study schools took different approaches to delivering curriculum materials. Examples of these approaches included:

- Classroom teachers delivered respectful relationships education in their own classrooms, with lessons across the school run at the same time each week.
- Social and emotional learning and respectful relationships education were taught on alternating weeks.
- Respectful relationships education was embedded into the social and emotional learning lessons once a fortnight.
- Health and Physical Education specialist teachers had responsibility for all respectful relationships lessons across the school.

While individual school context should be considered in the delivery of teaching and learning materials, overall it was considered that giving classroom teachers responsibility for respectful relationships education lessons in their own class was a better way to embed a whole-of-school integration of respectful relationships education. This was attributed to the close relationships formed between classroom teachers and their students, and the potential for classroom teachers to be able to integrate the content and messages within broader classroom activities.

Parent and family engagement

Limited data collection from parents and families has been a persistent barrier to understanding the extent of parental support for respectful relationships education within the education system. Both this evaluation and previous evaluations (for example, [Kearney et al., 2016](#)) have found that parents and families are a crucial piece of the respectful relationships education puzzle. Parents and families can either reinforce messages or, conversely, be a potential source of resistance.⁸ While some school and departmental staff who were interviewed indicated concern that communication to parents about respectful relationships education could unintentionally spark backlash, this evaluation did not uncover any evidence of actual backlash from parents themselves. Parental backlash was not noted in any of the teacher focus groups (which involved 168 participants in total) or on school culture feedback forms at the conclusion of the pilot (of which 371 were collected).

Parents of all students who took part in the student survey were provided with a letter that explained the pilot and the content of the survey. It is interesting to note that just one parent out of the parent body of 217 students opted out of their child undertaking the Building Respectful Relationships student survey. Reports from school staff suggested the number of opt-outs was anticipated to have been higher. This may suggest a difference in perceived or anticipated resistance to respectful relationships education versus actual views of parents.

A survey of parents was distributed via Years 1 and 2 classroom teachers at Schools 1 and 2. It elicited a very small number of responses (13 in total). The data from this small sample suggests that parents were supportive of respectful relationships education and would like to know more about it.⁹ Most survey respondents (62%, $n = 8$) indicated that they saw the value of respectful relationships education being taught in schools to increase gender equality and reduce gender-based violence. Similarly, the two focus groups conducted with parents suggested that there was varied understanding among parents of what respectful relationships education is and what their schools were undertaking as part of the pilot.

While the evaluation did not uncover any direct evidence of backlash or resistance from parents and families, it did highlight the importance (and sometimes challenges) of communicating to parents and families to ensure they are engaged as part of the school's respectful relationships education work and to manage potential resistance. Parent support for respectful relationships education was identified by schools as an enabling factor supporting buy-in. However, schools had different levels of engagement with parents and families. Furthermore, schools recognised the importance of reassuring parents and families by providing them with plenty of information and access to resources about the pilot. This particular strategy can also serve to counter misinformation. Despite the awareness among pilot schools of the importance of this strategy, however, there was a nervousness about enacting it.

8 This evaluation was designed to ask parents about their views and understandings of respectful relationships education. However, the evaluation team was granted access to only a small group of parents via a survey in one state.

9 Given the small number of responses to the parent survey, it is possible that responses to this survey were from more informed, more engaged and potentially more supportive parents and families. Voluntary selection bias tends to elicit responses from people who have stronger opinions about a particular topic.

The following comment from a teacher at School 13 illustrates this bind, and perhaps a desire for support in providing appropriate material for parents:

‘Well, it’s compulsory for the students in that the school has to provide it [respectful relationships education], but you could find that you may have children withdrawn by their parents if the parents don’t actually understand what the program is about, but hopefully if we do have any parents in that direction, we can actually sit down, show the resources, explain what it is and where it is and why it is and how it is and what it’s actually getting at ... However, the information that we have is only as good as the information that we have, so ...’ (teacher)

In addition, school staff expressed concern that the work being done to challenge gender stereotypes and attitudes towards gendered violence was not necessarily being reinforced at home. Some teachers who were interviewed believed that students were receiving messages counter to the school’s attempts to foster respectful and inclusive relationships. One teacher noted that ‘what we do at school is then negated at home’. Another teacher said:

‘While ... I think it is highly important respectful relationship education happens at school, unfortunately 30% of a child’s success comes from the teacher. So, unfortunately, unless home concerns are addressed, then we can only improve the 30% by working with schools. Schools are still a great place to begin though.’

Case study 2: Parent and family engagement

Staff from School 1 and School 2 identified communication with parents and families as an enabling factor in gaining support for respectful relationships education and managing backlash. These two schools implemented a range of strategies – such as information nights, awareness days and newsletters – to communicate to their parent community about respectful relationships education. However, school leaders reported reservations about integrating gender equality messages in their communication to families, fearing this would prompt resistance and backlash.

Ultimately, the gap in the evidence regarding parents’ attitudes to and understanding of respectful relationships education will persist unless parents and families are actively engaged in evaluation and research. Given the role of families in influencing and reinforcing attitudes and beliefs in the home, and the uncertainty expressed by schools and departments of education about the extent to which there is family support for respectful relationships education, it is critical that this evidence gap is addressed in the near future, via direct data collection with parents and families.

Support for staff and students

A good practice approach to respectful relationships education requires that schools consider how to support their staff and students who experience violence. This may involve the way they manage disclosures and respond to incidents in the school, or their prioritising of staff and student wellbeing more broadly ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)).

Consistent with previous research ([Kearney et al., 2016](#); [Pasuca et al., 2019](#)), the ability of schools to support student wellbeing and respond to disclosures was identified as an important priority in the pilot. Schools employed a range of strategies to ensure that the school was a 'safe space' in which to talk about sensitive issues, including encouraging students to identify people within the schools that they felt safe to talk to:

'It can be uncomfortable, talking ... I think they have learnt ... "it's okay to ask questions". Since this has been going ... if there's a question, they will come and ask. Just know that there is – it is okay to talk to somebody; it might be your friend; it might be your classroom teacher, someone else. It's okay to talk about things.' (teacher)

In the focus groups for this evaluation, some students reported that respectful relationships education was a program that enhanced their personal wellbeing at school:

'And last year, I didn't – I had always come up with excuses to ... not come to school because I didn't like it that much. But now, I am starting to really like it because we have respectful relationships.' (student)

Respectful relationships education was also identified as providing support for students to 'talk about things'. Some teachers reported instances of students disclosing experiences of violence, including students who had observed violence enacted by their parents. Staff tended to see these disclosures as positive indicators that students felt confident to seek help and name and challenge gender-based violence. While many staff expressed confidence in dealing with student disclosures, others requested further professional learning to manage them.

The issue of dealing sensitively with staff experiences of violence also emerged as a key theme among case study schools. Schools addressed this issue by offering avenues of support for staff, providing them with the autonomy to choose to share or discuss their experiences, to opt out of activities or situations where they felt threatened or uncomfortable, and to take up appropriate external support. A leader at one school described that school as a 'high trauma-based school', which they said led to a high risk of staff 'burnout' given the 'confronting' and 'difficult' circumstances and issues they experienced daily. A few of the teachers recognised this stress as vicarious trauma, due to the intensity of working in this context.

Case study 3: Safe people to talk to

A teacher at School 12 noted the school psychologist's role in supporting children in questioning gender norms and recognising acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, thus supporting the aims of respectful relationships education. They spoke of the psychologist challenging notions such as 'girls should ... be a certain way, dress a certain way, look a certain way and be treated badly by their boyfriends'. At this same school, another avenue of support was to introduce students to the Kids Helpline through a whole-class Skype call.

Case study 4: The tree house

At School 1 a non-punitive, proactive approach to behaviour management had been established prior to the pilot. The school had reconsidered its approach from harsh discipline to an emphasis on having conversations with the kids in the ‘tree house’, a safe space originally labelled the ‘behaviour room’. These conversations were designed to support the students in developing strategies to cope with the ‘big emotions’ they felt around issues of conflict and violence. The tree house is an example of how schools can model positive ways of dealing with difficult feelings and establish an atmosphere in which students and teachers are likely to feel safe to explore topics, raise questions and share views without fear of judgement or silencing.

Community partnerships

Throughout the pilot, some schools engaged with external partners to support the delivery of certain aspects of respectful relationships education (such as disclosure support), while others did not. Interviews with school staff indicated that the roles and purposes of community partnerships could be explored and clarified during professional learning sessions and school baseline assessments.

Departmental staff acknowledged that the forming of partnerships between schools and community organisations was a new endeavour and that supporting the strengthening of these links may be an area of focus for the future. The absence of a purposeful and coordinated approach to engaging external agencies was identified as a gap by at least one departmental representative:

‘So, I think for many schools, working with family violence agencies is quite new and a bit of a culture change in and of itself ... I think that’s worked for us to sort of strengthen links with peak bodies but also by finding ways to help schools to connect on the ground and I think part of the theory of that is through our area-based staff. But through the communities of practice that our staff and the schools be involved. I think opening that up to be more formal with community agencies is one of our aims.’ (departmental staff member)

This advice reinforces findings from a previous evaluation ([Kearney et al., 2016](#)) that schools may need further guidance to support their engagement with external community partners, and that these partnerships will likely look different for each school, depending on their individual needs and the availability of local services.

Opportunities for consideration

1. Education jurisdictions support schools to engage with families as part of a whole-of-school approach. For example, this could be by:
 - a. Developing resources to support schools to engage families as part of the school readiness stage of implementation.
 - b. Developing a communications strategy and templates for schools, with clear messages for internal and external stakeholders (staff, teachers, students and families) at key points throughout the respectful relationships education journey.
2. Education jurisdictions recognise that respectful relationships education can raise issues related to personal experiences of violence for staff as well as students. Mechanisms such as access to employee assistance programs and family and domestic violence response services should be in place prior to implementation, to enable staff to access support outside the school setting.
3. Schools engage with external organisations, such as domestic and family violence services and agencies, to support professional learning about respectful relationships education and responses to staff or student disclosures. This engagement should be informed by guidance from relevant experts and a comprehensive self-assessment, planning and review process undertaken by the school.

2. Addressing the drivers of gender-based violence

Key finding

After only six months, Year 1 and 2 students' stereotypical gender attitudes regarding jobs and activities showed signs of diminishing. These improvements to students' gendered attitudes were correlated with explicit teaching of age-appropriate, gendered content in Years 1 and 2. Staff in a number of schools demonstrated signs of having new insights into gender inequality and the ways in which it impacts on school culture.

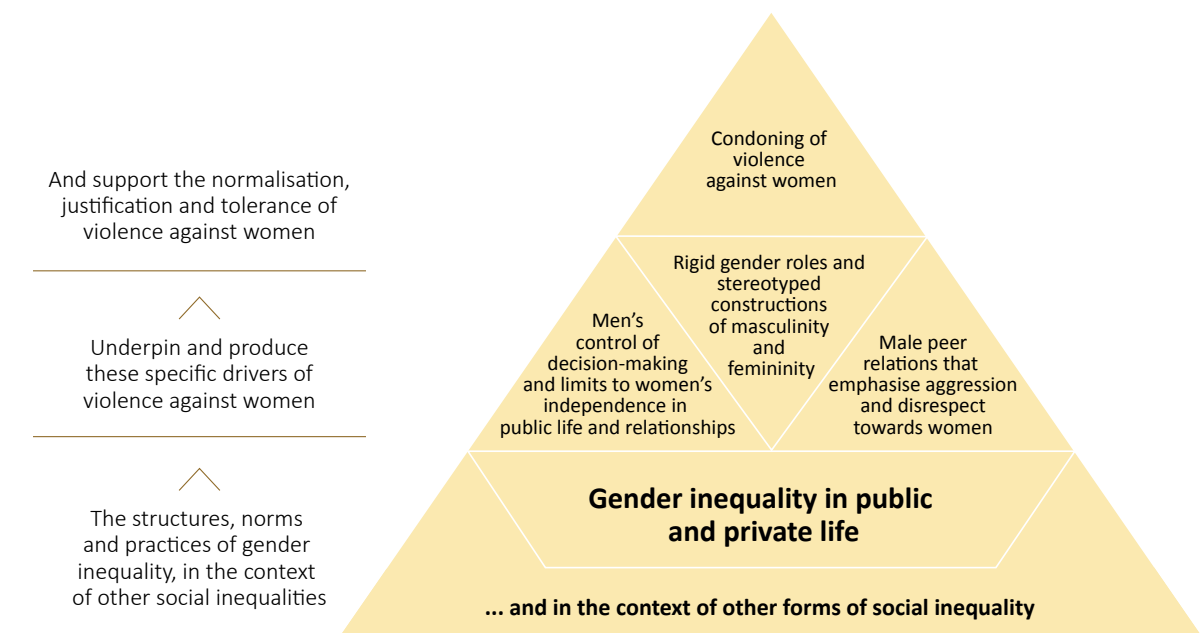
Discussion

Australia's national framework for the primary prevention (see [Glossary of terms](#)) of violence against women, *Change the story* ([Our Watch et al., 2015](#)), identifies the following gendered drivers of violence against women (depicted in Figure 6, below):

- the condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
- rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

While respectful relationships education is a term used broadly (see discussion in [Section 2: What is respectful relationships education?](#)) research suggests that for respectful relationships education to be effective it must take a whole-of-school approach and explicitly address the drivers of gender-based violence ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)). A review of the international evidence on school-based interventions to prevent gender-based violence ([Ellsberg et al., 2015](#); [Gleeson et al., 2015](#); [UNESCO, 2015](#)) found that good practice initiatives must recognise the roles of inequality, gender and power in the occurrence of gender-based violence, and seek to address these explicitly in age-appropriate ways, such as through the use of toys and play for young children.

Figure 6: The gendered drivers of violence against women



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 6 in Appendix E](#)

Why is it important to address gender stereotypes?

While the drivers of violence against women are complex, evidence indicates that factors related to gender inequality are the most significant and consistent predictors of violence against women. One such factor is rigid gender stereotypes (Our Watch et al., 2015). The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) found that adults' attitudes towards gender equality – including stereotyping – have significant impacts on their attitudes towards violence against women ([Webster et al., 2018](#)).

In 2018 Our Watch undertook a review of literature and commissioned a survey of 858 parents of young children across Australia about gender stereotypes. The study found that gender stereotypes influence the ways that children develop and engage with the world. From a very young age, children begin to learn about the attitudes, values, skills and behaviours that are seen as 'normal' or 'acceptable' for their social context, and begin to shape or express their identity and preferences accordingly, in order to 'fit in' and be part of a social network ([Our Watch, 2018a](#)).

The overwhelming majority of parents who participated in the study said they wanted their children to experience gender equality, and that they would like to challenge the restrictive nature of gender stereotypes that impact on their children. By challenging these stereotypes we can potentially foster the development of both girls and boys, shape their later career prospects, their ability to process emotion in healthy ways, and their capacity to engage in equal and respectful relationships ([Our Watch, 2018a](#)).

Progress towards addressing the drivers of gender-based violence

This evaluation found that pilot schools made progress in addressing rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity. Most significantly, by the end of the pilot:

- Students' gendered attitudes tended to be less stereotypical (see [Figure 1: Summary of pilot outcomes](#) and [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#)).
- In many instances, school staff identified and acknowledged their own unconscious biases about gender roles through critical reflection.
- Across all schools there was strong agreement that sexual harassment and gender discrimination were not tolerated. However, among some schools this agreement dipped marginally.

Many staff referred to and acknowledged their unconscious biases, such as in the following teacher-facilitated discussion with a student:

Student: They [teachers] can be both [genders] because, like, in the olden days the girls could be only a teacher or something else; and the boys could be anything they want ...

Focus group facilitator: In the olden days, you said, did you? So that's different now?

Student: Yep, because girls can, like, have any jobs now (teacher-facilitated discussion with student)

Staff also commented:

‘I don’t want to admit this but having said, when the boys are fighting at lunchtime and the parents are like, why are they doing this and I just – I’m like oh, sometimes boys will be boys.’ (teacher)

‘It’s not necessarily that you want to have attitudes which are discriminatory or mean but it’s been so deeply seeded that it comes up without being conscious. It’s not necessarily a conscious thing that happens. Only by people sitting and going well, do I think that? Why do I think that? Where would I have got that idea from? That reflectiveness is not something that is a naturally occurring thing for the majority of people.’ (leader)

Age-appropriate curriculum that addresses the gendered drivers of violence

Curriculum materials with a gendered perspective are an important component of respectful relationships education within a whole-of-school approach. Evidence demonstrates ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#); [UN Women, 2016](#); [UNESCO, 2015](#)) that respectful relationships education, as a primary prevention initiative, is most effective when it includes teaching that supports students in understanding and critically analysing gender roles, norms and relations in age-appropriate ways. The Australian Curriculum as a framework for levels Prep to Year 10 in all Australian schools authorises schools to implement respectful relationships education. However, while the Australian Curriculum can be a useful resource, it does not explicitly contain a ‘how to’ on respectful relationships education, nor does it provide any guidance on or requirement for taking a gendered approach to the content.

Most schools in the pilot used the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum resources ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018a](#)) Topic 7 (Gender and identity) and Topic 8 (Positive gender relations) as the basis for lessons for Year 1 and 2 students¹⁰ (see Figure 7, on the following page). These resources were already being delivered in a growing number of Victorian government schools throughout the implementation period (roll-out commenced in 2016).

The pilot schools in Queensland utilised *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum resources to augment the *Respectful Relationships Education Program* (RREP) developed by the Department of Education Queensland ([Queensland Government, 2016](#)). This pilot involved complementing the RREP program with content from Topics 7 and 8 of the Victorian *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* teaching and learning materials. Stakeholders in this pilot reported that the RREP, which is closely aligned with the Australian Curriculum, positions this content under Health and Physical Education within the relationships and sexuality topic area, and provides a general approach to positive relationships, respect and other social and emotional learning topics.

10 Many of the participating schools used these curriculum materials for Prep to Year 6 students.

Figure 7: Overview of *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum resources Topics 7 and 8

Level 1 to 2, Topic 7 — Gender and identity

Learning aims:

reflect on identity: likes, dislikes and strengths	develop an awareness of positive and negative gender norms	challenge negative gender norms	develop an appreciation of difference
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Level 1 to 2, Topic 8 — Positive gender relations

Learning aims:

develop an understanding of gender-based violence as involving unfair/hurtful behaviours based on ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl	identify and practice respectful and gender-friendly behaviours
identify examples and effects of verbal, physical and psychological gender-based violence	identify and practice assertive and help-seeking strategies to help keep themselves [students] safe in situations involving gender-based violence

[Text-equivalent description of Figure 7 in Appendix E](#)

Case study 5: Working with multiple curriculum materials

At School 2, classroom teachers were responsible for the delivery of the respectful relationships education instruction to their own class. At this school, members of the leadership team mapped the content of *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* resources to the Australian Curriculum, which according to an education stakeholder, gave what teachers saw as validation for teaching it, especially regarding the ‘gender lessons’.

During observations most students appeared engaged in the lessons. There were some examples of students building their conceptual understanding of what respectful relationships means in practice. For instance, this was illustrated by statements from and discussions with Year 1 and 2 students at one of the case study schools:

Example 1:

“‘Respectful relationships’ is about friendship, teamwork, helping, being nice, you get to know more people, stop fighting, stop bullying, fewer rude words, more teamwork, not being mean, how people feel, being nice and not mean, to listen, “do things that help people, from being angry to happy”.’

Example 2:

Facilitator 2: Do you think it's important though that children understand about these sorts of things?

Student: Yeah, this is. Yeah.

Facilitator 2: Why do you think it's important?

Student: It's important because people will realise that doing this is mean.

Teachers in the participating schools indicated that their students had developed a 'gender lens' as a result of being taught the adapted curriculum materials used in this pilot. Many teachers talked about 'the kids starting to notice little things', such as the absence of women and girls in social life:

"How come you've got no girl YouTubers?", said a Year 3 girl to a boy doing a presentation on YouTubers.' (teacher)

A number of students also demonstrated an ability to identify and challenge common scenarios that are often fuelled by gender stereotypes:

Example 1:

'Like if somebody is like a girl and they're playing unicorns, it doesn't mean a boy can't play.'

Example 2:

Facilitator 1: What would you say?

Student: ... that it's okay to – for girls to play basketball, it doesn't have to be all boys.

Example 3:

'Well, we were talking about it, yes, this scenario could have been different. But it kind of was sexist because she was playing with other people so she – so they could have done it to any one of those other people. But they just did it to her, I guess because maybe she was a girl or something.'

Example 4:

Student: Being sexist.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, being sexist. Can you explain to us what that means?

Student: People saying can't girls can't do this and boys can't do that.

Some students struggled with aspects of the scenarios, such as unfamiliar names or cultural practices, assumptions about access to certain technologies, and scenarios that projected a level of affluence that was not relevant to some student cohorts:

'They [students] were looking at groups – social groups and things like that that they're a part of; where our kids don't have that.'

Adequate time to plan, reflect and embed the curriculum (alongside comprehensive professional learning) was seen as crucial by all the teachers and stakeholders in case study schools, and this was approached differently from school to school.

Opportunities for consideration

4. Education jurisdictions deliver teaching and learning materials that address the drivers of gender-based violence as part of respectful relationships education programs (see the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* curriculum materials, Topic 7 Gender and identity and Topic 8 Positive gender relations) ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training, 2018a, April\)](#)).
5. Education jurisdictions, with support from prevention experts, undertake regular reviews of the respectful relationships education curriculum materials to ensure they reflect best practice primary prevention of gender-based violence.
6. Teaching and learning materials that address the drivers of gender-based violence are delivered every year in each classroom, across each year level and on a regular and consistent basis by the classroom teacher.

3. Supporting school readiness

Key findings

- Enabling cultures and commitment to respectful relationships education were evident among participating schools.
- Staff in some schools demonstrated signs of having new insights into gender inequality and the ways in which it impacts on school culture.
- All 18 participating schools demonstrated an existing readiness and commitment to respectful relationships education, as illustrated by high ratings in the school culture surveys. In large part, these encouraging results can be attributed to strong school leadership and a phased, opt-in approach to school recruitment.
- Commonly, staff involved in the pilot recognised and were motivated by the knowledge that some of their students witness and experience violence at home. This understanding may contribute to school cultures that are highly responsive to students' needs.
- Among some pilot schools, there were improvements to reported commitments to respectful relationships among staff and students, and lack of tolerance towards gender discrimination and sexual harassment, following their participation in the pilot.
- There was evidence of some resistance to and misunderstandings about discussing gender roles and relations, as illustrated by feedback from some teachers. Research suggests resistance occurs when existing structures are being challenged and that it is a normal part of the change process.

Discussion

School readiness as a key enabler

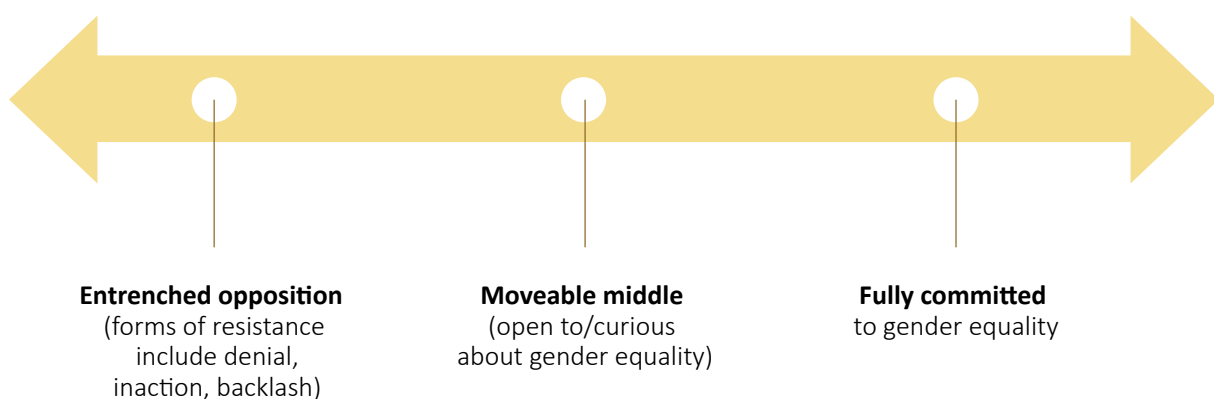
All 18 pilot schools displayed very positive school cultures before embarking on the pilot, which offers an encouraging indication of readiness to more broadly implement the initiative. School readiness is an established enabler for the effective uptake of respectful relationships education ([Kearney et al., 2016](#); [UN Women, 2016](#)).

Schools were allowed to opt in to this pilot, which helped ensure there was a level of existing leadership commitment prior to implementation. As recommended in previous evaluations ([Kearney et al., 2016](#)), this opt-in approach allows for a more effective scale-up, as it builds a base of schools that can lead others in the future.

As mentioned, responses to the school staff culture surveys indicate that participating schools had very positive school cultures before embarking on the respectful relationships education pilot. Leaders of the participating schools also tended to be in stronger agreement to most statements in the survey that reflected a positive school culture (see [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#)). Culture survey results were varied across schools. Some reported small improvements for key indicators compared to the already high baseline results. However, other schools responses to the statements 'My school is committed to ensuring respectful relationships between students' and 'My school is committed to ensuring respectful relationships between staff' were found to receive less support (with statistical significance) over time (see [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#)).

There are several possible explanations for these differing results. In the context of frameworks of backlash and resistance ([VicHealth, 2018](#)), even a small decline in strong agreement against school culture indicators may be a sign of respondents moving from denial (a form of opposition, as shown in Figure 8, below) towards an honest appraisal of their culture, which is informed by the professional learning and capacity building they have participated in as part of the pilot.

Figure 8: Spectrum of resistance to gender equality



(adapted from VicHealth, 2018)

[Text-equivalent description of Figure 8 in Appendix E](#)

Similarly, research from the organisational change management field suggests that transformative change takes people on a tumultuous journey known as the ‘change curve’. The early stages of this process are often associated with frustration, isolation, scepticism and general resistance ([Malone, 2018](#)). Using this model, denial or opposition is an important first step for schools to undertake and should not be considered a step in the wrong direction. Respectful relationships education is a long-term journey for schools to undertake as both workplaces and places of education. Some of the most challenging work to be done is in self-reflection and the acknowledgement that such work counters the status quo.

Despite the observed decline in certain whole-of-school indicators, overall support for the importance of respectful relationships education in schools (generally) remained strong at the end of the pilot (see [Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes](#)).

Resistance

The implementation of respectful relationships education within schools can be somewhat unsettling for some staff. Despite the progress made by schools within the relatively short pilot duration, some staff relayed examples of resistance to the initiative, which seem to centre on misconceptions about the purpose of it:

‘They [the teachers] have asked questions about, “Well, why would you do that?” ... “Why would you take that away from the boys?” So, I had to talk about, “Well, it’s not taking something away from the boys. It’s making sure that everybody has an equal opportunity; and that grounds are for everybody”.’ (principal)

Research suggests that resistance occurs when existing structures are being challenged, and that this is a normal part of the change process ([VicHealth, 2018](#)). Moreover, cultural changes to gender role norms and practices take time ([Webster et al., 2018](#)) and a long-term commitment is required to explore what the pattern of changes looks like over time. Current research estimates it would take about six to ten years to start to see measurable changes against the gendered drivers of violence against women, once quality prevention programs are in place ([Our Watch, 2017](#)).

A small number of staff involved in the pilot reported feeling alienated during the initial professional learning. Specifically, the explicit approach to naming men’s violence against women made some staff uncomfortable. Some teachers felt that the content had increased their awareness:

‘I mean the stuff that we’ve done in here has definitely heightened my awareness of the fact that it’s everywhere, all the time and how scary that is too.’ (teacher)

Others said they felt that men had been unfairly targeted. This response is perhaps to be expected in the face of any social change, including gender equality ([Flood et al., 2018](#)). Some schools recognised this more difficult aspect of implementing respectful relationships education. The case study on the following page outlines a promising strategy for managing resistance at one of the case study schools.

Case study 6: Managing resistance

In one school, efforts were made to address resistance among some staff by providing opportunities for leadership among younger staff to implement the program. In School 15, a member of the Years 5 and 6 team who was also the school's newest graduate teacher demonstrated a very strong commitment to the initiative and designed, developed and provided professional learning for the group. According to a leader at the school, the new teacher was able to develop her leadership skills and was regularly consulted by staff for advice and support on a range of matters relating to respectful relationships education at the school. This mentoring and team-focused teaching approach appeared to alleviate anxiety and resistance around teaching the gender-based violence content of respectful relationships education by building teacher confidence, skill and a belief in the teaching and learning materials.

Commitment to respectful relationships education as a response to perceived need

According to responses to the school staff culture survey and interviews with staff at case study schools, commitment to the initiative in some schools tended to be associated with the perceived need for respectful relationships education to address domestic and family violence in their own communities:

'[The pilot is] very required in our school setting. After attending local trauma network meetings ... in which I was approached by multiple representatives of agencies involved in support [of] women impacted by DV [domestic violence] who had particular concerns [and] feel this is very needed.' (teacher)

This view illustrates the desire of teachers for change and for school environments and cultures that are likely to support students who might be experiencing or witnessing violence. It may also reveal a conflation by school staff of the purpose of primary prevention initiatives to address gender-based violence with early intervention and response. As discussed in [Why take a whole-of-education approach?](#), schools are a vital setting for population-wide initiatives to prevent gender-based violence. While respectful relationships education is a primary prevention initiative, it is not unexpected that school staff see the initiative's relevance to the day-to-day experiences of their colleagues, students and families. The relationship of primary prevention to other work that addresses gender-based violence is depicted in Figure 9, on the following page.

Figure 9: Relationship of primary prevention to other work addressing gender-based violence (Our Watch et al., 2015)

Tertiary prevention or response

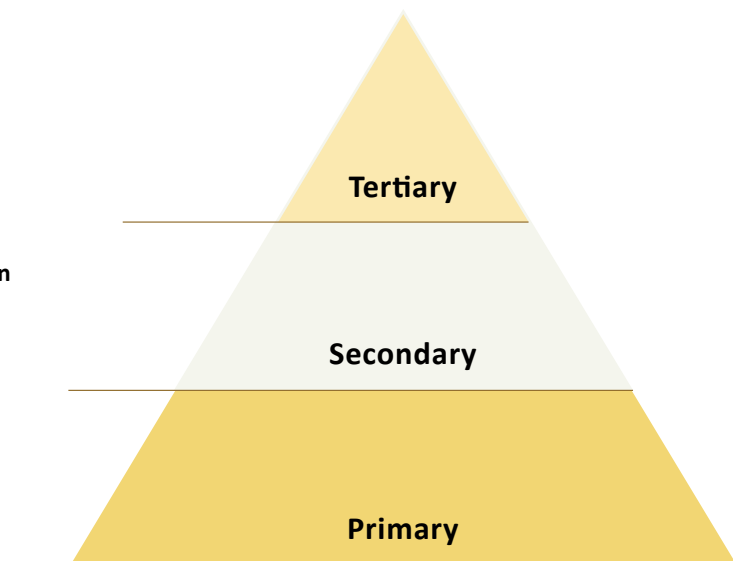
Supports survivors and hold perpetrators to account (and aims to prevent the recurrence of violence)

Secondary prevention or early intervention

Aims to 'change the trajectory' for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence

Primary prevention

Whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 9 in Appendix E](#)

Opportunities for consideration

7. With support from education jurisdictions, schools develop their understanding of resistance (from staff, families and community) and integrate a response plan into their whole-of-school approach as part of the school readiness stage of implementing respectful relationships education.

4. Professional learning

Key finding

Staff involved in the pilot identified that professional learning allowed them to explore their personal positioning in relation to gender and to apply this lens to their school. Professional learning helped build the confidence of teaching staff in delivering the curriculum. The pilot suggests that classroom teachers, rather than external providers, are well positioned to deliver this content, as it allows for an ongoing conversation tailored to the students' developmental stage.

Discussion

As introduced under [Teaching and learning](#), the professional learning aspect of the whole-of-school approach has been crucial for school staff. Professional learning has helped staff to build their understanding of gender equality and respectful relationships education, introduce the teaching and learning materials, and explore issues such as how to appropriately manage disclosures.

Case study 7 illustrates how a considered professional learning strategy enables schools to engage staff and leadership using an iterative approach. The professional learning strategy described was implemented in one of the states involved in the pilot.

Case study 7: Multi-tiered professional learning strategy

In one state, the professional learning strategy implemented took a multi-tiered approach, with a different focus for each audience.

Table 1: Professional learning strategy delivered to pilot schools in one state (summary)

Professional learning	1. Leading respectful relationships education	2. Whole-of-school briefing	3. Implementing respectful relationships education
Duration	2 × 4 hours	30 minutes to 1 hour	2 days
Staff	Leadership team (e.g. principal, assistant principal)	All staff (including teaching and non-teaching staff)	Year 1 and 2 teachers
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence • Pilot overview • Gendered drivers of violence • Whole-of-school approach • Responding to disclosures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence • Pilot overview • Responding to disclosures • Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-based violence • <i>Change the story</i> • Whole-of-school approach • Curriculum materials • Responding to disclosures

Support in understanding and challenging personal positioning to gender and violence

Professional learning was referred to by all stakeholders as a key strategy for building expertise in critically examining respectful relationships education, gender inequality, gender and violence, unconscious gender bias and the gendered language used in school communities. Awareness of these concepts had a positive impact on teacher practice in relation to their expectations of students, language use and resources:

‘What I’m really enjoying seeing is people slowly opening their awareness to what they’re actually saying and doing and that’s the power of the project.’ (leader)

One of the aims of professional learning for teaching staff was to build confidence in delivering the curriculum to students, and to challenge the personal positioning of school staff regarding gender. In many cases, this aim was achieved.

For example, an initially reluctant teacher at one school became inspired following the professional learning session:

‘[a member of the implementation team] was fielding phone calls from a teacher who was actually at the Our Watch two-day teacher PD [professional development] so inspired by his learning that he wanted to workshop potential school-based activities with her.’ (leader)

Building teachers’ capacity in applying a gender lens also allowed staff to reflect on their broader school environment. For example, School 11 prided itself on having an inclusive culture. However, staff found that undertaking a gender analysis or using a ‘gender lens’ revealed that stereotypically gendered practices were pervasive in the school:

‘Then finding things out that you absolutely did not know and how they pertain to every single thing in your room and the outcomes in the school ground, that was the game changer for me specifically. I like to think that I’m already doing all that stuff and then I went “Oh my god”.’ (teacher)

Despite these positive indicators, there was evidence among some teachers of resistance to a focus on gender and gender equality (see further discussion in [2. Addressing the drivers of gender-based violence](#)). In one of the case study schools, feedback from focus group discussions with staff suggested that some teachers felt alienated during the initial professional learning. Specifically, the explicit approach to naming men’s violence against women made some staff uncomfortable. This suggests that entry points for staff must be carefully and critically considered so that professional learning, particularly initial briefings involving all staff, are framed in ways that clearly highlight the aims and benefits of the initiative. Related to this, school staff wanted the professional learning to be challenging, but also for it to be managed in a ‘respectful, gentle and slow approach, to forestall pushback’. This view may point to a need for professional learning to be iterative, in order to build gradually on learning outcomes.

Importance of local context

Although some staff found the whole staff briefing confronting, others talked about the reality check they received by being presented with local data on domestic and family violence. They felt this built a local picture that meant they couldn't ignore the need to address the issue in their schools:

'You can get a little bit complacent that oh it's [this area] and our families are quite well to do and that stereotype of "well it won't be happening", because they're upper socioeconomic status and you know that only happens to certain people. Just knowing that that's not true at all, it's happening, it doesn't matter how much money you have or what you do, really that it could be happening.' (leader)

The importance of approaching respectful relationships education in a manner appropriate to the school context is consistent with previous research that has acknowledged the significance of tailored interventions with input from the school community. Although the whole-of-school approach provides an important framework for respectful relationships education, conceptions of gender-based violence may vary among school communities ([Stanley et al., 2015](#)). School context and levels of educational advantage should therefore mean that implementation will differ from school to school.

Clear boundaries and expectations in teaching sensitive topics

In the *Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships* resources for Year 1 and 2 students, gender-based violence is framed as 'things that people say (verbal), things they do to others' bodies or possessions (physical) or things people do that affect how safe or welcome people feel e.g. ignoring, leaving out, laughing at (psychological)' ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018a](#), p. 62). The age-appropriate content framed violence by considering the difference between fair and friendly play and play that is violent or 'too rough'. Despite such age-appropriate framing, at times teachers felt nervous about exploring topics relating to violence with students who may have direct experience of it. Many teachers, however, appear to have found ways to do this carefully and safely, for example by setting clear boundaries and classroom agreements. One teacher talked about the positive impact of being 'challenged' and 'confronted' by the level of responsibility she felt towards the students:

'I got a lot out of the fact that I guess I was confronted, and I was challenged personally because even though you create things in the curriculum, you are the person continually modelling.'

This pilot has reinforced the importance of a carefully planned and staged professional learning strategy that builds teacher capacity to deliver the curriculum, allows staff and teachers time to explore and question their personal positioning regarding gender, and builds an understanding of how to implement a whole-of-school approach. This is critical not only to ensure a genuine whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education, but also to enable effective delivery of the classroom resources.

Opportunities for consideration

8. With education jurisdiction support, schools develop an ongoing professional learning strategy for all staff (both teaching and non-teaching), addressing:
 - Key concepts such as gender, gender lens, gender equality/inequality and gender-based violence, and how these concepts are translated in their school and workplace contexts.
 - A whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education, including the implementation cycle that facilitates continual improvement and measurement of intended outcomes.
 - Appropriate and safe responses to staff, student and family disclosures of violence, including referral to domestic and/or family violence response agencies with appropriate expertise; professional learning on responding to student disclosures should be delivered prior to classroom delivery of teaching and learning materials.¹¹
 - Systematic sharing of good practice approaches between schools.
9. Prior to classroom delivery, comprehensive professional learning opportunities are provided for teaching staff to enable them to deliver curriculum materials in a safe and supportive environment, with the support of their peers. Schools are resourced, where possible, to enable staff to engage in professional learning activities on the delivery of respectful relationships education, such as through departmental or school-based professional development opportunities.

5. Long-term commitment

Key finding

Pilot participants noted that a long-term government commitment to respectful relationships education (through time and investment in areas such as professional learning) supports the implementation of a whole-of-school approach.

Discussion

Respectful relationships education is a long-term journey for schools, both as workplaces and as places of education. This pilot demonstrates that part of the challenge of implementing a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education is that it is a significant change process for schools to undertake, requiring investment of time and human resources, particularly during its early stages. School leadership and teaching staff are familiar with the challenges of taking on new teaching and learning materials and integrating parts of the curriculum into their work. This also requires time and investment, but it is arguably a comfortable space for schools to operate within.

11 Support for dealing with disclosures of violence should be aligned with [mandatory reporting laws and procedures in each state and territory](#).

Feedback from school staff suggests schools require sufficient time to pursue all aspects of the whole-of-school approach identified as part of their action planning process. Reflecting on their school's uptake of respectful relationships education, the principal at School 1 remarked on the 'incredible challenge' of 'moving culture' and that such change was 'harder' than originally thought, owing to what they perceived to be the high levels of disadvantage in their school context. Similarly, teachers and leaders at School 2 commented that the school had embarked upon implementing respectful relationships education through teaching and learning across the school and capacity-building of staff. However, one school leader noted that shifts in the language, behaviour and interactions between and among teachers and students would 'be slow'.

These reflections are consistent with findings of previous pilots of the whole-of-school approach in Victorian secondary schools (for example, [Kearney et al., 2016](#)) and international examples ([UN Women, 2016](#); [UNESCO, 2015](#)). The finding reinforces the need for a long-term approach to respectful relationships education, to allow schools sufficient time and support to tackle non-curriculum-based aspects of the whole-of-school approach and to embark on the process of transformative culture change.

Opportunities for consideration

10. Scaling of respectful relationships education within jurisdictions should be guided by an implementation strategy that incorporates:

- An implementation plan that takes a staged approach and allows schools to opt in to participate, acknowledging that school readiness and planning for respectful relationships education can take up to a year.
- Support for school leaders to plan for the implementation of respectful relationships education. This could include budgeting and staff resourcing, professional learning, curriculum mapping, and the provision of existing evidence-based tools and resources to assist in self-assessment and action planning.

6. Collaboration and coordination

Key findings

Workforce

- A skilled department of education workforce was identified as a critical enabler for implementation of a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education.

Authorising environments

- Policy environment and infrastructure (such as Queensland's *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland Taskforce Report*, the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016–2026*, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Free from Violence Strategy, and the establishment of Respect Victoria) was recognised as an enabling platform for the future of prevention work.

Communication and messaging

- Media coverage and misinformation about respectful relationships education were identified by participants as barriers that can potentially undermine the implementation and take-up of respectful relationships education.

Broader work to shift community attitudes

- Respectful relationships education sits within a broader program of work to prevent gender-based violence. Work to shift violence-supportive attitudes, norms and structures undertaken by schools and departments of education must be complemented by work in the public service and broader community.

Discussion

Workforce

Schools need support in order to deliver respectful relationships education as a complex and transformative change process ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)). Support is required at both at a strategic level, through advocacy for resourcing and appropriate policies and guidance, and at ground level, through day-to-day support of schools' implementation needs. This support can be provided by regionally based staff who have dedicated roles in supporting schools to implement respectful relationships education. Where this workforce was in place, it was noted by school and departmental staff in this pilot as a significant enabler for primary schools:

'I think that's where we come in is to look at, well, what do you [schools] need from there and what do we have to support you [them]? Then if we don't have what you've got, well, where are you going to get it; and we are not in a really good position as yet to actually have that – we probably have the expertise to do it, we just don't have the people, we don't have the regional support mechanisms to help schools to be able to really access all of those services in a coordinated considered way ...' (departmental staff member)

However, even where focused support has been available, some departmental staff reported the challenges in supporting so many schools:

‘... we cannot work intensively with every school in the way that we really should be to be getting the kind of change that they want.’ (regional departmental staff member)

Authorising environments

Government support and access to evidence were seen as key enablers to schools and government departments working together. In particular, senior departmental staff referred to the framework and strategies developed as part of the secondary schools pilot ([Kearney et al., 2016](#)) and other evidence, such as the Royal Commission into Family Violence ([State of Victoria, 2016](#)). Interviewees from departments of education identified the strength and importance of systems, sectors and agencies working together. This included the role of an external change agent with specialist expertise in prevention of gender-based violence, and a community of practice to enable schools to learn from each other.

Although gaps in support were identified, one departmental representative suggested there is a ‘genuine authorising environment’ for respectful relationships education at senior levels in their department and that this support was crucial to the program going ahead. Reports such as *Not now, not ever* ([Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland, 2015](#)) and the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence were seen as key to generating a high-level commitment to respectful relationships education, and a whole-of-government approach to this issue.

Communication and messaging

The role of public communications and messaging on public and stakeholder perceptions of respectful relationships education was suggested to be an important consideration for schools and government departments:

‘We’re hoping to have some [stories] published on our website which we would have loved to have shared with you ... they are amazing [about] the change that has happened in such a short amount of time. When you hear these stories, girls and boys both saying I can do things I never thought I could do before.’ (departmental staff member)

Developing a common language for an understanding of and rationale for respectful relationships education is an important approach in addressing misinformation. In addition, a proactive and considered communications strategy that clarifies the purpose of the initiative and showcases positive results and stories of change should accompany the implementation of respectful relationships education.

In the same way that concern about backlash from parents can constrain schools’ communication and engagement with families (see [Parent and family engagement](#)), backlash from media, stakeholders and the public can create challenges in the take-up of respectful relationships education at state and national levels. Stakeholders across the project were aware of the ways in which media coverage can impact on parents’ perceptions and support for the pilot. This comment by a departmental representative typifies this concern:

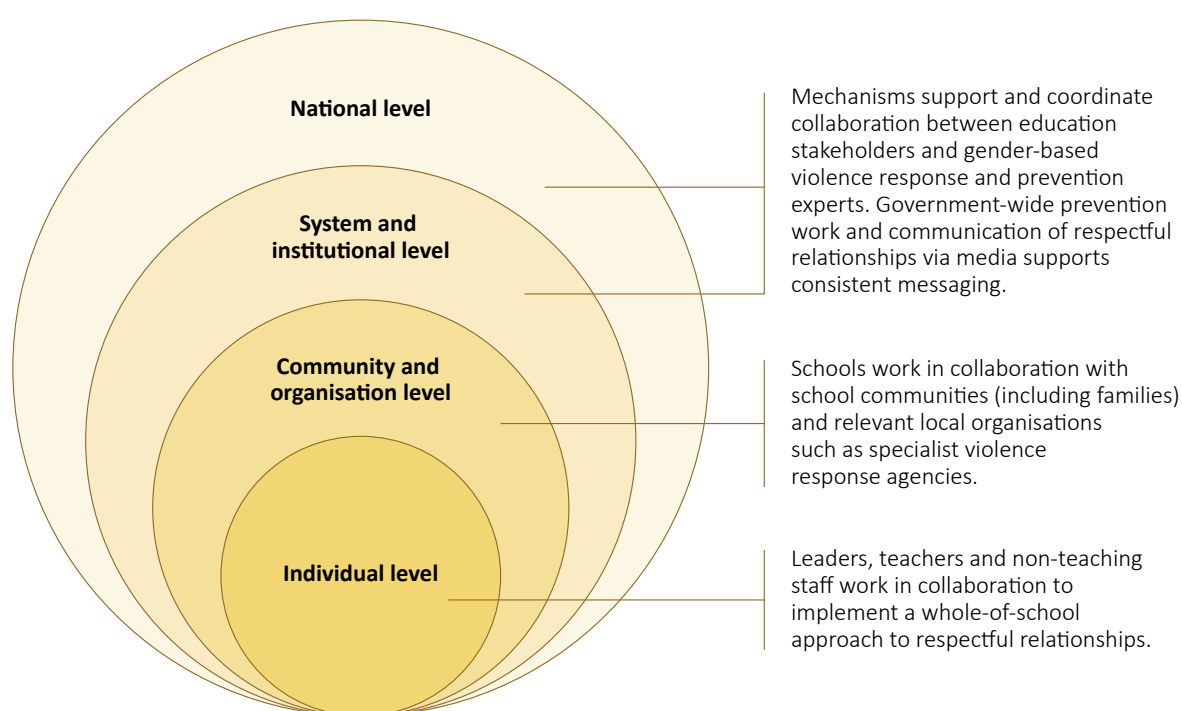
‘Most of the difficulties that we find are when schools don’t communicate effectively with their parent body; or, they communicate something that sends people off in a tizz or a tangent that isn’t really what they are doing anyway. So that part of the miscommunication tends to end up in the media.’

Feedback gathered following the pilot indicated that future expansion or roll-out of respectful relationships education might be supported if accompanied by a proactive and considered communications strategy that clarifies the purpose of the initiative and showcases positive results and stories of change.

Broader work to shift structures, norms and practices

As described in Figure 10, below, respectful relationships education aims to influence the structures, norms and practices of the education system and school communities. It is therefore critical that parallel prevention work is undertaken to ensure progress made in schools is reinforced by work within the broader education system, families and the community as a whole.

Figure 10: School-based primary prevention ecological model



(adapted from [Gleeson et al., 2015](#))

Text-equivalent description of Figure 10 in Appendix E

Systemic primary prevention of gender-based violence initiatives can fortify respectful relationships education in schools (and vice versa) and ensure the sustainability of this pilot's outcomes. This point was articulated by a school leader involved in the pilot:

'But, also, it's not just about schools. It needs to be a societal thing. Some of the advertisements they are using at the moment are really powerful. So, it needs to be not just an education department commitment; it needs to be a government commitment.' (leader)

As suggested by the ecological model of school-based primary prevention (Figure 10, above), the social change required to create a future free from gender-based violence involves work at many levels, including individual, organisation and community, system and institutional, and societal levels ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)).

Opportunities for consideration

11. Education jurisdictions develop a communication and engagement strategy for government, media and broader community stakeholders on respectful relationships education. This could include media reporting of positive change stories and outcome data. Education jurisdictions engage in dialogue with stakeholders (such as parents' groups, principals' associations, education unions, and gender-based violence response and primary prevention sectors) about why schools undertake respectful relationships education, what is involved, and with what results.
12. Government departments implement strategies to address the gendered drivers of violence against women among their staff and the broader community, to reinforce and support progress made in schools. For example, strategies could include:
 - Undertaking a whole-of-government/multi-departmental program to deliver messaging to the community about the prevention of violence against women, to support community engagement in respectful relationships education.
 - Developing a professional learning strategy for personnel – especially those responsible for supporting schools undertaking respectful relationships education – to develop knowledge and skills in preventing violence against women. This strategy should be developed in concert with the implementation plan (as described under [5. Long-term commitment](#)).

7. Evaluation and monitoring

Key finding

Although this evaluation yielded evidence that positive change related to the gendered drivers of violence can be achieved through respectful relationships education, the pilot was limited to a small number of sites over a short period of time. Future evaluations should engage a broader number of sites and student year levels. Longitudinal evaluations are needed to examine the sustainability of changes to student and staff attitudes and to explore the perspectives of families.

Discussion

This pilot highlighted both the importance and challenges of measuring and monitoring implementation of respectful relationships education. Data from this evaluation pointed to early indicators of change – particularly among students who utilised the teaching and learning materials that explore and challenge concepts of gender – and shifts in school cultures. However, data gaps persist, particularly the lack of information on the perspectives of parents and families. The pilot demonstrated that age-appropriate evaluation tools can

be administered to evidence change for students. Similarly, while there have been barriers to engagement with parents and carers, this pilot suggests parents are interested in learning more about the whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education. As such, it is critical that comprehensive and long-term evaluation and monitoring is conducted alongside implementation and scale-up to provide evidence of change over time and to explore the sustainability of the pilot's impact:

'... at the core of it we're trying to test through evaluation what are the attitudes and behaviour changes. We'll see that through our evaluation. Hopefully we'll see it, but it'll probably take time through the NCAS [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey] stuff. The National Community Attitudes Survey and all of the work that we do to support the outcomes framework for the whole-of-government prevention of family violence strategy, *Free from violence*.' (departmental representative)

The results of further research and evaluation would continue to inform practice knowledge about what works in best practice respectful relationships education as a primary prevention approach. A number of opportunities are available to build this evidence base, including expanded pilots to explore delivery of teaching and learning materials to students beyond Years 1 and 2, longitudinal follow-up to explore the sustainability of outcomes, and long-term behaviour impact studies to examine whether there are any enduring impacts on student and staff behaviour.

Opportunities for consideration

13. Education jurisdictions, in collaboration with schools, undertake further evaluation into the processes and impact of implementing respectful relationships education. Future research should address evidence gaps identified in this evaluation, including outcomes for students at all primary levels and the perspectives of parents, families and community partners.
14. Education jurisdictions, in collaboration with schools, should establish school-level and state-wide evaluation mechanisms to monitor uptake of respectful relationships education in the education sector and to measure outcomes and longitudinal change. These evaluations should collect data from students and families to inform a full assessment of impact.

Section 6: Conclusion

This report brings together findings from a pilot of respectful relationships education in primary schools in two Australian states. While the initiative was implemented within different jurisdictions and policy contexts, the evaluation found a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education can be implemented in a primary school setting, with promising results. Notably, outcomes of the relatively short pilot indicated significant impacts. Students were found to hold fewer gender-stereotyped attitudes, and schools evidenced a consistently strong commitment to respectful relationships education and a lack of tolerance for sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

These findings are linked with enablers such as comprehensive professional learning, support for staff and student wellbeing, and engagement with parents and families. The findings of the pilot further highlight that by taking a gendered approach to teaching and learning materials, critical shifts in student attitudes towards gender stereotypes can be achieved in a short amount of time.

This evaluation was limited in its ability to demonstrate the pilot's impact (changes to attitudes, norms, structures and practices) in a short period of time. Given the small sample of schools participating in the pilot, the task of drawing conclusions from this evaluation for the scale-up of respectful relationships education has been done with caution.

Future research and evaluation priorities should include engaging with the perspectives of parents and families, exploring the delivery of teaching and learning materials to students beyond Years 1 and 2, and conducting longitudinal follow-up to explore the sustainability of outcomes. The extent to which respectful relationships education tackles the intersection of gender inequality with broader structural inequalities and discrimination (such as racism, ageism, sexuality, and ableism) is another important area of future investigation.

Respectful relationships education challenges people's personal positioning, their assumptions and their beliefs. It adjusts processes and structures that determine how schools operate. Emerging Australian and international evidence suggests that, undertaken as a whole-of-school approach over an extended timeframe, respectful relationships education can ultimately shift the ways in which schools operate as workplaces, community settings and education institutions, and contribute significantly to the prevention of gender-based violence. Transforming society to end gender-based violence is a multi-generational process. It is therefore vital that evidence-based respectful relationship education in primary schools continues to be implemented in contextual and comprehensive ways to progress primary prevention of gender-based violence.

Glossary of terms

Case study school: Five of the schools participating in this pilot elected to take part in additional evaluation activities that included focus group interviews with staff and parents as well as classroom observations. Schools are not identified in this report. See [Appendix A: Evaluation approach](#) for further detail on the case study approach.

Gender-based violence/violence against women : The term gender-based violence is used throughout this report. It commonly refers to any act of violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Most often, but not always, gender-based violence is committed by men against women ([UNFPA, 2005](#)). In the context of respectful relationships education, the term gender-based violence is used in place of ‘violence against women’, as it is considered to better include the experiences of people who do not conform to binary (male/female) definitions of gender.

Gender inequality: A social condition characterised by unequal value afforded to men and women and an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity between them ([Our Watch, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, and Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, 2015](#), p. 8).

Gender lens: A way of analysing how strategies such as policies, procedures, systems and programs impact and affect people of different genders in different ways ([VicHealth, 2016](#)).

Intersectional: An intersectional understanding of gender-based violence acknowledges that while gender inequality is a necessary condition for the violence structural inequality and discrimination including racism, ageism, homophobia and ableism, intersects with gender inequality. For example, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women racism and the legacy of colonisation intersect with sexist beliefs, behaviours and structures, resulting in violence that is experienced differently in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women ([Our Watch, 2017b](#)).

Lead school, partner school: In Victoria, the whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education is being rolled out across the state through a lead and partner school model. Depending on a school’s experience and readiness, Victorian schools elected to participate as either a lead school or a partner school. Lead schools were provided with \$10,000 per annum for two years to support their implementation of a whole-of-school approach and to mentor and support partner schools. Partner schools received \$4000 in the first year to support their implementation of a whole-of-school approach.

Pilot/initiative: Refers to Our Watch’s partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training, Queensland Department of Education and 18 primary schools to pilot a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education. The pilot/initiative includes supporting the whole-of-school approach and evaluation.

Primary prevention: A whole-of-population approach to address the underlying drivers of violence against women. Primary prevention is distinct from secondary prevention or early intervention initiatives that aim to ‘change the trajectory’ for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence. It is also distinct from tertiary prevention or responses, which support survivors and hold perpetrators to account, and aim to prevent the recurrence of violence ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#), p. 8).

Project lead and liaison officers: In Victoria, these roles comprise the dedicated respectful relationships workforce in place to support lead and partner schools with implementation. The workforce is made up of 17 project leads and 17 liaison officers throughout Victoria as well as a unit within the Department of Education and Training's central office. More information can be found on the [Victorian Department of Education and Training's Respectful Relationships website](#).

Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships: Refers to the Victorian teaching and learning materials that have been designed for teachers in primary and secondary schools to develop students' social, emotional and positive relationship skills ([State of Victoria \(Department of Education and Training\), 2018a](#)).

Respectful relationships education: The holistic approach to school-based primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#), p. 13).

Respectful Relationships Education Program (RREP): Refers to Queensland teaching and learning materials that have been designed to equip students with the skills to develop respectful and ethical relationships, free of violence. This program includes five hours of instruction per year level and may be delivered as part of a school's student wellbeing or pastoral care program, or used in conjunction with Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education materials.

Secondary prevention: Also termed early intervention, which aims to 'change the trajectory' for individuals at higher-than average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence ([Our Watch et al., 2015](#)).

Tertiary prevention: Activities that support survivors and hold perpetrators to account, and also aim to prevent the recurrence of violence ([Our Watch et al., 2015](#)).

Whole-of-school: The whole-of-school approach recognises that in order to achieve sustainable change, shifts are needed at a policy, structural, process, system and institutional level. A whole-of-school approach involves engaging not just students, but school staff and the wider school community in the process of cultural change.

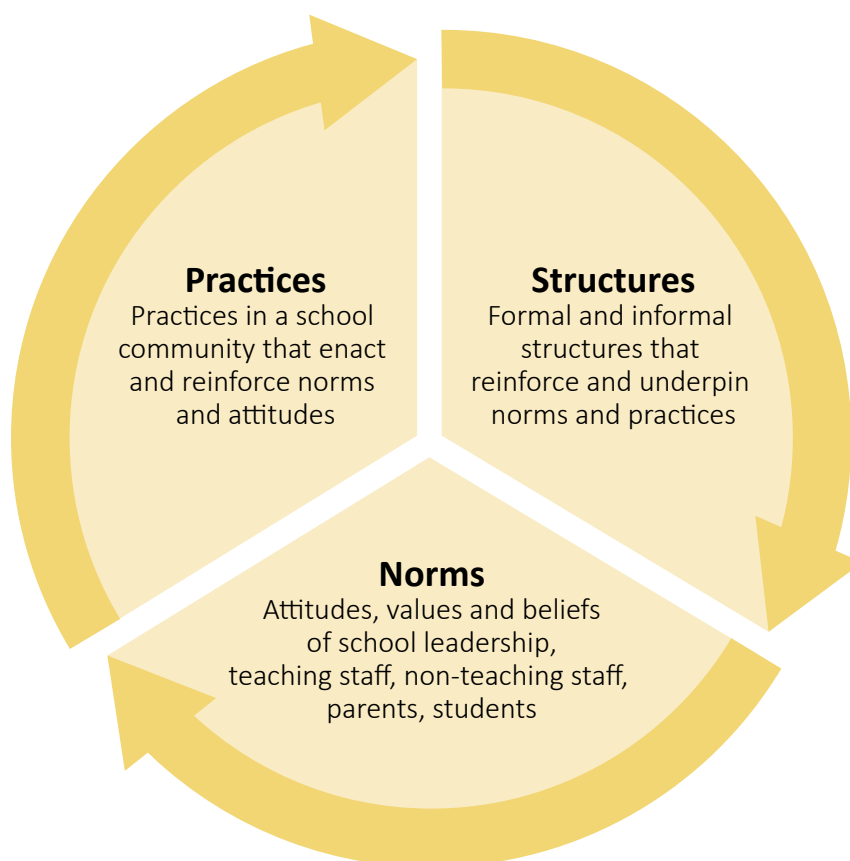
Appendix A: Evaluation approach

Approach and framing

Measuring changes to practices, structures and norms

When measuring change against the gendered drivers of violence against women, the evaluation sought to evidence impact across norms, practices and structures and to document the scope of activities undertaken by participating pilot schools. Since attitudes and beliefs are reinforced by structures and practices, it was important to examine the changes to structures and practices that reinforce attitudinal change. For a representation of the relationship between structures, norms and practices, see Figure 11, below.

Figure 11: Practices, structures and norms



[Text-equivalent description of Figure 11 in Appendix E](#)

Case study approach

Uptake of the whole-of-school approach is a gradual process that depends on factors both internal and external to the school. The project team anticipated that over the course of the current implementation period, some schools would be more successful than others in embedding a whole-school approach. The evaluation aimed to capture both the internal and external factors that have impacted the uptake of the model.

In order to explore these contextual factors and develop a deeper understanding of what works for primary schools in the implementation of respectful relationships education, Our Watch incorporated a case study model into the evaluation. This meant that five schools agreed for additional qualitative and contextual data to be collected, to support a more detailed and school-specific analysis of the pilot. The five case study schools were selected by Our Watch education advisers in consultation with the relevant departments of education.

Action research

Another important aspect of the evaluation approach was to allow schools to integrate feedback and reflection as part of an 'action research' approach to evaluation. Schools were able to use data from the evaluation to inform implementation of respectful relationships education within their school. This has been a valuable approach for schools participating in the pilot who used their own data as points of reflection and in planning for action.

Evaluation methods

A mixed-methods approach was applied to the evaluation, drawing on a variety of data sources including surveys, monitoring records, stakeholder interviews and focus groups.

The evaluation design for the current pilot builds on the pilot of respectful relationships education in secondary schools led by Our Watch in 2015, and the stakeholder feedback Our Watch received on its design. The methodology for the secondary schools evaluation was reported by schools and departmental staff to be a significant strength of the pilot. It included feedback loops to inform program activity at the school and principal level, as well as the project team and government partners' level. This evaluation adopted an action research approach, which allowed schools and the project implementation leaders the opportunity to reflect on their own data and respond accordingly.

Data collection tools:

- School culture surveys (pre- and post-pilot) collected information on staff perceptions of school culture, particularly in relation to respectful relationships education, gender equality and work/life balance (adapted from the secondary school's pilot tools ([Kearney et al., 2016](#))).
- Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey (pre- and post-pilot) was used in two case study schools to measure student attitudes towards gender stereotypes and depictions of gender-based violence (see [Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey](#) for background on the development of this tool).
- Focus groups with school leadership, teachers and staff in case study schools gathered reflections from school leadership, implementation teams and broader staff on their experiences of implementing respectful relationships education (led by research partners Deakin University).
- Focus groups with students in case study schools gathered reflections from students to inform an understanding of any impact on their attitudes (led by research partners Deakin University).
- Focus group with parents in case study schools gathered and documented reflections from parents at two of the case study schools regarding their knowledge and understanding of respectful relationships education (led by research partners Deakin University).

- Parent survey in two case study schools captured parents' awareness and understanding of respectful relationships education in their children's school.
- Professional learning evaluation surveys gathered responses from teachers and school leadership.
- Collection of case studies illustrated instances of change in schools, captured by Our Watch education advisers, and qualitative examples of outcomes and change at a school level.
- Classroom observations at case study schools engaged with teaching staff and observed the delivery of classroom activities as part of respectful relationships education (led by research partners Deakin University).
- Stakeholder interviews captured insights and reflections from Our Watch staff and Department of Education and Training stakeholders on the pilot of respectful relationships education in primary schools (led by research partners Deakin University).

See [Appendix B: Data collection methods](#) for a breakdown of the timing of data collection tools and samples.

Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey

The evaluation approach sought to include the perspectives and voices of children and young people as critical stakeholders in respectful relationships education. Children and young people have the right to participate in research and evaluation on issues affecting them.

To this end, Our Watch commissioned Deakin University to develop the Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey to measure any changes in students' beliefs and attitudes to gender, comparing results before and after students participated in respectful relationships education. The survey is an adaptation of validated measurement tools ([Liben & Bigler, 2002](#)).

Ethical oversight

The evaluation sought and received approval from human research committees and directorates from Deakin University, Queensland Department of Education and the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

Evaluation limitations

Limited sample

Our Watch was resourced to work with up to 20 schools across two states. The organisation worked closely with the states' departments of education to engage schools that represented a range of socioeconomic and demographic attributes. The pilot was limited to curriculum delivery with Years 1 and 2 (within the context of a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationship education) and therefore cannot provide comment on the specific teaching and learning needs of other primary school year levels.

Given these limitations, this evaluation report presents all of the pilot's findings within the context of existing research and other respectful relationships education pilots.

Since pilot evaluations often collect a depth of data from a small number of sites, a level of extrapolation is required for opportunities for consideration at a systemic level. This evaluation explicitly set out to understand and make suggestions to inform a broader systematisation of respectful relationships education in primary schools. This report and its opportunities for consideration would be strengthened through further pilots within primary schools that engage with a broader sample of schools and include a broader range of year levels. Despite the challenges of evaluating a small sample, statistically significant changes in student survey results were observed. This report presents findings (including enablers and barriers to implementation) that occurred across the participating schools.

Demonstrating impact in a limited timeframe

Changes in attitudes, norms, structures and behaviours occur slowly. A dramatic shift would not be expected when a school begins to implement respectful relationships education – change is usually gradual.

A short program timeframe created challenges for evidencing the impact of initiatives designed to prevent gender-based violence. The duration of this pilot was 18 months, with implementation in the pilot schools preceded by planning and capacity building with staff and stakeholders within this time. Therefore, there was only one year of implementation in which to demonstrate change through the evaluation. This was a significant challenge for measuring school cultures, attitudes and practices.

Counting on change: a guide to prevention monitoring, estimates that it would take about six to ten years to start to see measurable changes against the drivers of gender-based violence, once quality prevention programs are in place ([Our Watch, 2017](#)). The evidence base for respectful relationships education in Australia would benefit substantially from a longitudinal evaluation to explore the long-term effects (and sustainability of any short-term effects) of the initiative in preventing violence against women.

Survey limitations

Owing to logistical issues and ethical considerations, there were a number of limitations in the design and analysis of the surveys undertaken for this evaluation:

- The Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey questions presented binary notions of gender – girls and boys, female and male. Therefore, the survey did not provide options for children who do not identify or categorise activities and behaviours or work in these binary ways.
- The Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey was originally designed to be administered to children individually to support greater reliability and validity. The survey was instead administered in groups of three to four, with one facilitator. Thus, some children may have been influenced by other children in the classroom setting, which would affect the findings.
- The school culture survey was analysed using an independent samples t-test, rather than a matched-pairs t-test. The independent samples t-test violates the assumption that the two groups are impartial. However, it allowed us to look at the change in general from the pre-group to the post-group.

- The survey asked respondents to report their own perceptions. As such the responses 1) may not be representative beyond the sample, particularly given low sample sizes; and 2) may not be reliable (in terms of gathering stable and consistent answers each time the survey is applied) ([Takeuchi et al., 2015](#)).
- Results of the school culture survey at both pre- and post-administration tended to high to very high agreement for most questions, which may be attributed to the ‘ceiling effect’, indicating the survey design may not accurately measure expected change or that the pilot timeframe was not long enough to allow for change ([Salkind, 2010](#)).

Perspectives of parents and families

Parents and families are critical stakeholders in respectful relationships education. As such, the evaluation attempted to gather data from parents to examine their perceptions, attitudes and understanding of respectful relationships. A survey was administered with two schools in one state and focus groups were held with parents of two schools in the other state. However, only a very small amount of parent-specific data was able to be included in the evaluation. These responses therefore cannot be generalised to the broader parent and family community and provide only limited insights. Further investigation of the importance of family engagement in the implementation of respectful relationships education is vital – particularly for any research involving long-term follow-up.

Intersectional approach

Our understanding of the ways in which intersectional theory is applied to prevention programming and evaluation continues to evolve. Future evaluation design should incorporate a strengthened approach to inclusion and capture how structural inequality and discrimination (for example, racism, ageism, homophobia and ableism) intersect with gender inequality.

Case study approach

The case study approach to this evaluation allowed for an in-depth understanding of how the respectful relationships education pilot was undertaken in five schools. Given more data was collected in case study schools than in other schools participating in the pilot, in some instances analysis may be weighted to the experiences of the pilot in those case study schools. Results of the school culture survey, documented observations from the Our Watch education advisers and some interview data provide evidence relating to all 18 participating schools. See [Section 4: Evaluation approach](#) for further discussion of how data sources were triangulated for this evaluation.

Appendix B: Data collection methods

Surveys and audit tools

Data collection tool	Sample population	Timing	Purpose
School staff culture survey, ¹² administered electronically.	School staff (for example, leadership team, teachers, administrative staff) from all 18 schools. State X: Baseline n = 256 Follow-up n = 179 State Y: Baseline n = 323 Follow-up n = 192	Varied between state. Baseline Aug/Sep 2017 or Mar to May 2018 Follow-up Mar 2018 or Dec 2018	To collect information on staff perceptions of school culture about respectful relationships education, gender equality and work/life balance.
Parent survey, administered online.	Parents of Year 1 and 2 students at case study schools in one state (n = 13).	Nov to Dec 2018	To capture parents' awareness and understanding of respectful relationships education in their children's school.
Building Respectful Relationships Student Survey, administered face-to-face.	Year 1 and 2 students in two schools in one state. Baseline n = 202 Follow-up n = 217	Baseline May 2018 Follow-up Dec 2018	To measure changes in students' beliefs and attitudes to gender and depictions of gender-based bullying and harassment.
Professional learning evaluation surveys.	School leadership and implementation teams (n = 19) and teaching staff (n = 20) from schools in one state.	Nov 2017 (Leading RRE) and July 2018 (Implementing RRE)	To measure the impact of professional learning activities with leadership and teaching staff.

12 Several questions in the school staff culture surveys were adapted from the Gender Equity Survey developed by VicHealth for the Creating Healthy Workplaces Initiative. The original authors are Professor Anthony Smith, Ms Jayne Russell and Dr Gillian Fletcher from La Trobe University.

Interviews and focus groups

Data collection tool	Sample population	Timing	Purpose
School focus groups.	<p>School staff (for example, leadership team, teachers, administrative staff) from case study schools in both states.</p> <p>State X: Baseline n = 77 Follow-up n = 45</p> <p>State Y: Baseline n = 21 Follow-up n = 25</p>	<p>Varied between state.</p> <p>Baseline Aug/ Sep 2017 or May 2018</p> <p>Follow-up Mar 2018 or Nov 2018</p>	To gather and document reflections from the school staff about their experience of the pilot, including impact of the pilot, the process of embedding the whole-of-school approach and barriers/enablers to achieving this.
Classroom observations.	<p>Teachers delivering, and students participating in, <i>Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships</i> Topics 7 and 8 at case study schools in both states.</p> <p>State X: n = 7 State Y: n = 2</p>	<p>Varied between state.</p> <p>Mar 2018 or Nov 2018</p>	To explore teaching practice, curriculum delivery and student engagement with respect to gender relations and awareness.
Interviews with departmental staff and Our Watch staff.	<p>Department of Education and Department of Education and Training head office and regional staff; Our Watch staff and managers (n = 19).</p>	<p>Mar and Oct/ Nov 2018</p>	To gather and document perspectives on the implementation of respectful relationships education in primary schools, including broader coordination and departmental support. To collate Our Watch staff and manager reflections on the progress and impact of the pilot, including barriers and enablers.

Data collection tool	Sample population	Timing	Purpose
Case studies to illustrate change.	Qualitative stories from all 18 pilot schools, captured by the Our Watch education advisers.	Throughout pilot	To demonstrate and illustrate outcomes at a school level, such as changes to school culture, shifts in awareness among staff, or examples of changes to policies and procedures.
Student focus groups.	Students in Years 1 and 2 at case study schools in one state (n = 43).	Aug 2018	To gather and document reflections from students in Years 1 and 2 at case study schools on their experience of respectful relationships education and their attitudes towards gender and violence.
Parent focus groups	Parents of primary school students at case study schools in one state (n = 8).	Mar 2018	To gather and document reflections from parents at two case study schools on their knowledge and understanding of respectful relationships education.

Appendix C: Evidence for pilot outcomes

The following section provides more detailed results supporting the discussion and findings in this report. This includes survey results and illustrative extracts from interviews and focus groups. It is not a comprehensive summary of all data and results. Statistically significant quantitative results are noted in relevant results tables.

Students

Gendered attitudes of both boys and girls tended to be less stereotypical at the end of the pilot. All results – except for changes to girls’ and boys’ interest in masculine jobs and activities – were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Survey of just over 200 students involved in the pilot from Years 1 and 2 found girls and boys were:

- less likely to consider traditionally masculine jobs and activities as only for boys
- less likely to consider traditionally feminine jobs and activities as only for girls
- more flexible about which gender should do traditionally masculine and feminine jobs and activities.

Illustrative teacher observations:

‘Students are “starting to talk about [gender] more and challenge each other” about things like “boys wearing girly shoes”, gendered colours and girls being able to do “what boys can do”.’ (teacher, School 1)

‘Say somebody gets upset and cries, they don’t call them “oh, you’re a girl”. You don’t hear people being called “gay” anymore. They’ve developed more words that they can use that they didn’t have before.’ (teacher, School 2)

Illustrative students’ focus group comments:

Example 1:

Student: They [teachers] can be both [genders] because, like, in the olden days the girls could be only a teacher or something else; and the boys could be anything they want ...

Focus group facilitator: In the olden days, you said, did you? So that’s different now?

Student: Yep, because girls can, like, have any jobs now.

Example 2:

‘It means when you offend someone of that gender like saying, oh, girls aren’t cool because they have not much muscles. Which isn’t true at all, which is just being mean.’ (student)

Example 3:

Facilitator 1: What would you say?

Student: ... that it’s okay to – for girls to play basketball, it doesn’t have to be all boys.

Example 4:

Facilitator 2: Do you think it's important though that children understand about these sorts of things?

Student: Yeah, this is. Yeah.

Facilitator 2: Why do you think it's important?

Student: It's important because people will realise that doing this is mean.

Example 5:

'Well, we were talking about it, yes, this scenario could have been different. But it kind of was sexist because she was playing with other people so she – so they could have done it to any one of those other people. But they just did it to her, I guess because maybe she was a girl or something.' (student)

Example 6:

Student: Being sexist.

Facilitator 1: Yeah, being sexist. Can you explain to us what that means?

Student: People saying girls can't do this and boys can't do that.

Example 7:

'Like if somebody is like a girl and they're playing unicorns, it doesn't mean a boy can't play.' (student)

Some students identified respectful relationships education as a program that enhanced their personal wellbeing at school.

Illustrative comment from student focus group:

'And last year, I didn't— I had always come up with excuses to ... not come to school because I didn't like it that much. But now, I am starting to really like it because we have respectful relationships.' (student)

Illustrative statement from Year 1 and 2 students at School 13:

"'Respectful relationships' is about friendship, teamwork, helping, being nice, you get to know more people, stop fighting, stop bullying, fewer rude words, more teamwork, not being mean, how people feel, being nice and not mean, to listen, do things that help people, from being angry to happy.'

School culture

School staff agreement on the schools' commitment to respectful relationships between and among staff and students was high throughout the pilot. For some staff, this agreement increased or decreased minimally at the end of the pilot. This is shown by school staff responses to the following questions, where 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

My school is committed to respectful relationships between: (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Staff and students	4.43	4.57
Staff	4.23	4.29
Students	4.47	4.56

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Notes
Staff and students	4.31	4.17	NA
Staff	4.23	4.06	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.038$
Students	4.35	4.20	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.038$

My school does not tolerate: (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Gender discrimination	4.44	4.57
Sexual harassment	4.56	4.62

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Gender discrimination	4.43	4.35
Sexual harassment	4.53	4.44

Commitment to respectful relationships education

School staff agreement on the importance of providing respectful relationships education in general was high throughout the pilot. Among some staff this agreement increased slightly, decreased slightly or remained level. This is shown by responses to the following question, where 1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important.

How important is it to provide respectful relationships education in schools? (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Notes
Leaders	4.82	4.57	NA
Teachers	4.52	4.73	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.028$
Other staff	4.55	4.55	NA

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Leaders	4.76	4.41
Teachers	4.47	4.32
Other staff	4.28	4.15

School staff agreement on the importance of their organisation's involvement in respectful relationships education was high throughout the pilot. This is shown by responses to the following question, where 1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important.

I think my organisation's involvement in this project is... (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Leaders	4.27	4.33
Teachers	4.12	4.13
Other staff	3.98	4.14

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Notes
Leaders	4.42	3.70	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.029$
Teachers	3.95	3.94	NA
Other staff	3.60	3.96	NA

School staff agreement on the clarity of the link between respectful relationships between men and women in the school and prevention of violence against women remained high. This is shown by responses to the following question, where 1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important.

For me, the link between respectful relationships between men and women in the school and the prevention of violence against women is clear (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Leaders	4.39	4.38
Teachers	4.24	4.37
Other staff	4.03	4.14

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Notes
Leaders	4.58	4.22	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.049$
Teachers	4.09	4.00	
Other staff	4.28	4.15	NA

Capacity to deliver

Confidence among school staff in teaching, understanding and integrating respectful relationships education in everyday work was moderate throughout the pilot. Among some staff this level of confidence increased slightly, decreased slightly or remained level. This is shown by school staff responses to the following questions, where 1 = very low confidence, 4 = high confidence.

My confidence in my capacity to: (mean scores)

State X

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Notes
Teach respectful relationships	2.98	3.09	NA
Understand respectful relationships	3.13	3.28	Statistically significant result, $p = 0.042$
Integrate respectful relationships in everyday work	3.25	3.29	NA

State Y

	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot
Teach respectful relationships	2.79	2.75
Understand respectful relationships	2.95	2.96
Integrate respectful relationships in everyday work	3.08	3.00

Parent support

Engagement of parents in respectful relationships education is an important but underexplored aspect of research and evaluation. The very limited available data suggests parents are supportive of and interested in finding out about respectful relationships education.

Parents (62%, $n = 13$) of Year 1 and 2 students in two schools indicated they see value in respectful relationships education being taught to increase gender equality and reduce gender-based violence.

Appendix D: Rapid review of relevant literature

Background and purpose

In 2015 Our Watch published *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper* (the Evidence Paper) ([Gleeson et al., 2015](#)), which provided an overview of key research and literature on respectful relationships education and school-based primary prevention initiatives in Australia and internationally. A number of core elements of good practice respectful relationships education were distilled from that review. As part of this evaluation of respectful relationships education in primary schools, Our Watch conducted a rapid review of new research since 2015 with respect to those core elements. This rapid review was neither a comprehensive nor an exhaustive review, but focused on key literature (including meta-reviews and single studies from peer-reviewed academic and grey literature) about school-based interventions to prevent violence against women or gender-based violence in Australia or internationally.

Methodology

The aim of the review was to determine whether there was any new and/or changed evidence since the Evidence Paper in 2015 about effective approaches to respectful relationships in schools as an initiative to prevent gender-based violence.

The rapid review searched for peer-reviewed and grey literature relating to respectful relationships education from the period 2015 to 2019. Studies from 2015 were included to capture those that were published after the review for the Evidence Paper was finalised but excluded those that were referred to in the Evidence Paper. The review prioritised reviews and systematic reviews of evidence and studies with rigorous methodologies. It also prioritised evidence from Australia or comparable contexts, although broader international reviews were included. Two searches were undertaken of the databases listed below. Search 1 used the phrase 'respectful relationships'. Search 2 used the terms 'violence' AND 'prevention' AND 'school'. The databases searched were:

- Cochrane Reviews
- Web of Science
- Ovid Medline
- ANROWS Library
- Google Scholar
- The University of Melbourne Library.

There is a significant amount of overlap between respectful relationships education, sexual and reproductive education and more general anti-bullying and wellbeing programs. For this review, studies were excluded if they did not directly address gender-based violence (for example, sexual assault or intimate partner violence). The search terms used in Search 2 were deliberately broad in order to capture the diversity of interventions that fall under the banner of respectful relationships education.

In addition to these searches, relevant studies that met the inclusion criteria were also drawn from the references of the studies examined.

Findings

Overall, the evidence published in this intervening period confirms and extends the knowledge of the effectiveness of school-based respectful relationships education as outlined in the 2015 *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper*.

Key points:

- There continues to be stronger evidence relating to positive changes in attitudes and knowledge than there is for impacts on behaviour, although evidence relating to behaviour change is emerging ([Lundgren & Amin, 2015](#); [Niolon et al., 2019](#)).
- Much of the evidence focuses on interventions in high schools with adolescents. However, there is some evidence relating to primary school settings ([Crooks et al., 2019](#); [Lundgren & Amin, 2015](#)).
- There is very limited evidence about the effectiveness of programs run in pre-school settings ([King et al., 2018](#)).
- There is evidence to indicate that addressing gender through an explicit discussion of rights and gendered power relations increases the effectiveness of interventions ([UN Women, 2016](#); [UNESCO, 2015](#)).
- Evidence demonstrates that programs that are run for longer periods – for example, over a number of years – are more effective than shorter or one-off interventions ([Crooks et al., 2019](#); [Lundgren & Amin, 2015](#); [Niolon et al., 2019](#)).
- Program materials and delivery that are age- and developmentally appropriate are more effective than those that are more general or not well tailored to their audience ([Bowring et al., 2018](#); [UN Women, 2016](#)).
- There remains a gap in evidence on how best to implement respectful relationships education programs with groups within the community who may be at higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence, such as women and girls with disability, those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities ([Crooks et al., 2019](#); [Duley et al., 2017](#)).

Appendix E: Text-equivalent descriptions of figures

Figure 1: Summary of pilot outcomes

Student attitudes	<p>Gendered attitudes of boys and girls tended to be less stereotypical at the end of the pilot. Statistically significant changes in attitudes related to which gender should perform traditionally masculine and feminine jobs and activities, and interest shown in feminine jobs and activities by both boys and girls.</p> <p>Some students who participated in interviews for this evaluation identified respectful relationships education as a program that enhanced their personal wellbeing at school.</p>
School culture	<p>Commitment to respectful relationships between and among staff was high throughout the pilot. There were slight fluctuations in results for some staff, according to site.</p>
Commitment to respectful relationships education and school readiness	<p>Agreement on the importance of providing respectful relationships education was high throughout the pilot. However, there were slight fluctuations in results for some staff, according to site.</p>
Teachers' capacity to deliver	<p>Teachers' feedback indicated that professional development was key in supporting their capacity to deliver a gendered approach to respectful relationships education. The pilot also indicated that some teachers remained resistant to the need for an approach to respectful relationships education that addresses the gendered drivers of violence.</p>
Parents	<p>Very limited data was able to be collected as part of the pilot about parent support for respectful relationships education. However, the small number of parents that provided feedback indicated they were supportive of and interested in finding out about respectful relationships education.</p> <p>Engagement of parents in respectful relationships education is an important but underexplored aspect of research and evaluation.</p>

[Return to text following Figure 1](#)

Figure 2

Infographic.

The five partners were:

- Department of Education (Queensland) – Government partner and funder
- Department of Education and Training (Victoria) – Government partner and funder
- Our Watch – Coordination and project lead
- The Myer Foundation – Funder
- Luke Batty Foundation – Partner

Our Watch was the project lead and also performed the roles of:

- Evaluation advisors
- Project implementation leaders.

Deakin University had input as a research partner.

As project implementation leaders, Our Watch led two projects implemented by:

- Department of Education Queensland – departmental/regional staff (10 schools)
- Department of Education and Training Victoria – regional staff (8 schools).

[Return to text following Figure 2](#)

Figure 3

Infographic of the dates, phases and actions of the pilot, summarised in the following table.

Dates	Phase	Actions
June–Sept 2017	Development and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pilot school recruitment• professional learning strategy development• teaching and learning materials adaptation
Aug 2017– May 2018	Professional learning, baseline data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• school staff culture survey baseline• whole-of-school assessments and action plans• student survey baseline• staff focus groups
June 2017– Dec 2018	Whole-of-school activities	Implementation of a whole-of-school approach including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reviewing and updating policies• curriculum mapping• professional learning• delivery of age-appropriate curriculum that addresses the gendered drivers of violence• observations of teaching and learning materials in classrooms of case study schools

Dates	Phase	Actions
Mar–Dec 2018	Follow-up data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student survey follow-up/focus group • parent survey/focus group • school staff culture survey follow-up • staff focus groups • interviews with external stakeholders

[Return to text following Figure 3](#)

Figure 4

Infographic of three levels of data sources. The relationship between the sources is depicted as a pyramid that broadens from the narrow school-level focus at the top to the broader system-level focus at the base.

The data sources were:

Top third of the pyramid: Data from 5 case study schools

- qualitative outcome data
- student outcomes
- parent data
- barriers and enablers at a school level
- implications for implementation in schools

Middle of pyramid: Data from 18 pilot schools

- culture surveys
 - high-level outcome indicators re school culture
 - short-/medium-term outcomes re confidence to deliver and integrate respectful relationships education
 - importance of respectful relationships education in schools and in individual schools and link between prevention of gender-based violence and gender equality
- change stories
 - qualitative case studies indicating shifts within the school

Bottom of pyramid: Data from Our Watch education advisors and departmental staff

- barriers and enablers at a system level
- implications for systematisation
- building on secondary sources, for instance secondary schools evaluation and evidence paper

[Return to text following Figure 4](#)

Figure 5

Infographic of the six connected components for building respectful relationships via a whole-of-school approach:

- School culture and environment
- Leadership and commitment
- Professional learning
- Teaching and learning
- Families and communities
- Support for staff and students

These components reinforce each other and are all strengthened by ongoing evaluation, which is represented in this infographic as a circle that cuts through all six components.

[Return to text following Figure 5](#)

Figure 6

Infographic of the gendered drivers of violence against women.

The structures, norms and practices of gender inequality – in the context of other social inequalities – underpin and produce specific drivers of violence against women and support the normalisation, justification and tolerance of violence against women. These drivers are:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships
- Rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

[Return to text following Figure 6](#)

Figure 7

Infographic of the learning aims of Topics 7 and 8 at Level 1 to 2.

Level 1 to 2, Topic 7 – Gender and identity

Learning aims:

- reflect on identity: likes, dislikes and strengths
- develop an awareness of positive and negative gender norms
- challenge negative gender norms
- develop an appreciation of difference

Level 1 to 2, Topic 8 – Positive gender relations

Learning aims:

- develop an understanding of gender-based violence as involving unfair/hurtful behaviours based on ideas of what it means to be a boy or a girl
- identify and practice respectful and gender-friendly behaviours
- identify examples and effects of verbal, physical and psychological gender-based violence
- identify and practice assertive and help-seeking strategies to help keep themselves [students] safe in situations involving gender-based violence

[Return to text following Figure 7](#)

Figure 8

Infographic showing three points along a spectrum of resistance:

- Left end of spectrum: Entrenched opposition (forms of resistance include denial, inaction, backlash)
- Middle of spectrum: Moveable middle (open to/curious about gender equality)
- Right end of spectrum: Fully committed to gender equality

[Return to text following Figure 8](#)

Figure 9

Infographic showing the relationship between primary prevention and other work to address violence against women. The relationship between these is depicted as a pyramid that narrows from broader whole-of-population initiatives to response services for individuals.

Primary prevention

Whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary ('first' or underlying) drivers of violence

Secondary prevention or early intervention

Aims to 'change the trajectory' for individuals at higher-than-average risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence

Tertiary prevention or response

Supports survivors and holds perpetrators to account (and aims to prevent the recurrence of violence)

[Return to text following Figure 9](#)

Figure 10

Infographic presenting and describing the model in terms of the four levels where work must be done to create a future free from gender-based violence:

- Individual level
- Community and organisation level
- System and institutional level
- National level.

At the individual level, leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff work in collaboration to implement a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships.

At the community and organisation level, schools work in collaboration with school communities (including families) and relevant local organisations such as specialist violence response agencies.

At the system and institutional level and the national level, mechanisms support and coordinate collaboration between education stakeholders and gender-based violence response and prevention experts. Government-wide prevention work and communication of respectful relationships via media supports consistent messaging.

[Return to text following Figure 10](#)

Figure 11

Infographic describing practices, structures and norms and presenting them as reinforcing each other.

Practices

Practices in a school community that enact and reinforce norms and attitudes

Structures

Formal and informal structures that reinforce and underpin norms and practices

Norms

Attitudes, values and beliefs of school leadership, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, parents, students

[Return to text following Figure 11](#)

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