

## 4.6 Feeling safe

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear that children have the right to feel safe and to be safe at all times.<sup>116</sup> The importance of adequate systems and structures to support student safety in schools and to respond to concerns for safety cannot be understated. Within schools, feeling and being safe is essential for students to be ready and able to engage with learning. When students feel unsafe it affects their behaviour and their feelings towards school and learning.

### Survey findings

- 89 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they feel safe ‘all the time’ or ‘most of the time’. One in 10 said they don’t feel safe ‘sometimes’ or ‘ever’.
- Almost one in two Year 3 to Year 6 students were ‘sometimes’ afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school. One in 10 said they were ‘often’ afraid of this.
- 80 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel safe ‘all the time’ or ‘most of the time’. One in five said they feel safe ‘about half the time’ or less.
- Almost one in two Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having been afraid of being hurt or bullied and 28 per cent have not gone to school at least once because of it.
- Students who feel safe at school are more likely to have positive engagement outcomes (like school a lot, feel like part of their school, say being at school every day is very important, and achieve highly).

### Do students feel safe?

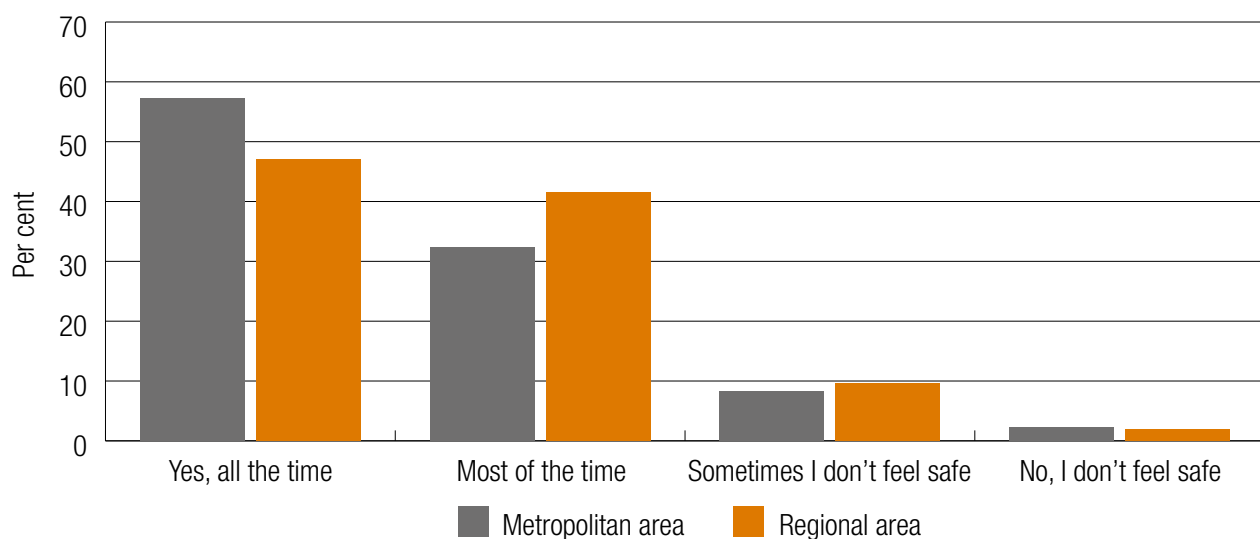
One in two Year 3 to Year 6 students (53.0%) answered that they feel safe in their school ‘all the time’ and one in three (36.1%) said ‘most of the time’.

However, one in 10 students reported that ‘sometimes [they] don’t feel safe’ (8.8%) or ‘[they] don’t feel safe’ (2.1%).

There was no significant difference measured between female and male students or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to how safe they feel at school.

However, Year 3 to Year 6 students in regional areas were less likely than their metropolitan counterparts to say they feel safe ‘all the time’ (47.0% versus 57.2%) and instead more likely to say they feel safe ‘most of the time’. The proportion of students who don’t feel safe was similar for students in both areas.

**Graph 4.11: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don’t feel safe or they don’t feel safe, by region**

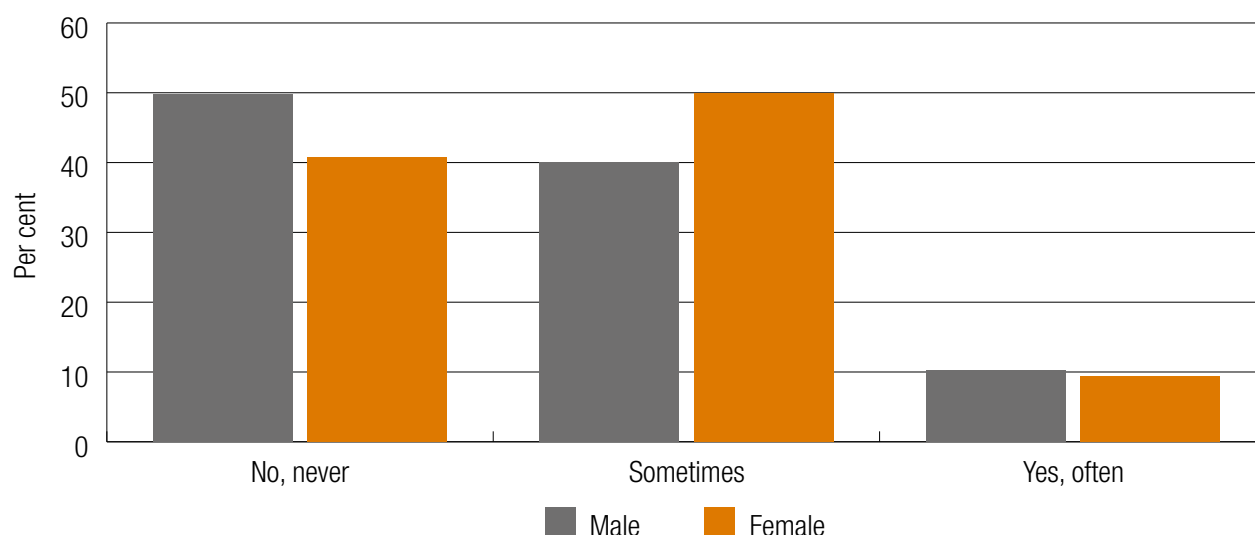


**Table 4.12: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, sometimes they don't feel safe or they don't feel safe, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes, all the time	52.5	53.5	57.2	47.0	52.9	54.8	53.0
Most of the time	36.8	35.6	32.4	41.5	36.4	32.9	36.1
Sometimes I don't feel safe	8.3	9.2	8.3	9.6	8.5	11.0	8.8
No, I don't feel safe	2.5	1.8	2.2	1.9	2.1	1.3	2.1

Notably, more than one in two Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they are either 'sometimes' (45.7%) or 'often' (9.7%) afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school. Girls were more likely than boys to be worried about this.

**Graph 4.12: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by gender**



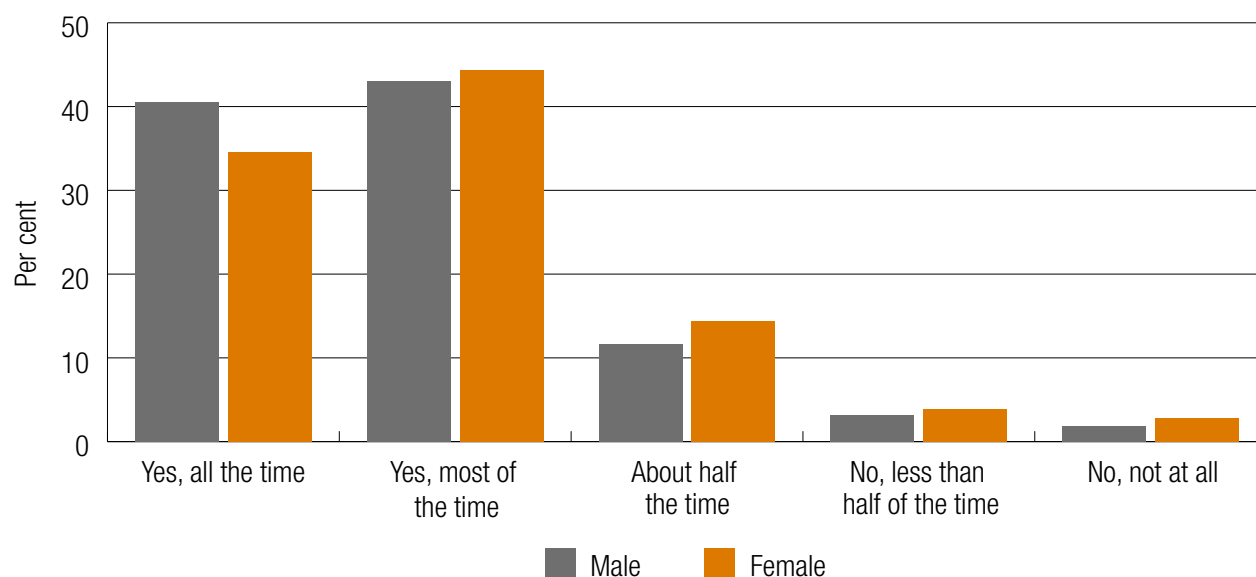
**Table 4.13: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they are never, sometimes or often afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
No, never	49.8	40.7	45.2	43.6	44.1	50.0	44.6
Sometimes	40.0	49.9	45.9	45.5	46.2	40.3	45.7
Yes, often	10.2	9.4	8.9	10.9	9.7	9.7	9.7

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, just 37 per cent reported feeling safe in their school 'all the time' while 44 per cent said 'most of the time'. One in five students (19.7%) said they only feel safe 'about half the time' or less.

A higher proportion of female students than male students reported feeling unsafe; however, this difference was not statistically significant (21.1% of female students said they feel safe 'about half the time' or less compared to 16.6% of male students).

**Graph 4.13: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, about half the time, less than half the time or not at all, by gender**



In regard to regional differences, metropolitan Year 7 to Year 12 students were significantly more likely than regional students to report feeling safe 'all the time' (39.7% of metropolitan students said this compared to 30.0% of regional students).

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students reported feeling safe at school 'all the time' (43.2% versus 36.2%) but also 'less than half the time' and 'not at all' (11.3% combined versus 5.8% combined) however none of these differences were found to be statistically significant.

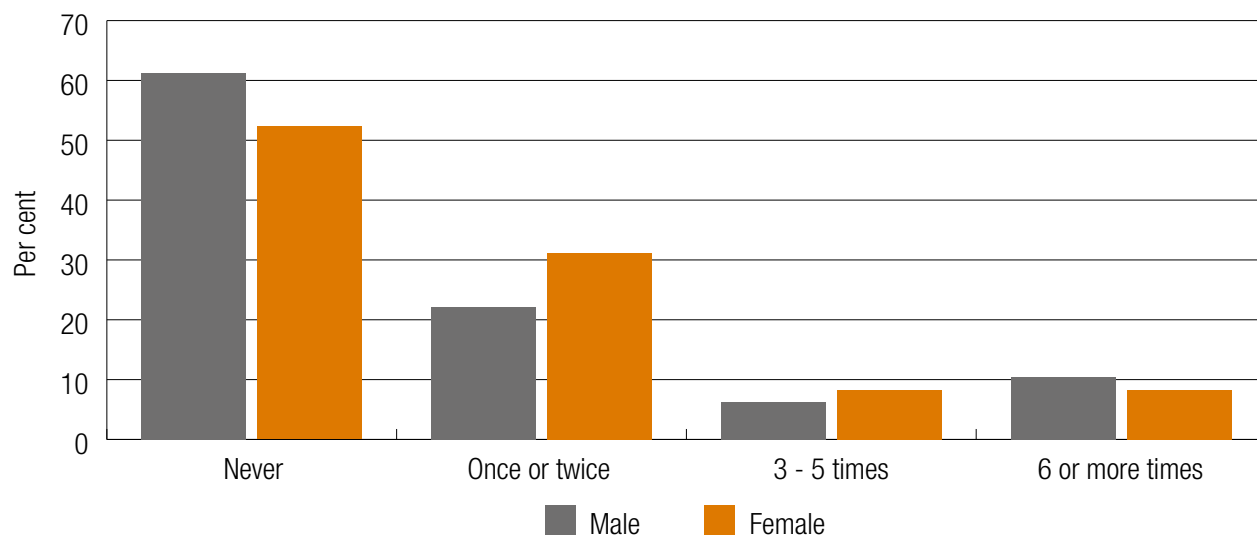
**Table 4.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe all the time, most of the time, about half the time, less than half the time or not at all, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes, all the time	40.5	34.5	39.7	30.0	36.2	43.2	36.7
Yes, most of the time	43.0	44.3	39.9	52.2	44.3	34.1	43.7
About half the time	11.6	14.4	13.4	14.0	13.7	11.4	13.6
No, less than half the time	3.2	3.9	4.0	2.9	3.6	4.5	3.7
No, not at all	1.8	2.8	3.0	1.0	2.2	6.8	2.4

Forty-four per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported having been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school at least once in the current school year (January – November 2016) and 28.2 per cent had not gone to school at least once because of it.

Female students were more likely than male students to avoid school because of bullying; however, the proportion of male students reporting the same was also significant (32.2% of female students reported this as did 21.8% of male students).

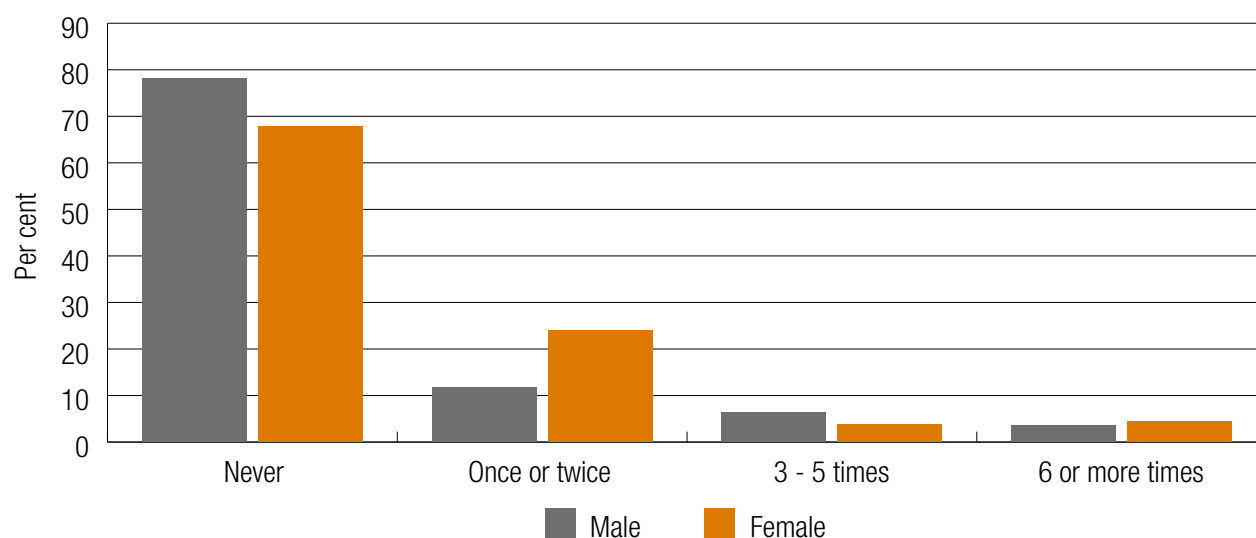
**Graph 4.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by gender**



**Table 4.15: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 to 5 times, or 6 or more times been afraid that someone will hurt or bully them at school, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Never	61.3	52.3	58.0	51.2	55.0	68.2	55.9
Once or twice	22.2	31.2	25.1	32.9	28.0	18.2	27.4
3 – 5 times	6.3	8.2	7.4	7.7	7.7	4.5	7.5
6 or more times	10.5	8.2	9.6	8.2	9.3	9.1	9.1

**Graph 4.15: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times not gone to school because they were afraid someone might hurt or bully them, by gender**



**Table 4.16: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have never, once or twice, 3 – 5 times, or 6 or more times not gone to school because they were afraid someone might hurt or bully them, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Never	78.2	67.8	71.1	73.0	72.2	N/A*	71.7
Once or twice	11.8	24.0	21.3	16.0	18.7	N/A*	19.5
3 – 5 times	6.4	3.8	4.6	5.0	4.9	N/A*	4.7
6 or more times	3.6	4.4	3.0	6.0	4.2	N/A*	4.0

\*  $n < 20$

## Do teachers take action?

Sixty-one per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students agreed with the statement that teachers ‘always’ do something that helps when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, while 29 per cent answered that teachers help ‘sometimes’. Some students (4.6%) felt that teachers ‘almost never’ do something that helps and the remainder (5.2%) said they did not know.

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, one-half (49.3%) believed that teachers ‘almost always’ take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, however, just over one-third (35.9%) of them also believed that the action that the teachers take helps or makes the situation better. Male students and students in metropolitan areas were more likely than other students to say that teachers ‘almost always’ take action and that this helps improve the situation.

More than one in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students (12.0%) felt that teachers ‘almost never’ take action and one in five (21.8%) said that if action is taken by a teacher it does not help or make the situation better.

Female students were more likely than male students to feel that teachers do not take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied, (14.0% of female students reported this compared to 8.5 per cent of male students) and in addition, they were less likely to agree that the action that teachers take helps or makes the situation better.

None of the differences between regional and metropolitan students or Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students were statistically significant.

**Table 4.17: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying teachers take action when they know a student is being hurt or bullied almost always, now and then, almost never or they are unsure, by selected characteristics**

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Almost always	53.2	47.2	51.5	44.2	49.2	50.0	49.3
Now and then	27.3	28.0	25.9	32.5	28.5	19.0	27.9
Almost never	8.5	14.0	12.8	10.2	11.6	19.0	12.0
Unsure	11.0	10.9	9.8	13.1	10.8	11.9	10.8

**Table 4.18: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying the action that teachers take in response to bullying helps, does not help or they are unsure, by selected characteristics**

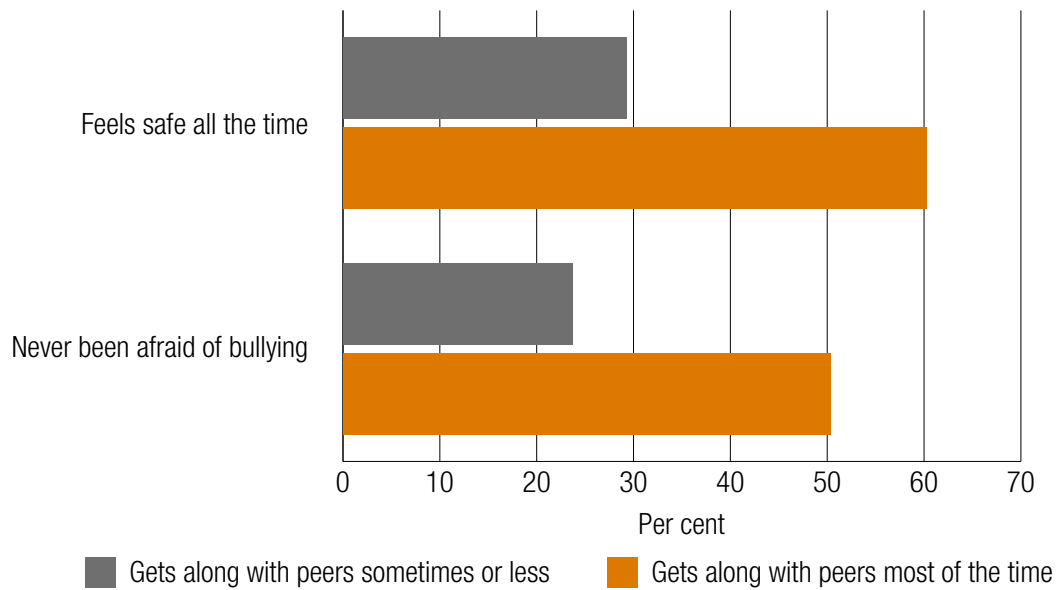
	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes	42.2	31.6	36.8	34.0	36.2	31.0	35.9
No	20.6	21.8	22.0	21.4	21.0	33.3	21.8
Unsure	37.2	46.6	41.2	44.7	42.7	35.7	42.3

## Students who get along with peers and teachers – Year 3 to Year 6

Compared to students who said they get along with peers and teachers ‘sometimes’ or less, those who said they get along ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’ were more likely to feel safe and have no fear of being hurt or bullied:

- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘most of the time’ were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (60.3% versus 29.3%).
- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘most of the time’ were more likely to say they are never afraid that someone will hurt or bully them (50.3% versus 23.7%).
- Students who said they ‘always’ get along with their teachers were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (63.3% versus 38.1%).

**Graph 4.16: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they feel safe at school all the time or have never been afraid of bullying, by how well they get along with peers**

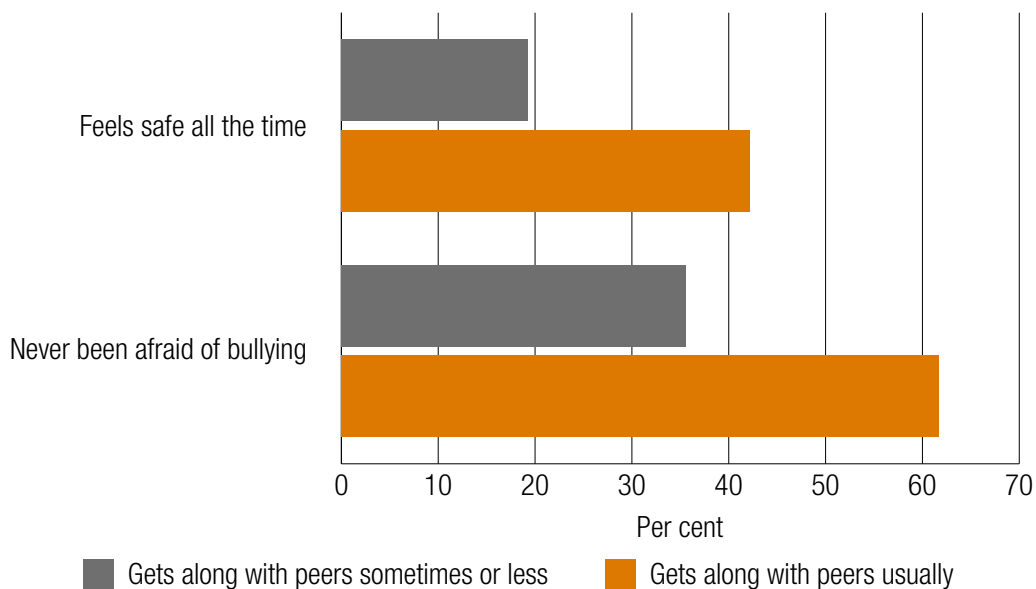


## Students who get along with peers and teachers – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they ‘usually’ get along with their peers and teachers were more likely than those who said they get along ‘sometimes’ or less to feel safe and have no fear of being hurt or bullied:

- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘usually’ were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (42.2% versus 19.3%).
- Students who said they get along with their peers ‘usually’ were more likely to say they are never afraid that someone will hurt or bully them (61.7% versus 35.6%).
- Students who said they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers were more likely to feel safe at school ‘all the time’ (42.5% versus 17.7%).

**Graph 4.17: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe at school all the time or have never been afraid of bullying, by how well they get along with peers**





## Students who feel safe – Year 3 to Year 6

Compared to students who sometimes or never feel safe at school, those who said they feel safe ‘all the time’ were more likely to say that they like school, that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them and that they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results:

- Students said being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (82.4% versus 53.6%).
- Students said they like school ‘a lot’ (63.4% versus 22.6%).
- Students reported doing well or very well in their school results (53.3% versus 36.9%).

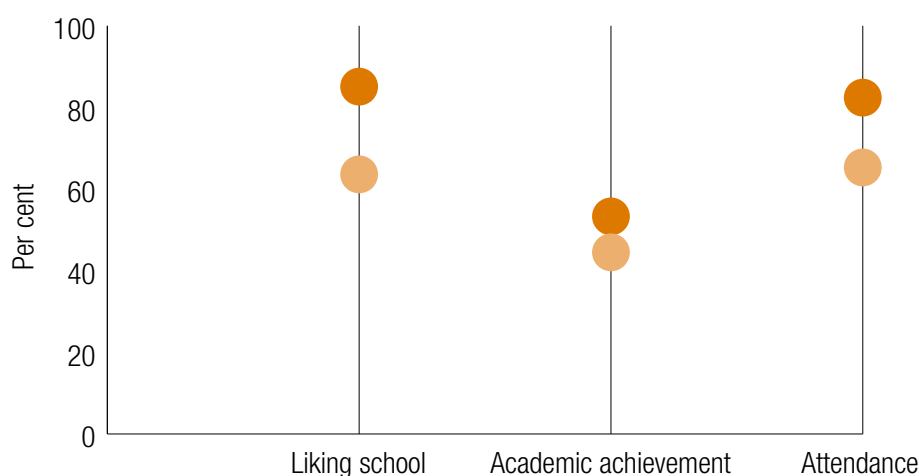
**Table 4.19: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK, they don’t like school or don’t like school at all, by how safe at school student feels**

	Feels safe all the time	Feels safe most of the time	Sometimes doesn’t feel safe or never feels safe
Likes school a lot	63.4	35.5	22.6
Likes school a bit	21.7	33.7	22.6
Thinks school is OK	13.4	26.9	38.1
Doesn’t like school/not at all	1.5	3.9	16.6

**Table 4.20: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they do well or very well, OK or not so well in their school results or they’re unsure, by how safe at school student feels**

	Feels safe all the time	Feels safe most of the time	Sometimes doesn’t feel safe or never feels safe
Well or very well	53.3	46.8	36.9
OK	41.8	44.6	41.7
Not so well	1.5	4.7	14.3
Unsure	3.4	4.0	7.1

**Graph 4.18: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who feel safe all the time or not all the time**



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

## Students who feel safe – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the younger cohort, Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they feel safe ‘all the time’ were more likely than students who said they feel safe ‘about half the time’ or less to feel part of their school, to like school and to say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them. No significant relationship was found between feeling safe and academic achievement for Year 7 to Year 12 students:

- Students feel part of their school (91.6% versus 43.6%).
- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (76.7% versus 29.3%).
- Students say that it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day (80.2% versus 51.9%).

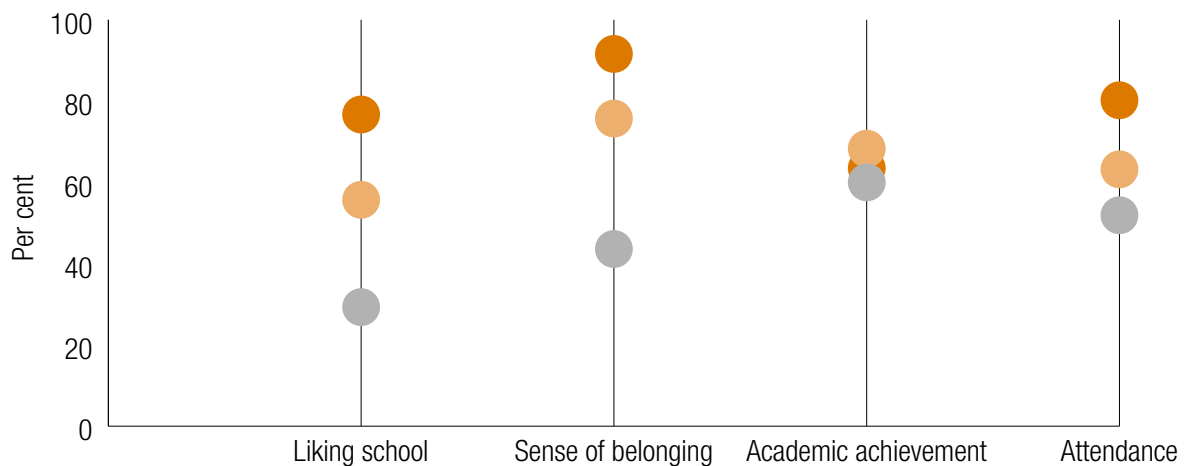
**Table 4.21: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school, by how safe at school student feels**

	Feels safe all the time	Feels safe most of the time	Feels safe about half the time or less
Likes school a lot	49.8	26.0	15.0
Likes school a bit	26.9	29.7	14.3
Thinks school is OK	18.9	34.5	44.4
Doesn’t like school/not at all	4.4	9.8	26.3

**Table 4.22: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be at school every day, by how safe at school student feels**

	Feels safe all the time	Feels safe most of the time	Feels safe about half the time or less
Very important	80.2	63.2	51.9
Somewhat important	19.4	32.4	36.8
Not important	0.4	4.4	11.3

**Graph 4.19: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who feel safe all the time, most of the time or half the time or less**



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day.

## Group discussion findings

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, safety affected their willingness to attend school and their ability to engage in learning. Through the group discussions several important messages about safety emerged:

- Friends and teachers create safety.
- Feeling safe is a precursor to learning.
- Safety at school is particularly important for children who may not experience safety in other aspects of their lives.
- Students require support to feel safe and to be safe.
- Students want their ideas for safety to be heard and acted on by schools.

## Safety as relational

For children and young people safety is largely relational.<sup>117</sup> Feeling safe and being safe is influenced by the relationships they have with the people around them. Safety is experienced when students are with people they trust and in places that are familiar to them, and when there is consistency in their relationships, the behaviour of people and processes. For students, friends and school staff made them feel comfortable, relaxed and happy, which created feelings of safety. Experiencing a sense of belonging and acceptance through these relationships also contributed to feeling safe and comfortable at school.

Friends at school were particularly important for making students feel safe and accepted. Students characterised friends as reliable and trustworthy – as people who would take their concerns seriously and ‘have their back’. Friends were also a protective factor against bullying, would stand up for students and seek additional help when required. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 made clear connections between their sense of safety and motivation to attend school, and feeling ready and able to learn. Feeling comfortable was a particularly important precursor to learning, as discussed further below.

Without friends, students indicated they would feel unsafe and alone and were more likely to experience bullying. Feeling these ways had implications for school attendance and learning with students explaining it was difficult to concentrate on learning when they felt upset, uncomfortable or unsafe.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“They make you feel safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because at our school there is a little bit of bullying so if you have a friend you feel safe at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you feel comfortable when you go to school.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you have friends at school you will have someone to play with you and keep you safe if something happens.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Friends are important] For your safety.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you have someone to play with it is safer to be around people you know if you get hurt they are there for you!!!!!!! Happiness!!!”</i></p>	<p><i>“To allow people to feel safe.”</i></p> <p><i>“Creates a better atmosphere.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you feel safe around a place you may not want to be.”</i></p> <p><i>“Feel more comfortable.”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends help you feel accepted and also make the environment feel safer and more enjoyable/comfortable.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Unsafe.”</i></p> <p><i>“You’ll be lonely and scared.”</i></p> <p><i>“It puts weight on your back and you get worried.”</i></p> <p><i>“You would be sad and lonely and you would be bullied.”</i></p>	<p><i>“You feel unsafe and unable to come because you will get bullied.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel alone, unsafe, insecure.”</i></p> <p><i>“Wouldn’t feel comfortable.”</i></p>

Quality relationships with teachers were also important for students' sense of safety in school. Students referred to the qualities of teachers that made them feel comfortable and safe – they were caring, nice, helpful and approachable. School staff that embodied these qualities also made students interested in learning and school, as noted in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Because you'll have to stay with them for a year or they will save you and keep you safe."</i></p> <p><i>"So you feel safe going to school."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] because she is nice and she helps you when you need help and she makes sure you stay safe and don't get hurt physically and mentally."</i></p>	<p><i>"Make you feel safe."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher I like is very helpful, makes me feel comfortable and helps me throughout the situation I'm in."</i></p> <p><i>"Make you comfortable."</i></p> <p><i>"So if you feel unsafe they will keep you happy."</i></p>

Feeling comfortable with school staff meant students felt happy at school, able to voice their opinions and able to discuss their concerns or ask for help. As discussed in Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future and Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment, when students did not feel comfortable in class they were less likely to ask for assistance with learning or other concerns.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"If you don't get along with your teacher it's going to be hard to communicate with them and get along but if you like them you can ask for help and feel safe!"</i></p> <p><i>"Because you can talk to them if you feel unsafe or unsure about class work."</i></p>	<p><i>"Makes the environment feel safer healthier and I can be comfortable saying what I feel is true."</i></p> <p><i>"If you have a bond with a teacher, you build on a connection and it makes you feel comfortable."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes you feel more comfortable if you talk to your teacher about something you don't wanna talk in the class."</i></p> <p><i>"Because maintaining a healthy relationship increases your overall happiness and allows you to feel comfortable talking to them."</i></p>

Students wanted school staff to be proactive in making sure that they felt safe at school. When teachers 'checked in' with students they felt cared for and safe. If students perceived that teachers did not care for them, then it made it difficult for them to seek support to feel safe and for other concerns.

*"For teachers that don't care about the kids they are teaching because for the kids to be comfortable the teachers need to care for the little munchlings."* (Year 3 to Year 6)

For some students, concerns for safety at home placed an increased importance on feeling safe at school.

*"Somewhere safe to live to know that people are out there to help them e.g. kids helpline because they need to feel safe everywhere they go."* (Year 3 to Year 6)

## Safety and learning

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, feeling safe and comfortable within the school and the classroom was a particularly important precursor to learning. When students felt safe, they also felt emotionally able to engage in learning. Students said they enjoyed learning when they were in an emotionally safe environment that enabled them to engage in learning, as discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.1 – A positive and fair classroom environment.

Concentrating on learning was difficult when students did not feel comfortable or were worried about their safety. Students explained if they felt unsafe they also felt that no one would listen to them, they would feel upset and felt they could not think straight. Concerns for safety had an impact on students thinking, learning and behaviour. Ultimately, their experience of school was stressful and they were less likely to feel able to emotionally engage in learning or ask for the support they needed to feel safe. Friends and teachers were pivotal in creating an environment in which students felt comfortable, as noted above.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Because it was a safe place to learn about new things."</i></p> <p><i>"I liked [learning] when [name of staff] was here and I worked a lot and I loved the safe environment I was in."</i></p> <p><i>"Safer school please."</i></p> <p><i>"It may be hard for kids to come to school if they are being bullied or don't feel safe."</i></p> <p><i>"It makes it hard [to learn] when you get bullied because your mind is still thinking about it."</i></p> <p><i>"It's hard for children to learn when not in correct mindset."</i></p>	<p>What helps other kids like learning at school?</p> <p><i>"Feeling safe and comfortable in the school."</i></p> <p><i>"Feeling comfortable with your teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"[Is it important to have friends at school?] Yes, because it makes the learning environment more comfortable and makes you feel safe and have someone to complain to about a bad teacher... etc."</i></p> <p><i>"[What happens if you don't have friends at school?] You won't feel comfortable in class, because you have no one to talk to."</i></p> <p><i>[Is it important to get along with your teachers at school? Why?] Allows for a good and safe environment to learn in."</i></p> <p><i>"[Is it important to get along with your teachers at school? Why?]" It allows students to feel happier, safer, more comfortable and makes learning easier."</i></p>

For students across Year 3 to Year 12, relationships with teachers significantly influenced student help-seeking behaviour. Students were proactive in asking for help when they felt comfortable and had positive relationship with their teachers. However, asking for assistance was difficult when students did not feel comfortable, as discussed further in Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment and Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They might be scared of the teacher they have."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes it is hard to ask the teachers."</i></p>	<p><i>"Feel comfortable asking questions."</i></p> <p><i>"Rely on them [teachers] and feel comfortable asking for help."</i></p> <p><i>"Not feeling comfortable enough to ask for help [makes it hard to get help and support]."</i></p>

## Experiences of bullying

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that experiences of bullying go against student's rights.<sup>118</sup> Bullying has significant implications for future health and wellbeing and is preventable.<sup>119 120</sup> Bullying was a concern for students across Year 3 to Year 12 as experiences caused distress, loneliness and anxiety. Further, students described how bullying also affected motivation to attend school, concentration in class and achievement.

Student experiences of bullying and their perceptions of safety were strongly influenced by their relationships with peers. Friends were a protective factor against bullying as being with friends lessened the likelihood of bullying occurring.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"You won't get bullied if you have friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes definitely because if you don't have friends you will be lonely, sad, depressed and have no friends. You have more chance of getting bullied."</i></p>	<p><i>"If you have a group of friends you are less likely to be picked on."</i></p> <p><i>"Protect you."</i></p> <p><i>"So you don't get bullied and they help you out and kids should be friendly."</i></p>

Further to this, if bullying did occur, students felt confident in their friends as supportive bystanders. The actions friends took varied from 'standing up' to the bully, providing support and comfort to the victim or, for students in Year 3 to Year 6, seeking help from school staff. All of these actions were viewed positively by students and contributed to feeling safe at school.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Yes it is important to have friends at school because at recess and lunch you could come across bullies you won't have a friend to stand up to the bully with you."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because if you're getting bullied you have friends, you have someone that can help you."</i></p> <p><i>"They have your back."</i></p> <p><i>"So if you are getting bullied they can stick up for you."</i></p>	<p><i>"Also so you won't get bullied and someone to back you up."</i></p> <p><i>"If someone is bullying you they will say stop."</i></p> <p><i>"Friends are important because they are there for you if you get bullied."</i></p> <p><i>"They will always stand up for you and make you feel better when you're sad."</i></p>

Without the natural allies of friends, students were more likely to be a target for bullying and not receive support when bullying did occur. For students across Year 3 to Year 12, experiences of bullying exacerbated their feelings of a lack of belonging and safety and the effects included depression, negative feelings toward school and lack of motivation to attend school.

Further, there was an apparent cycle of effects related to bullying. Experiences of bullying made students feel sad and, as student's explained, they were then more likely to be picked on for being sad.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<i>"You would probably be teased."</i>	<i>"You would be an easy target. You get bullied and teased."</i>
<i>"You will be alone and you won't have much fun. You will not have anyone to stand up for you."</i>	<i>"You feel unsafe and unable to come because you will get bullied."</i>
<i>"You are constantly put down."</i>	<i>"You will be lonely and more of a target to bullying."</i>
<i>"If you are getting bullied, nobody will stand up or help you."</i>	<i>"You are more prone to being picked on and being isolated even more."</i>
<i>"You get lonely – and you start to get bullied about it."</i>	<i>"You get bullied because you look lonely and sad."</i>
<i>"Get hurt."</i>	

Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 also indicated how labels put on students or students who were deemed as 'different' experienced bullying from peers and teachers. These labels related to sexuality, being 'different' and also perceived capability linked with post-school destinations (for example, 'ATAR students', 'foundation students', etc).

For students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI) there was a desire for greater acceptance and awareness through education for peers and school staff.

When students were labelled by the school in terms of their post-school destinations, it affected how students felt about themselves, their self-esteem, and was the source of bullying.

## Safety in the school environment

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 expressed a desire for a culture in schools that provided safety. A school in which people cared for and were nice to each other created a culture of safety and made students feel comfortable and happy at school.

Year 3 to Year 6

*"The thing I would like to change about the school is have lots of people care about one another because lots of people would say that's a nice school and more people would feel safe."*

*"[...] I would change the safety at the school so nobody gets hurt because then the whole school is happy."*

*"Something I want to change is the behaviour is caring, helpful, nice etc. because then no one would get bullied and everyone could feel safer."*

The physical school grounds were also noted by some students as an area of unsafe activity. The ways students played on equipment and access by community members outside of school hours were both problematic. Students explained sometimes community members left broken glass or vandalised school property over the weekend – at one school, windows had been broken on several weekends.

Year 3 to Year 6

*"Cameras around the school so no more vandalism."*

*"Students are getting angry because of the vandalisms that have been happening to our school."*

However, some students felt constrained by rules that promoted safety.

Year 3 to Year 6

*"Not so many safety rules."*

*"To change new rule of no running on pavement so we can play more and new things."*

*"Be able to climb trees and if you get hurt you learn a lesson."*

*"Less caution."*

*"No hats when cloudy."*

## Support for being and feeling safe

Students identified a need for support to be and to feel safe at school and at home. They suggested letting students know that people in the school care about them and are looking out for their safety, stopping bullying and providing lessons to students on safety. They wanted school staff to be proactive and responsive to safety concerns, including bullying.

Students wanted school staff to understand safety from the student perspective, to hear the voice of students and for schools to proactively implement strategies to support students to feel safe at school. Systems which enable students to contribute to their own safety at school provide important avenues for the student voice to be heard.

Students also wanted teachers to be proactive in protecting students from fights and bullying, particularly younger students. They expressed a desire for schools and school staff to take action and prioritise student safety.

## Suggestions from students

Feeling unsafe was a significant concern for wellbeing, self-esteem, learning and engagement. Additionally, students identified being safe and feeling safe as impacting their ability to engage in learning and motivation to attend school. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 wanted safety to be prioritised within schools. A range of suggestions to improve their sense of safety related to school culture, student participation and the physical and emotional environment.

Students wanted schools to nurture and promote a culture of safety based on positive relationships. Student experiences of school and of safety were highly relational, as such, relationships with school staff and other students critical. Proactive approaches were suggested to increase positive, pro-social behaviour and reduce bullying and fighting, such as rules, positive messaging around the school (through posters for example) and positive behaviour programs. Students also suggested increased education for students and staff on student diversity and inclusion (with specific reference to sexual orientation, labelling of students, and staff behaviour towards students). Some students suggested explicit lessons on safety would be beneficial.

Students expressed a desire to have a selection of strategies that they could choose from to put in place when they felt unsafe. Some students were able to identify activities or strategies that supported them to feel calm or reduce anxiety. Some students wanted a space to destress when anxious, upset or angry and the autonomy to decide when they needed to use this space.

*"[Putting really big words in] Alphabetical order to help calm down."* (Year 3 to Year 6)

*"Read more books because it can calm us down."* (Year 3 to Year 6)

Hearing and understanding safety from the perspective of students was important to students, as was ensuring prioritisation of safety through implementation of preventative strategies and adequate responses to safety concerns. Clear and consistent rules and consequences, particularly in response to bullying and fighting, increased student sense of safety. Occasionally, students felt instances of bullying or fighting were 'noted' by school staff and this was an inadequate response.



Bullying was a particular concern for students in Year 3 to Year 6 and an area in which they wanted action.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“That the teachers would deal with problems such as arguments properly because they just let things like that go.”</i></p> <p><i>“To have a class for bullies doing homework.”</i></p> <p><i>“To make more punishments for bullying.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would make a program teaching kids to all treat each other nicely with fun games because some treat each other badly and use violence to release their anger.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would like kids to be a bit less rougher, physically.”</i></p> <p><i>“Much less BULLYING because I’m getting bullied too much. Help me teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“For the teachers to do more about bullying.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a more protective area for kindies.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I would like to see a type of buddy system set up – something for the younger kids to help them feel safe and heard.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a bully-free zone somewhere in the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Less bullying.”</i></p>

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also suggested changes to the environment and practices of schools. Increased natural surveillance was suggested through more staff on duty, the use of cameras, and use of walkie talkies for ease of communication. Changes to the physical environment included different building materials, different colour choices, increased lighting and planning to reduce congestion. Students indicated these changes would make schools safer spaces and more welcoming.

*“Have your phones during school because what if the duty teacher left the oval and someone might capture you and you will be able to call for help.” (Year 3 to Year 6)*

*“The back school gates are checked that they are closed by the teachers so that people don’t get in.” (Year 3 to Year 6)*

*“I would paint the toilets brighter colours inside so they are not so dark/spooky.” (Year 3 to Year 6)*

*“Less red and yellow bricks on school because people get hurt.” (Year 3 to Year 6)*

*“Keep the toilet cameras around the school but not in the toilets.” (Year 3 to Year 6)*

Critically, students wanted to be involved in their safety. They wanted schools to listen to student suggestions, to implement, promote and share with students the approaches that schools were adopting. As noted previously, such practices underpin child safe organisations.<sup>121</sup>