What is the role of school culture and school climate in countering bullying?

- Patterns of social interaction, including bullying, do not occur in a vacuum — they are influenced by the setting in which they occur.
- Through their social interactions, children and young people participate and ‘re-create’ the social world around them. The school culture and climate have a significant impact on students’ interactions.
- Classroom and school climate appear to be the main variable between schools seen as either effective or ineffective in dealing with bullying.
- School climate is generated through the behaviour and relationships of everyone within the school community.
- The effectiveness of bullying prevention approaches may depend on how well they target the school climate and address the school ‘ecology’.
- Because bullying occurs within a multi-layered context — the layers being individual, peer and whole-school — successful school-based interventions need to take a multi-level approach, and involve students, staff and parents and carers.
- The explicit teaching of values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate.
- A strong correlation has been found between positive teacher–student relationships and both lower levels of bullying and increased feelings of safety for students.
- Specific training about bullying is a significant factor in teachers’ ability to effectively respond to bullying. Calls for urgent attention to in-service teacher education are very common in contemporary studies about countering bullying in schools.
- It is critical to take teachers’ personal perspectives and skills into account in implementing anti-bullying approaches.
- Teachers’ perception that they would be supported by their principal is strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying.
- Teachers (as well as other staff and parents and carers) have a key role in modelling appropriate behaviour to students.

Implications for schools

- The importance of a positive school climate suggests embedding anti-bullying responses and prevention within a whole-school approach.
- Teachers’ everyday role in countering student bullying should be recognised in school policy and practice.
- Effective school-based anti-bullying initiatives promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and also between all members of the school community.
- The explicit teaching of positive school values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate, which in turn is related to lower levels of bullying.
- Given that teachers’ ability to respond appropriately to bullying depends on beliefs, knowledge, and skills, teacher professional development about countering bullying is essential.
- Given that teachers’ responses are related to their perceived support from the principal, genuine support from the school’s administration for staff is central to a whole-school approach.
- Taking the personal perspectives and beliefs of teachers into account when preparing bullying prevention and intervention strategies will lead to more effective outcomes.
- A link between adult behaviour and the frequency of bullying is highlighted in research, emphasising the importance of considering positive whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.
- Adults within the school setting need to be aware of providing positive social role models, and to avoid engaging in bullying.
Fostering positive relationships across the whole school and the community should be incorporated into schools’ anti-bullying approaches.

The response by schools to an incident of bullying can be seen as an opportunity to explore and enhance a positive and supportive school climate.

Schools need to be alert to all forms of bullying occurring at all levels of the school system.

Addressing student bullying through whole-school, multi-level approaches would need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

Want to know more?
This research snapshot is based on *A review of literature (2010–2014) on student bullying by Australia’s Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group.* (2015).

Other research snapshots on student bullying are available at Bullying. No Way!

Further information on bullying and on student safety and wellbeing can be found at: [www.bullyingnoway.gov.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.gov.au) and [www.safeschoolshub.edu.au](http://www.safeschoolshub.edu.au)