

All Students

Teacher ratings of student interactions

Amongst other things, we asked Year 8 teachers to provide feedback about individual students in relation to the nature of their interactions with other students. The students' Year 9 and Year 10 form teachers provided equivalent information.

The relevant data are contained in the table below.

Whereas in Phase 1 no teachers answered that they were 'not sure, don't know enough about this student to be able to comment' when rating students on the dimensions listed in the table, between five percent and 29 percent of the students' form (as opposed to subject) teachers answered in this way in Phases 3 and 4 for each of the dimensions listed.

But of the Years 9 and 10 form teachers who did feel they knew the students well enough to comment, their feedback was similar to that provided by Year 8 teachers, albeit perhaps a little more positive overall: for example, they were more likely to say that students were good at resolving disputes with peers and less likely to feel that students would be influenced by peer pressure to do something out of character.

Aspect of relationship with other students	Phase 1: Year 8 teachers		Phase 3: Year 9 form teachers			Phase 4: Year 10 form teachers		
	Often/ Always ^a	Never/ Occasion- ally ^a	Often/ Always	Never/ Occasion- ally	<i>Not sure</i> ^b	Often/ Always	Never/ Occasion- ally	<i>Not sure</i>
	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c	% ^c
Gets on well with other students	67	10	89	3	–	87	–	5
Gets hassled/bullied by other students	7	76	3	69	19	–	82	13
Hassles/bullies other students	7	85	1	82	11	–	81	14
Isolates him/herself from other children	8	76	3	79	10	4	82	7
Is good at resolving disputes or keeping things smooth with peers	39	19	32	21	24	44	11	27
Is influenced by peer pressure to do something out of character	15	65	3	60	18	2	57	18
Helps/supports other students in the class	44	21	35	25	11	39	14	27
Mixes with students who are anti-social or get into trouble	13	66	11	65	6	6	60	15
Sees other students' points of view	45	16	33	8	29	39	12	25

^a As in previous 'All Students' tables, in order to simplify data presentation, we have combined the two response categories 'Always' and 'Often'. The same has been done with the 'Occasionally' and 'Never' categories. Note that where there was missing data, this was usually only at the level of one percent. Therefore, most of the data not reported in the table related to the 'Sometimes' response option.

^b The full wording of this response option was: 'Not sure, don't know enough about this student to be able to comment'.

^c The percentages in the table indicate the proportion of **students**, not teachers. Individual teachers often provided feedback on more than one of our participating students.

Bullying

That students often express a fear of being bullied when they reach secondary school is mentioned in the transition to secondary school research literature. This was also a finding of the present study: as further discussed in Chapter Eleven, Emily and a considerable number of our other students were apprehensive about being bullied once they arrived at secondary school.³⁷

Whereas in Phase 1 Emily's parents had advised that Emily had neither been picked on or bullied in the last few months nor given any other child a hard time, one year later they reported that:

"Emily was threatened at school and the threat was brought to her attention from a friend."

Their response was to...

"...contact [one of] Emily's teachers because she [Emily] had formed a great relationship with her."

When Emily was asked similar questions about bullying in Phase 1 she indicated that she had not experienced any bullying or been given 'a hard time' over the previous few months, and had not given any other students a hard time either, an analysis confirmed by her teacher at the time — see Table 2.

But in Phase 2, since moving to secondary school, Emily confided that:

"A Year 10 girl [has been giving me a hard time] after school, wanting to pick a fight."

Emily's response had been to "ignore her" which eventually resolved the situation.

In Phase 3, while Emily was not currently experiencing any bullying, she talked about the incident in Term 3 her parents had referred to (different from the one concerning the Year 10 girl mentioned above): that is, being threatened with a "hiding". This had worried her to the extent that she agreed to her parents' suggestion to seek help from one of her teachers. This teacher had brought about a successful resolution, incorporating peer mediation as part of the solution.

By the end of her first term in Year 10, Emily had experienced one incident of being picked on. This was not at school, however, but at a local event. Emily's account was that a girl who had been drinking too much deliberately shoved her and called her names. Emily's friends, and also friends of the other girl, were supportive and helped diffuse the tension by encouraging Emily to ignore the girl, given that she had been drinking. Emily listened to their advice and the situation did not escalate: "[I] just brushed her off."

While Emily answered that she had not 'picked on or given anyone a hard time [that] term', she did add that she and her friends "just joke around", teasing each other in a good natured way. (Her Year 9/Year 10 form teacher had a slightly different perspective: as shown in Table 2, this teacher considered that Emily 'occasionally' 'hassled' other students.)

The data in this section suggest that although Emily was a very social, and generally popular, girl she had the potential to attract, or bring about, some more negative contact with other young people from time to time.

In Year 9, Emily sought teacher help for a bullying incident.

Emily occasionally 'hassled' other students.

³⁷ Emily was also apprehensive about encountering 'older students' generally at secondary school, but according to information presented in Chapter Eleven, her fears were unfounded.

All Students

Students and bullying

Students' responses to the question 'Have you been picked on or bullied by anyone this term?'^a are shown in the table. As can be seen, the reported incidence of bullying (*of themselves*)^{*} decreased considerably between Phase 1 and Phase 4.[#]

Been bullied in recent months?	Phase 1 %	Phase 2 %	Phase 3 %	Phase 4 %
No	78	78	73	92
Yes	19	18	14	7
Other response	4	2	11	1
Missing data ^b	–	2	2	–

^a In Phase 1 the wording of this question was slightly different: instead of 'this term' it was 'in the last few months'.

^b 'Other responses' were most often comments that while they had not been bullied in the time period specified by the question, they had experienced it in the months before that (*"Yes, but not this term, last term. Was threatened by a girl who used to go to this school, but she's left now. It's better this term now that she's gone"*); that while they had not personally experienced it they had seen it happen to others; or, that while they did not like certain behaviours from others, they weren't really sure if it counted as being 'picked on/bullied' and/or that they knew how to deal with it: *"Yes, kind of — silly, girly type of things. I don't like fighting with friends"*; *"A little bit but I know how to deal with it — stick up for myself. I tell them to shut up. It's the Year 9 boys, they tease you. But it's not really a problem."*

Students who answered that they had been picked on or bullied (usually within the school grounds, but sometimes as they made their way to and from school) mostly reported some sort of verbal insult or teasing, including racist comments or repeated remarks about personal appearance:

- *"Tease me about my big eyes."*
- *"Make fun of my skin colour, my religion, where I'm from."*
- *"They call me a white Māori."*
- *"Because I'm Indian they say I'm a curry muncher, get teased."*
- *"They tease me about my [lack of] height — say I should be playing basketball."*

But for some students, the bullying went beyond the verbal taunts to verbal and physical intimidation:

- *"Pulled the chair out, I fell on the floor."*
- *"One student takes all my stationary."*
- *"If you don't give her what she wants (like wearing my scarf, using my pens) she gets angry."*
- *"Was told to 'watch my back'."*
- *"Pushing me, running into me and kicking me."*
- *"Two Year 12 [students] and one Year 13 last Friday took my bag from me, pushed me around, squirted me with drink bottle."*
- *"Physical bullying — push me around. Small group of boys (some of my classmates) pushing and shoving me, kick me. Pulling my hair. They don't really hurt me."*
- *"They punched, hit me."*

^{*} Note 1: When students were asked about bullying during their interviews, no attempt was made to provide a definition of bullying, even though we were aware that this can mean quite different things to different individuals, ranging from what might seem (to others) to be low-level, even 'trivial' hassling, to much more serious incidents. We feel however that students' responses give a valuable insight into the complex issue of bullying from their personal perspectives.

[#] Note 2: Although incidents of personal bullying decreased, student comments about seeing **other people** being bullied increased.

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Students and bullying – continued

And sometimes the bullying was in the form of ‘exclusion’:

- *“At school last week some friends stopped talking to me (they’d heard rumours about something). But it’s OK now.”*

Asked how they’d dealt with incidents of bullying, most said they’d dealt with it themselves, either by ignoring the perpetrators or ‘sticking up for themselves’, telling their friends and parents, and sometimes telling a teacher.

Often, once they’d taken steps to have the bullying dealt with it had been resolved:

- *“Teacher talked to bully.”*
- *“Told peer support people and it didn’t happen again.”*
- *“I hit him back and that fixed the problem.”*
- *“My friends helped me, they told him not to bully me.”*
- *“Told dean and dean talked to students.”*

But some students had more mixed success:

- *“A little Indian kid kept throwing stuff at me and mocking me, so I jumped him after school.”*
- *“Kid in class threw my pencils on the ground and I punched him — detention for three days.”*
- *“Tried to tell my teacher but she was too busy and didn’t do anything about it.”*
- *“The teacher doesn’t care.”*
- *“Nothing — just didn’t do anything about it.”*

A further question put to students about bullying at each phase of the study was to do with whether *they* had ‘picked on or bullied’ anyone that term/in the last few months.

In Phases 1 and 2, 12 percent and 11 percent of students respectively admitted to having done so; equivalent figures for Phases 3 and 4 were lower, at seven percent and four percent. But these students almost always attributed their behaviour to just teasing or having other students on in a ‘fun’ way (teachers sometimes had a different interpretation, as did students on the receiving end, judging from comments reported above), usually when with a group of their friends. To a lesser extent, students reported acting in self-defence, responding to being hassled by others.

All Students

Teacher and parent feedback on how well students related to adults

Teacher feedback

More than 90 percent of teachers at each of Phases 1, 3 and 4 answered 'yes' to the question, 'In general, would you say that this [named] student relates well/appropriately with other teachers, staff, adults in the school?', with the highest proportion (94%) answering this way in Phase 4. A few teachers omitted to answer, leaving six percent of teachers in Phase 1, five percent in Phase 3, and four percent in Phase 4 responding 'no' to the question.

Typical comments from teachers who felt that particular students mostly related well to other adults were:

- *“Responds well to teacher instruction, very respectful and cheerful.”*
- *“Pleasant demeanour, shows respect to adults, willing to listen.”*
- *“Student is confident, outspoken and respectful.”*
- *“Shares experiences and humour but within boundaries of student–teacher relationship.”*

Comments from teachers who gave a 'no' response included:

- *“[She] is not as outgoing with adults as she is with her peers.”*
- *“Has improved but social skills are poor. Not very sure about boundaries.”*
- *“[He] has begun to have some defiance issues.”*
- *“[He] can get into trouble in the classes that he doesn't like the teachers in.”*
- *“Mostly polite but is easily distracted.”*

Parental feedback

In Phases 1 and 4, parents were asked 'Most of the time, how would you say your child gets on with other adults this year, including teachers at school?'

Just over three-quarters of the parents who responded at each of these phases of the study (77% and 79% respectively) felt that their child generally related 'very well/well' with adults. Most remaining parents felt that their child 'varied' in this respect. Only two parents in Phase 1 and one parent in Phase 4 felt that their child did 'not [usually relate] very well' to 'other adults'. There were also a small number (3) of parents in Phase 4 who were 'not sure' or 'hadn't really thought about it'.

Parents who answered that it 'varied' made comments such as the following:

- *“[My daughter] has a lot of respect for her teachers but is apprehensive with other adults.”*
- *“Doesn't like her teacher at the moment. She is rigid about what's fair and what's not fair. She thinks teacher has favourites and doesn't like her but can't see any way to improve the relationship. Doesn't really know what the problem is. Not bad enough for mum to come down to school. Her work is OK.”*
- *“Is quite shy in front of adults so doesn't say a lot, but generally [relates] well.”*
- *“Has not got on well with the teacher, but other adults [relates] very well.”*
- *“Maybe some of the teachers don't like his attitude. He gets mad when the other kids say things to him and he gives them a hiding.”*
- *“Apparently can be disruptive in class.”*
- *“It all depends on his mood.”*
- *“Gets on well with teachers he likes. Doesn't get on well with those he doesn't like and this is noticeable in his marks.”*
- *“On the whole he gets on well but there are a couple of teachers he really doesn't like.”*
- *“She's gaining confidence in speaking and expressing her views to teachers as well as to us (parents).”*

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All Students

Teacher and parent feedback on how well students related to adults – continued

Comments from the few parents who felt that their child did not generally relate well to adults included:

- *“My child doesn’t really respond to authority. He was all right with the male teacher at the beginning of the year but half-way through the year he got a new female teacher who he didn’t get on with. The female teacher had returned to teaching after raising a family. She was set in old ways, wouldn’t adapt to new teaching methods.”*
- *“[My child is] sometimes very shy.”*
- *“[She] has no social skills and often comes across as being rude.”*

Relating to Adults

For another important perspective on students’ social interactions, parents were asked how they thought their Year 8 child mostly got on with other adults, including teachers at school. In Emily’s case, her parents rated her as relating ‘very well/well’ to adults.

In Phases 1, 3, and 4 teachers too were asked about participating students’ relationships with adults. The specific question was ‘In general, would you say that this student relates well or appropriately with teachers and other staff and adults in the school?’ The teachers who provided feedback about Emily each answered ‘yes’ to this question, the Year 8 teacher remarking that Emily...

“...is always polite and respectful of elders”,

and the Year 10 teacher noting that...

“...she is an amiable person who relates well with adults.”

Though overall feedback about Emily was that she related well and appropriately to adults, there was also a suggestion that Emily liked to keep ‘a bit of herself back’ and take time to assess whether she could ‘trust’ adults, especially those in authority. She was initially cautious about discussing problems with ‘unknown’ pastoral care staff at school, for example (see Chapter Seven).

Summary Statements about Emily and Social Interactions

Emily mostly related very well to her peers and to older students and adults and had many very positive interactions.

As well as her contact with them at school, Emily frequently engaged with her friends after school and at weekends. Their time together usually involved hanging out and talking and going on outings to the movies and special festivities, rather than undertaking particular pastimes, although as discussed in the previous chapter, Emily enjoyed a range of performing arts and sports activities, mainly within the context of school.

The most significant of all Emily’s friends were her *school* friends: friendships at school were an essential element of her school life, and references to her social interactions featured largely in Emily’s reasons for saying she enjoyed school at the different points of the study. Eagerness to see her friends each day also accounted for her being reluctant to miss a day of school. And friends were an important factor in helping Emily to settle at secondary school following the Year 8 to Year 9 transition (see Chapter Eleven).

She related well and appropriately with adults.