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Chapter 5
Protective Physical Environment

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Evidence for building a protective physical environment

Protective physical environment

A school's well-maintained physical environment helps to promote learning and positive social interactions among students and staff. Attractive building design and location, adequate provision of space, facilities and activities for recreation and learning (including through technology) can positively influence student behaviours.

A school's physical environment has long been regarded as simply the provision of play areas, buildings for classrooms and well-maintained gardens. In 1995 the Health Promoting Schools Framework[243] identified the physical school environment as a central feature of a school which can shape students' health behaviours and lead to improved opportunities for learning. The fields of road safety, sun safety and physical activity have extensively engaged in strategies to improve or monitor the school's physical environment to keep young people safe and improve their health behaviours (for example, installing shade, providing dual use paths conducive to safe riding, and offering activities to encourage young people to be active at break times). Further, there is substantial theoretical evidence to suggest the environment in which we live greatly influences our behaviour.
Only recently however, have researchers begun investigating how the physical environment may influence students’ academic and social outcomes. The school’s environment can be conceptualised in three main areas: the structural, functional and built environment. Structural features of a school include the school’s size, socio-economic status and sector, functional features including the house and home room systems, pastoral care programs and strategies and built environment characteristics such as the presence of graffiti and the condition of the buildings, and equipment available for students. This comprehensive view of a school environment encapsulates more than just buildings and the schoolyard and identifies features of a school that can be modified without necessarily engaging in expensive building programs.

A Western Australian retrospective study found the characteristics of secondary schools, such as a larger school size (represented by K-12 students on the campus), a higher socio-economic status of students at the school, an elevated priority for pastoral care, higher than average school-level reading, writing and numeracy scores, no graffiti, a well-established house system and vertical home room systems, all predicted students’ enhanced feelings of connectedness to their school and improved mental health outcomes, compared with students at schools without these features. This research demonstrates how physical and intangible school structural characteristics can improve student outcomes, including students’ feelings of connectedness and improved mental health.

This chapter discusses how the school’s physical environment can actively promote connectedness and improve mental health to prevent and respond effectively to bullying in schools. The physical and structural characteristics of schools that need to be assessed and modified, where appropriate, to reduce bullying in schools include the physical attributes of the school and the supportive school facilities and activities.

Physical attributes of the school

The school’s physical environment is important to consider when managing bullying. The UK National School Grounds Charity, Learning through Landscapes, provides funding for schools to modify their school grounds to improve learning and child development. After making improvements to the school environment 64 per cent of the 351 participating schools reported a reduction in bullying among other behavioural and learning outcomes. Similarly, a reduction in bullying was observed in Australian schools that implemented greener, more interesting and stimulating school grounds.

"...we argue that the obvious way to reduce aggressive behaviour and conflict on school grounds is to provide sufficient play activities with differing levels of complexity and variety that engage students and provide opportunities for cross-age interaction"

The physical environment is an important aspect of school context that may foster students’ feelings of connectedness to school. In particular, the absence of graffiti has the greatest impact on students’ connectedness during their first year of secondary school.
Supportive school facilities and activities

A safe and supportive school physical environment includes the provision of facilities and equipment as well as structured activities for students to enjoy during break times. The relationship between structured activities in school and bullying is not clear; however, there may be an indirect link between participation and opportunities for increased connectedness to school and development of self-esteem and social skills. Physical education and sport has been suggested as a medium through which some disengaged students can be reached, and their personal, social and moral development enhanced. Sports activities involve teamwork, the use of sound communication skills and teach physical and mental resilience. However, sports may foster competition rather than collaboration, and contact sports may bring about aggression. Therefore, structured physical activities should be well organised, appropriately supervised by school staff, and inclusive of all students, to ensure a social climate that does not alienate and marginalise students.

Given much bullying occurs during break times, the availability of structured activities (including recreational activities other than physical activities and sports) for students is likely to be beneficial in reducing bullying. Students should also, for example, have well supervised opportunities to access technology, both for educational and social/recreational purposes. Providing meaningful structured activities during free time periods in school may help to reduce indirect aggression among girls in particular, as they have less time for gossip. Structured activities also provide students with the opportunity to belong, discouraging the need to exclude others in an effort to confirm their own acceptance. The provision of engaging and well organised activities demonstrates a school’s commitment to providing a safe and supportive school environment in which students’ active participation and connectedness to the school is fostered.

Student supervision is another aspect of a school’s context that may influence students’ bullying behaviour. Students tend to feel unsafe from bullying in locations where adult supervision is low. Common locations and times for bullying include the school grounds, during break times, hallways and the school cafeteria. Key program elements associated with a decrease in students’ bullying others was improving playground supervision (including training lunchtime supervisors) and identifying bullying problem areas.

Actions for building a protective physical environment

Physical attributes of the school

An attractive and well maintained school environment suggests to students their school values comfortable, friendly and well-maintained surroundings. This can also impact students’ feelings of safety and connection to members of their school community. Well designed, planned and constructed school environments are another learning environment that can improve social relationships among students and staff, and promote positive attitudes. These environments also help reduce absenteeism and boost students’ and staff self-esteem. All members of the school community can participate in efforts to modify their physical environment and also contribute to school connectedness by creating warm environments where staff (teaching and non-teaching) and students feel their opinions and ideas are valued.

Schools can increase students’ feelings of ownership, pride and responsibility in maintaining their surroundings when they:

- provide adequate space for activities during break times
- organise seating structures to facilitate positive social interactions
- conduct regular assessments of the school’s physical environment
- use these assessments to inform modifications
- include students in the decision-making process.
Strategies for good practice: Physical attributes of the school

1. An assessment of the school’s physical environment is conducted annually.
2. An attractive, friendly school environment is maintained.
3. The main entrance is well-defined and welcoming to all members of the school community.

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An assessment of the school’s physical environment is conducted annually

During a school day, students spend approximately 80 minutes involved in free play during recess and lunch breaks. During this time students need a variety of play areas that are well supervised and areas they can go to if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. The identification by students of areas where they feel less safe, and clear guidelines or policies regarding the use of these areas, will help schools to reduce the potential for bullying behaviour.

An assessment of the school’s physical environment can involve mapping and reviewing aspects of the environment which may enable or prevent bullying. For example, mapping these areas will allow the school to see overlapping supervision areas or areas that lack adequate supervision or safety. It is also important to consider access to facilities and equipment for all age groups.
The following are suggestions for reviewing the school's physical environment as well as procedures for reporting and recording school bullying incidents, followed by questions that will help to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods.

**Step 1: Mapping your school’s physical environment**

Use a map of the school to identify:
- outdoor/recreation areas (by year level if applicable)
- outdoor equipment
- out-of-bounds areas
- safest areas
- supervision areas, including the number of staff assigned to each area, and time-out areas.

An example of a student friendly school map can be found in *Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1* or use existing maps of the school.

**Step 2: Mapping locations of bullying incidents**

Using the map of the school's physical environment delineating the safest areas, supervision areas, boundaries and so on, highlight the hotspots where bullying incidents are typically occurring using the school's records of bullying incidents. Consider supplying rough maps of the school (inside and out) or take photographs around the school and ask students to highlight the places they believe bullying (including cyberbullying) takes place or where they feel unsafe. In a secondary setting, students can also be challenged by seeking submissions from students detailing their safer schoolyard designs, rationale and recommendations. Compare these hot spots with the supervision boundaries, access to activities or equipment and out-of-bounds areas.

**Step 3: Review of the physical environment map**

Discuss the results of schoolyard mapping with all staff. Using the *Physical Environment Toolkit 5.2* planning sheet consider the potential problem areas and plan strategies for action. Consider the following questions while completing this review:

- **Are adequate areas provided for all students to play or spend time together?**
  - Are there grassed, shaded, covered and paved areas, sports and other equipment, and open spaces for students of all ages?

- **Are areas identified where students should not be spending time?**
  - Are there areas that are unsafe, where supervision is limited, or where students are blocked from the view of duty teachers?

- **Are there some areas that are currently considered out-of-bounds which could become safer areas for students to spend time?**
  - For example, the library provides a non-threatening environment that is often seen by students as an area that has more teacher supervision and can, therefore, be safer from bullying than the schoolyard.

- **Are areas available during break times with higher levels of teacher supervision for students who may feel unsafe?**
  - Areas supervised by empathic staff members should be provided within all school environments to enable students to seek refuge if they are bullied during break times.
✓ Are ‘time-out’ areas provided for students who display antisocial or bullying behaviours?
   Asking students who are engaging in bullying or other antisocial behaviour to take some time out from
   the situation, provides an opportunity for them to ‘cool down’ and reflect on their actions.

✓ Are all outside areas supervised by teachers?
   Recording the location and the types of activities students are engaging in allows the school to provide
   adequate levels of supervision.

✓ Do all staff perceive it is their role to intervene in bullying incidents in the schoolyard?
   Some staff can be reluctant to intervene in a bullying incident. Ensure staff are able to identify a bullying
   incident and respond in accordance with school procedures set out in school behaviour policies.

**Top tips for school improvement**

- Improve the coverage of teacher supervision of outdoor areas and bullying hot spots.
- Create safer areas for students to spend time during class breaks to avoid being bullied.
- Establish a time-out area for students who have behaved inappropriately to spend time during class
  breaks.
- Provide staff with skills and confidence to identify and respond effectively in bullying incidents.
- Create out-of-bounds areas where teacher supervision is limited and/or bullying is prevalent.

2 An attractive, friendly school environment is maintained

Well-maintained attractive school environments can impact positively on student attitude, behaviour,
motivation and connectedness.

Some ways to make schools more attractive include:

- removing graffiti as quickly as possible
- providing forms for reporting school maintenance/improvements that are needed around the school
  and acting on them
- regularly check cleanliness and temperatures of all learning areas
- creating garden beds using a variety of different plants
- displaying student artwork and photographs around the school
- acknowledging at assemblies and in news or e-letters the commitment of the school community to
  maintaining school buildings and grounds.
The main entrance is well-defined and welcoming to all members of the school community

A school whose main entrance is easy to locate and is warm and welcoming sends a strong and positive message to students and their families. It also promotes the school as a place committed to creating positive learning experiences. Many large companies and corporations invest significant amounts of money into how their main entrance looks to elicit a positive ‘first impression’ from their customers and clients. While schools do not need to invest significant funding, a coat of paint, cultural symbols such as Aboriginal art and student work can leave a lasting impression on parents, students and visitors to the school.

Supportive school facilities and activities

Adequate facilities, such as seating within the school, help to ensure students enjoy their break times in constructive and engaging ways and participate in positive social interactions. Supportive school activities, such as semi-structured physical and non-physical games, provide students with opportunities to develop an understanding of social rules. School leaders who expect appropriate behaviour to be modelled at all times by all staff will notice an improvement in behaviours and attitudes of students. Schools that provide opportunities for responsible technology use demonstrate to students an awareness of the important role of technology in their lives and the potential benefits this can provide to their social and educational development.

Strategies for good practice: Supportive school facilities and activities

1. Developmentally appropriate, competitive and non-competitive games and activities are provided during break times to assist students’ skill development and understanding of social rules.
2. Students are encouraged to help younger students join in activities during break times.
3. Students are taught how to positively resolve conflicts and disagreements in games without requiring adult intervention.
4. Supervised opportunities are provided for students to positively use technology for academic and social purposes.
5. Outdoor areas, out-of-bounds areas and ‘safer’ areas are clearly identified to students, and students are encouraged to spend time in areas where adequate supervision is provided.
6. Health and other student support services are located in areas which encourage student access.
7. Competent supervision is provided by school staff.
8. Targeted professional learning is provided for duty teachers to identify and respond appropriately and effectively to bullying situations.
Developmentally appropriate, competitive and non-competitive games and activities are provided during break times to assist students' skill development and understanding of social rules.

Break times can provide students with opportunities to socialise and engage in activities with their peers in a safe, supported environment. When school members consistently model, encourage and recognise appropriate social behaviours, they increase the likelihood of promoting positive behaviours and preventing bullying behaviours.

Schools can allow students to develop prosocial skills, extend key understandings about social rules and practise behaving appropriately in both structured and semi-structured environments when they provide:

• a range of semi-structured indoor and outdoor activities
• supervised activities for rainy days
• recreational and hobby clubs
• blogs managed by school staff.

Ways schools can create more prosocial schoolyards include:

• providing equipment which allows for different levels of challenging play
• using attractive, age appropriate outdoor equipment
• facilitating greater use by students of available equipment.

Step 1: Activity Review

Using Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3, list all the equipment (such as playground and sporting equipment) and activities (for example, lunch time concerts, teacher-led activities and library access) that are available to students. Compile this list over several days involving as many staff as possible to ensure all activities and equipment available to students is captured.

For all equipment and activities, complete the 'Who accesses?', 'How could access be improved?' and 'Comments' columns. Consider the following:

• What equipment and activities cater for developmental needs of students of all ages?
• How can this access be improved?
• Is there equity in the access to equipment and activities for all ages? If not, how can this be improved?
• Do students know in which areas they can spend their break times?
• Are students using these areas?
• Which groups of students would like to spend time in areas they are currently not allowed?
• Can provision be made to accommodate these groups?

Step 2: Planning

Distribute the completed Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3 to staff, students and parents to seek their input into the activities and equipment which are made available to students during break times to validate the initial list.

Using this information, work through Physical Environment Toolkit 5.4 to prioritise areas for improvement, for example, provision of new line markings on court areas and improved access to existing equipment and activities. This toolkit will assist staff to identify the areas of concern, suggest strategies to overcome these problem areas, and assign staff and a timeline for completing the changes.
Students are encouraged to help younger students join in activities during break times

Some students need support to join in activities in the schoolyard during break times. Engaging young people as leaders to facilitate activities during break times has many advantages.

Step 1: Engaging students as leaders

Students are powerful leaders in a school context and are largely underused by schools. To engage, train and support student leaders consider:

1. Choosing students who make good leaders and are already working toward leadership roles within the school or in the broader community.
2. Identifying teacher mentor/s to manage the leadership programs and support and facilitate the student leader activities. The teacher mentor needs to have a good relationship with the students and be willing to support new and innovative ideas. It is important for the leaders to take ownership in initiating and directing ideas and activities.
3. Providing student leaders with time and space to meet to discuss their plans for the break time student-led activities.
4. Allocating resources where necessary to implement their lunch time activities.
5. Ongoing support from the teacher mentor to the student leaders to develop and implement their activities.

Step 2: Facilitating interaction between leaders and younger students

To make the best use of volunteer leaders in both primary and secondary settings encourage them to consult with staff and students to determine in what ways younger students need support. In a primary setting, leaders may be needed to keep a game going or to remind groups of the importance of following rules and the negotiation of any new rules. In the secondary setting this may involve students mentoring new students, particularly at times of transition.

By developing programs in the primary setting which train volunteer leaders to assist younger students with group games (for example, managing equipment and refereeing, teaching new games, joining in games) schools:

• provide older students with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills
• increase students’ sense of social responsibility
• allow students to learn new skills
• form new friendship groups with strong positive role models.

In the secondary setting these programs will:

• develop decision-making skills among volunteer leaders
• provide positive role models for younger students
• develop opportunities for volunteers to be more socially responsible
• establish positive connections across age groups.
Step 3: Review

Regularly review with the student leaders and the students they are working with to determine the use of, and student satisfaction with, the leadership program. The review could consider asking a sample of the younger students the following questions:

- Did you engage in lunch time activities with student leaders?
- What did you like about these activities?
- What new skills did you learn?
- What could be improved or done differently?
- Would you like to see this program modified? If so, in what ways?
- What activities could be implemented next term?

Students are taught how to positively resolve conflicts and disagreements in games without requiring adult intervention

When conflict resolution skills are explicitly taught within classroom curriculum some students experience increased levels of confidence and feel better supported to transfer these skills to the schoolyard. Conflict resolution is more successful when the people involved in the conflict are the ones involved in finding a solution. Schools that develop a simple, well-defined process that is understood and adhered to by all students are usually more successful when resolving conflicts. A powerful component of this process involves encouraging students to consider points of view other than their own and to endeavour to resolve conflict by ensuring everyone gets a ‘fair go’.

The following is an example of a conflict resolution process as used in the Friendly Schools and Supportive Schools curriculum resources (see Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1).

✓ Respect each other
✓ Think about the problem
✓ Listen to the other person
✓ Say what you feel
✓ Brainstorm solutions
✓ Stick to what you have decided
✓ Talk again if the solution is not working
**4** Supervised opportunities are provided for students to positively use technology for academic and social purposes

Cyberbullying is most likely to occur at home or during break times at school[12] when young people are spending more time using technology for social purposes than academic purposes. While families need to be reminded of their responsibilities to support their children in cyberspace, young people and schools benefit from structured learning regarding the safer and effective use of technology both for academic and social purposes. As technology is constantly changing the most effective learning is delivered in accordance with where they are spending time online. Teaching young people how to reduce their exposure to cyberbullying is important. School staff need to identify opportunities for young people to learn positive ways to use technology, especially to support someone who may have been cyberbullied. Many activities are provided in the *Friendly Schools* (primary) and *Supportive Schools* (secondary) classroom resources to increase student understandings and skills related to reducing harm from cyberbullying.

Opportunities to integrate teaching about positive technology use is included in the *Friendly Schools* and *Supportive Schools* curriculum resources, as described in *Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1*.

**5** Outdoor areas, out-of-bounds areas and 'safer' areas are clearly identified to students, and students are encouraged to spend time in areas where adequate supervision is provided

Students and their families need to be informed of the reasons behind some of the decisions regarding where students can and cannot spend break times. When there are consistent messages and clear understandings around the use of the schoolyard, students are more likely to understand and respect the boundaries.

Using *Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1*, as described earlier in this chapter, provides a clear representation of which areas are available to students.

**6** Health and other student support services are located in areas which encourage student access

Some students feel uncomfortable accessing health and support services due to the stigma that can sometimes be associated with service use. There is the potential for this to be more pronounced in secondary settings given young people’s increased vulnerability to being teased or ridiculed for seeking help. Several factors can be considered to maximise students’ willingness to access health and support services:

- Locate these services with other facilities commonly used by students (such as located with Heads of House or near other teachers with a leadership role).
- Ensure service staff are trained to be approachable and skilled to help.
- Actively promote the ‘proactive’ nature of the school’s support services so that students are encouraged to use them at all times, not just when they are feeling vulnerable.
- Reassure students about the confidentiality of their visit.
- Design the service environment to be comfortable and welcoming to young people.
Competent supervision is provided by school staff

Encouraging students to spend time in areas where the level of adult supervision is high will reduce the invisibility of bullying behaviour. School-wide data collection on the prevalence of bullying, including where and when bullying occurs, can be used to inform the provision of well organised supervision from trained staff to ensure:

- signs and symptoms of bullying are identified
- situations are responded to in a timely manner
- students feel safe
- all areas of the school grounds that students may access are visible to duty staff
- hotspots are identified
- out-of-bounds areas are defined
- improved use of the schoolyard by all students.

*Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2* describes surveys that could be used to identify where and when bullying occurs.

**Questions to review staff supervision during break times**

✓ **Is there a formal reporting process or system for bullying incidents in the schoolyard?**

   Establish if one exists and define the benefits for your school of having a formal reporting system. See *Chapter 3, Proactive Policies and Practices* for further information relating to the development of a reporting system.

✓ **To what extent are all staff, students and parents aware of this reporting procedure?**

   Whole-school community awareness of the process of reporting incidents ensures effective and supported implementation across the school.

✓ **Is there a central register of all reported incidents in the schoolyard?**

   A central record system enables the effective recording, monitoring and follow-up of bullying incidents.

✓ **Who maintains the record system and what do they do with the information?**

   Assign the management of the central record system to a few key staff. The same key staff would ideally be trained in using the Method of Shared Concern and other restorative techniques to effectively respond to bullying incidents (see *Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkits 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3*).

✓ **Is there a system to monitor reported incidents for emerging bullying behaviour trends and repeat offenders?**

   Maintaining a central record system makes it easier for key staff to identify students who are repeatedly bullying others and those being bullied frequently as well as the locations where bullying is occurring. Monitoring reported incidents will also allow the school to identify bullying 'hot spots' and modify schoolyard supervision accordingly.
Competent supervision across the school grounds is one of the most effective strategies to reduce bullying behaviour. The following questions may assist the school to assess and refine its supervision strategies to help reduce and effectively manage bullying that occurs outside of the classroom.

✓ Is there a coordinated and regularly updated supervision roster?
   It is important that the staff duty/supervision roster is considered to be as important as staffing classrooms with appropriately trained staff. Supervision during break times must be consistent, supported by staff who are trained and know how to respond according to the school’s behaviour policies.

✓ Are all staff trained to identify and respond effectively to bullying behaviour?
   Training staff in the school’s preferred methods for reducing bullying incidents (from the behaviour policies) is important before they conduct supervision duties at break times.

✓ Are all staff trained in the school’s system of recording incidents of bullying?
   The whole-school community needs to be aware of the process of reporting incidents to ensure effective and supported implementation across the school.

✓ Does the school use bright duty teacher vests to help students quickly and easily identify support staff?
   Schools have found that having duty teachers clearly visible to other staff and students makes students feel safer. Students report it is also easier to identify a teacher when they need one.

8 Targeted professional learning is provided for duty supervisors to identify and respond effectively to bullying situations

Duty supervisors are often the first on the scene at a bullying incident and, therefore, need to know how to respond in a way consistent with the school’s behavioural policies. As supervisors can include non-teaching staff and relief teachers, induction processes and professional learning opportunities need to be offered to all staff. This training should address the school’s behavioural policies and response including:

- identification of bullying incidents
- ways to communicate with students to gain a better understanding of what has happened and who is involved
- immediate responses to ensure the safety of all students
- strategies to acknowledge positive bystander responses
- methods of reporting that are consistent with the school policy
- referral pathways and effective referral strategies
- strategies for student support and follow-up.
Summary

This chapter demonstrates the important role of the physical environment in facilitating or preventing engagement in bullying behaviours. To ensure a protective physical environment is provided, schools can consider the physical attributes as well as the facilities and activities available to students. Two school stories are provided in this chapter outlining how CHPRC research schools have enhanced their physical environment to reduce and prevent bullying and increased students' perceptions of safety.

Schools wishing to assess and modify their physical environment to determine perceptions of safety and connectedness will find the four toolkits in this chapter helpful.

- **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1** includes a mapping template for schools to assess their physical environment for safer zones, bullying hot spots and areas of low/high supervision.
- **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.2** is designed to be used in conjunction with **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1**, to plan potential problem areas and ways to increase perceptions of safety in these zones.
- **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3** provides a template for schools to list the activities and equipment available to students at break times.
- **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.4** complements **Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3** as a planning tool for schools to prioritise and assign resources to physical environment modifications for enhanced safety and efficient use of space.
School Stories

**Brief background to school initiative**

While all staff at this school recognised that bullying was happening, they felt the students were less aware as they didn’t seem to understand what bullying was. A survey conducted by the school psychologist also supported these findings.

**School profile**

- Government school
- 320 students
- Years: PP-7

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**Action**

The principal and deputy principal participated in schoolyard duty to keep in touch with what was happening in the school. The teachers on duty were very vigilant and an upper school teacher was always rostered with a lower school teacher so all of the students were known to the teachers. There was a communication book for staff to write which students were potentially at risk and to monitor them more closely.

The play areas that were out of sight of staff were reduced or made off limits to the students. The school introduced non-aggressive lunchtime activities at certain times of the year. In winter students played football; when it became too rough the staff introduced marble season. This was the only time of the year that students were allowed to bring marbles into the school. The library was also opened at various times through the year and sometimes the table tennis equipment was set up. On occasion, a particular class was allowed to take their sports bag out at lunchtime and play with the equipment (cricket bats, basketballs, soccer balls and tee ball equipment).

Lunchtime had been reduced from 45 to 40 minutes as the school found that it was during the last five minutes that most behavioural problems would occur. This strategy worked particularly well. Students had 10 minutes to eat, 25 minutes to play and 5 minutes to get a drink and go to the toilet, which was still plenty of time.

**What we learnt**

**Difficulties encountered**

Inexperienced staff, who were busy planning and preparing their classroom, often forgot to listen to what students were telling them. It was found on the survey, in the second year of implementation that bullying levels had increased which concerned many parents.
**Overcoming difficulties**

By training and mentoring younger and newer staff, they were able to quickly adjust to their new environment and concentrate on the needs of their students. An explanation of the survey results quickly assured parents, staff and students that the increase in bullying reports was not due to a fault in the policy but was due to students having a better understanding of what bullying was and feeling more confident about reporting their experiences.

**Recommendations for other schools**

Use a whole-school approach because if one teacher isn’t listening to student concerns the whole program suffers.

**More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkits:**

- Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.7
- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2
- Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1
- Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.2
- Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3
- Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.4
Background to school initiative

Parental expectations spurred the introduction of a new anti-bullying program.

School profile

- Rural government school
- 140 students
- Years: K-7
- This school is part of a community that is experiencing significant change. A large proportion of the community is no longer involved in farming.

Action

Students who engaged in bullying were put on a reward/contract system. Parents, the principal and the student signed a contract which identifies the rewards for appropriate behaviour and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. Inappropriate behaviours were outlined. The school believed that this system would help to formalise behaviour management strategies because all participants (teachers, parents and students) were involved in the formulation of the contract.

To ensure the behaviour management plan was followed by the school community, the school ensured that staff, students and parents had a chance to provide input into the plan. Rewards and consequences were clearly identified to the students and it was stressed that the plan had a positive focus, with positive steps taken before punishment. The plan was regularly reviewed.

The school formed a bullying prevention committee consisting of three parents, two Year 7s and two staff members. The school wanted to encourage peer groups to be vigilant about bullying at the school, hence the involvement of the two Year 7s on the committee. The committee conducted a bullying survey and from the results they identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school's policy. Both junior and upper primary students were asked a range of questions related to bullying and the school's approach. These included:

- Where does bullying occur?
- How often does it occur?
- Do you feel safe?
- Do the teachers care about you?

The data were collected, collated and presented to the bullying committee for review. Parents were sent brochures informing them of the survey's results. These data indicated that the students generally felt safe, but were able to identify areas where bullying did occur. The school believed that by raising awareness of bullying behaviour, students were less likely to engage in it and more likely to stand up to bullying behaviour by others.

Strategies suggested by the committee that the school believes worked well, included developing the social skills of students, role-playing activities and the development of assertive skills. In upper school, the need to model positive behaviour to other students was emphasised. Students were encouraged to enlist the support of their peers if they were being bullied. To reduce schoolyard bullying, staff reviewed the school plan and made some school areas out-of-bounds if they were difficult to monitor. Staff paid particular attention to areas where bullying occurred more often and ensured there was an even use of facilities so that there was less chance that students may become upset with each other. The school newsletter was used to keep parents informed of what was going on in the school.
What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

Staff were worried that the introduction of a specific anti-bullying policy would be viewed as evidence of a bullying problem at the school and become labelled as a ‘bullying’ school. The school had a good name and the staff didn’t want to make it appear the school had problems.

Overcoming difficulties

The principal reassured staff that rather than being given a bad name, the school would be seen as being proactive and caring. Staff were provided with information about other schools that were introducing similar programs.

Changes to make

In hindsight, the school would have made the survey instrument a little more specific to their needs as the one they used was too general.

More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkits:

- Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5
- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2
- Protective Physical Environment 5.1
- Protective Physical Environment 5.2
Toolkits for action

Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.1

Student Friendly School Map

Key
- Most friendly areas
- Bullying hotspots
- Least friendly areas
- Attractive areas
- Safest areas
- Unattractive areas
## Planning Sheet 1 – Example
### Outdoors, out-of-bounds, safer areas and supervision areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues (where and what?)</th>
<th>Suggestions for improvement</th>
<th>Staff involved</th>
<th>Timeline for implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: An area frequently used by students is blocked from the duty teachers' view by a bike shed. Antisocial and bullying behaviour has been reported in this area.</td>
<td>1. Designate this as an out-of-bounds area</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Insert date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Relocate the bike shed</td>
<td>Maintenance staff/parents</td>
<td>Insert date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Allow students to continue playing in this area and ensure duty teacher frequently checks behind the shed</td>
<td>Duty teachers</td>
<td>Immediate start and monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Assign an extra duty teacher to supervise this area if problem continues</td>
<td>Duty teacher</td>
<td>Insert date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Planning Sheet 1
Outdoors, out-of-bounds, safer areas and supervision areas

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</table>
**Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.3**

**Review Sheet 1: Review of equipment activities: what is it, who is it available to and could it be improved?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equipment and Activities</th>
<th>Who accesses?</th>
<th>Could access be improved? (yes/no)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

*chapter 5*
### Protective Physical Environment Toolkit 5.4

#### Planning Sheet 2
Physical environment strategies for action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues (where and what)?</th>
<th>Suggestions for improvement</th>
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