

3.2 Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future

Teachers play an important role in the trajectory of students throughout the formal schooling experience. Positive relationships between students and teachers have a long-lasting impact and can contribute to students' academic and social development, enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and promote engagement with school and learning.^{83 84 85} For some students, their relationship with a teacher may provide the stability, responsiveness and support from one trusted adult, which is beneficial for healthy development.⁸⁶

Survey findings

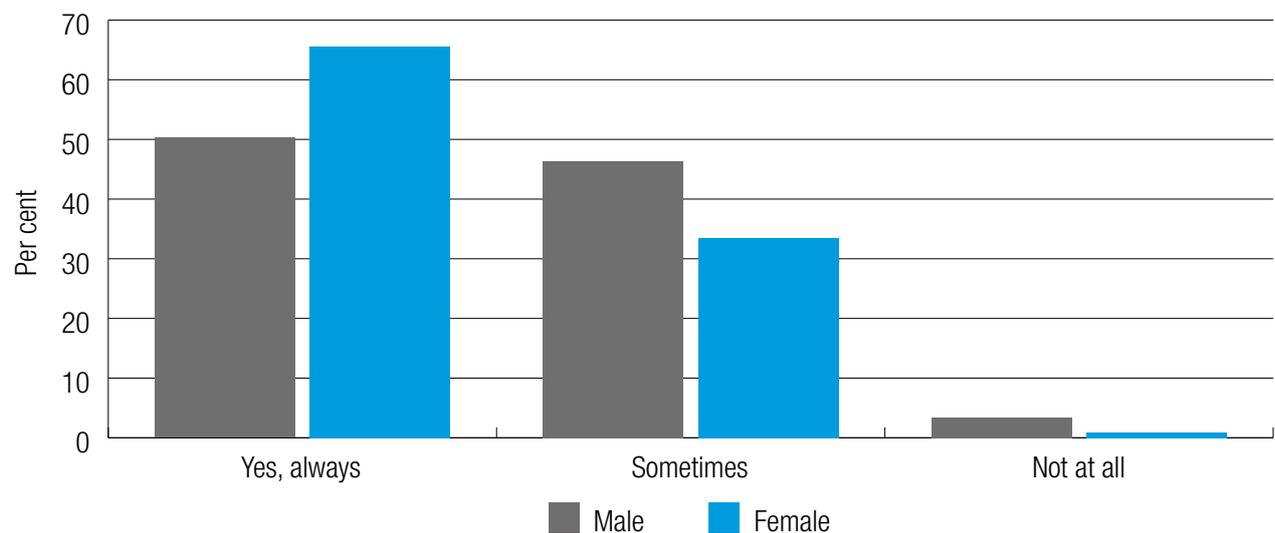
- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they 'always' get along with their teachers.
- 77 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they 'usually' get along with their teachers.
- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 39 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that their teachers care about them 'a lot'.
- One in 10 Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that teachers do not care about them.
- Students who 'always' or 'usually' get along with their teachers 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).

Getting along with teachers

Nearly 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students reported that they 'always' get along with their teachers while 39 per cent answered 'sometimes'. A few students (2.0%) said they do not get along 'at all'.

Among Year 3 to Year 6 students, girls were more likely than boys to say that they always get along with their teachers (65.6% of girls said this compared with 50.3% of boys).

Graph 3.9: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with teachers always, sometimes or not at all, by gender



Small differences were measured for Year 3 to Year 6 students in metropolitan areas and regional areas and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students but none of these differences were statistically significant.

Table 3.3: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students getting along with teachers always, sometimes or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes, always	50.3	65.6	60.1	57.8	59.9	53.4	59.2
Sometimes	46.3	33.5	38.6	39.3	38.4	42.5	38.9
Not at all	3.4	0.9	1.3	2.9	1.7	4.1	1.9

Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, more than three-quarters (76.7%) of participants reported that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers while almost 20 per cent answered ‘sometimes’. A small proportion of students – 3.9 per cent – answered with ‘hardly ever’ or ‘not at all’.

Female students were significantly more likely than male students to say that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers (79.7% of female students said this compared to 72.3%). There was no significant difference between students in regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal Year 7 to Year 12 students were less likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to report that they ‘usually’ get along with their teachers (65.1% compared to 77.4% of non-Aboriginal students) and more likely to report that they do not get along with their teachers ‘at all’ (7.0% compared to 1.3%).

Graph 3.10: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with teachers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by Aboriginal status

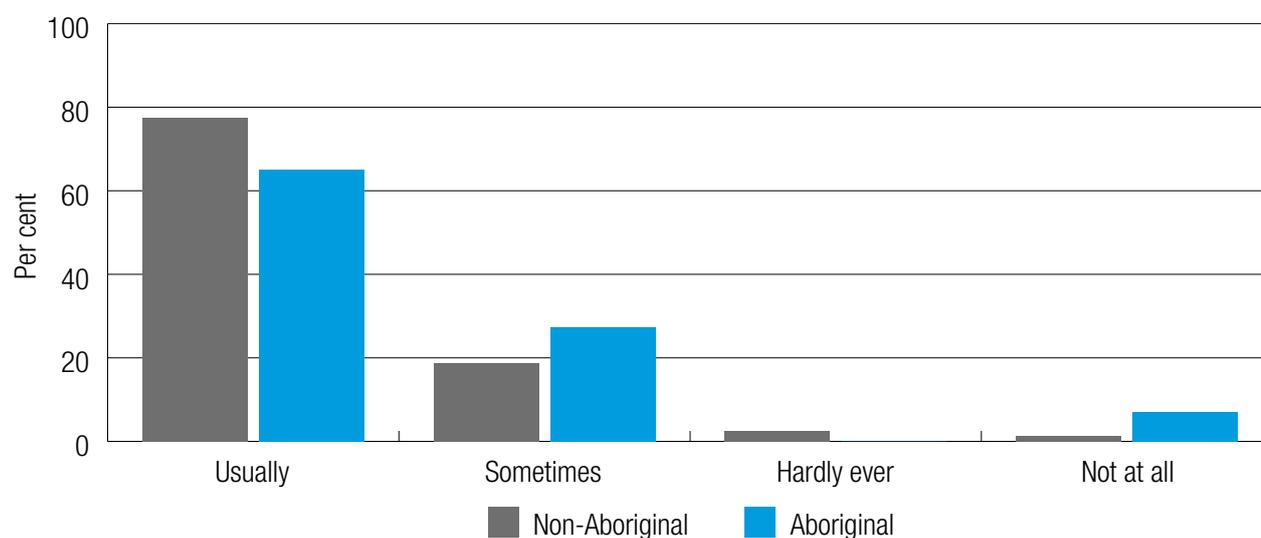


Table 3.4: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students getting along with teachers usually, sometimes, hardly ever or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Usually	72.3	79.7	75.1	80.3	77.4	65.1	76.7
Sometimes	23.5	16.7	20.5	16.8	18.8	27.3	19.4
Hardly ever	2.5	2.1	2.1	2.9	2.5	0.0	2.3
Not at all	1.8	1.5	2.3	0.0	1.3	7.0	1.6

Do students feel that teachers care?

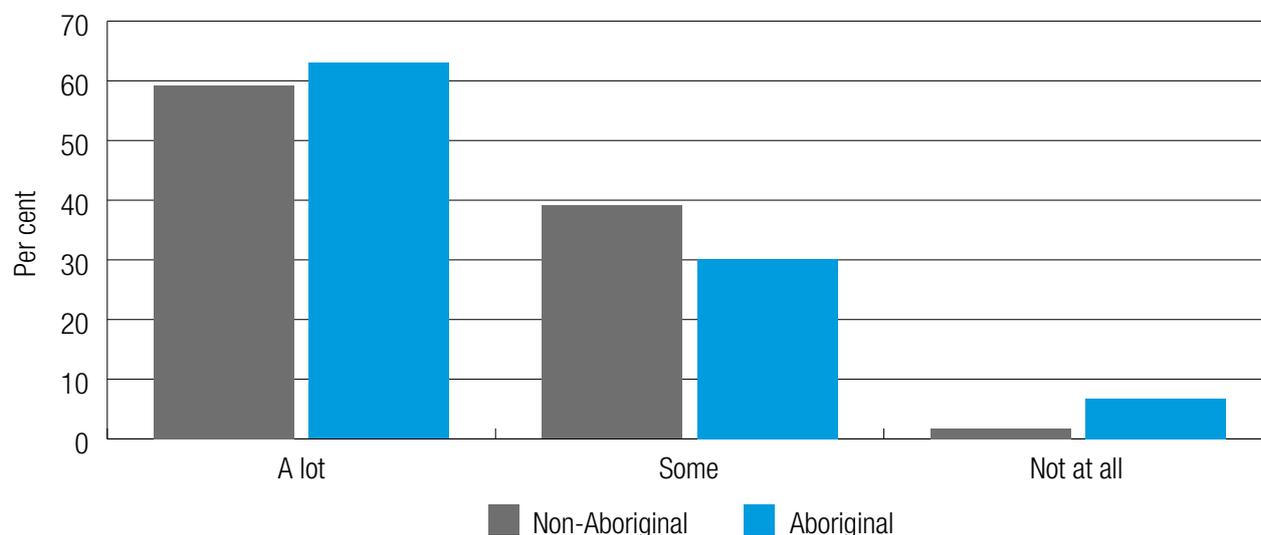
When asked how much they feel that teachers care about them, almost 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they feel that their teachers care ‘a lot’, 38 per cent said ‘some’ and about two per cent said ‘not at all’.

No statistically significant differences were measured between male and female students, students in different geographic areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Table 3.5: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
A lot	57.4	61.4	61.0	57.8	59.2	63.0	59.7
Some	39.0	37.7	37.1	39.9	39.1	30.1	38.2
Not at all	3.7	0.9	2.0	2.2	1.7	6.8	2.1

Graph 3.11: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by Aboriginal status



Among Year 7 to Year 12 students, less than 40 per cent (39.1%) answered they feel people at school (like teachers, other school staff and the principal) care about them ‘a lot’. Over one-half (52.3%) said ‘some’ and about one in 10 students (8.7%) answered ‘not at all’.

Students in metropolitan areas were more likely than students in regional areas to feel that people at school care about them ‘a lot’ (41.0% versus 34.6%) and also ‘not at all’ (9.9% versus 5.8%).

There was no significant difference between male and female students and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to this question.

Graph 3.12: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by region

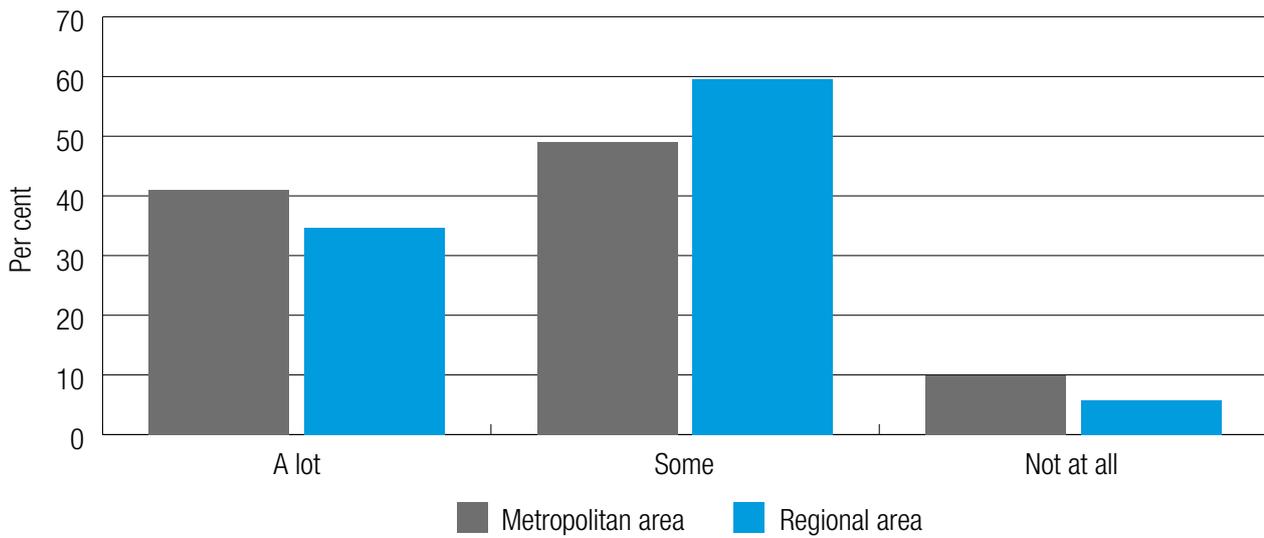


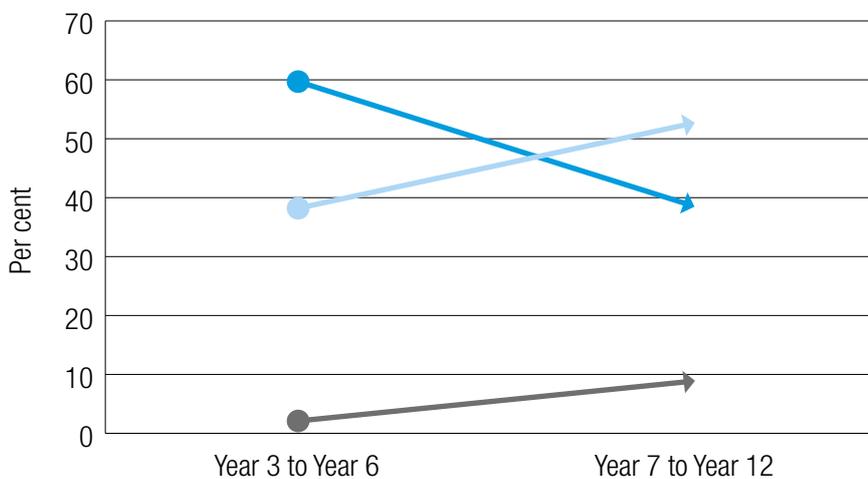
Table 3.6: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
A lot	41.1	37.9	41.0	34.6	39.0	40.9	39.1
Some	50.5	53.3	49.0	59.6	52.0	54.5	52.3
Not at all	8.4	8.7	9.9	5.8	8.9	4.5	8.7

It is important to note that the proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that people at school care about them ‘a lot’ is significantly smaller than that of Year 3 to Year 6 students (39.1% compared to 59.7%) and that consequently the proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling that teachers do not care about them is larger (8.7% compared to 2.1%).

The survey results suggest that while there is no major shift from primary to high school in regard to the proportion of students who say they ‘always’ or ‘usually’ get along with their teachers, there is a notable change in students’ assessment of how much they feel that teachers care about them.

Graph 3.13: Change in the proportion of students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by year level



What students like about teachers

In the survey, students were asked to think about their teachers and then say what they liked about them. For Year 3 to Year 6 students, the most frequently mentioned personal quality was ‘helpful/helping/helps me’ (25%) followed by ‘fun/funny’ (24%) and then ‘nice’ (22%).

Male and female students largely gave similar answers with the exception that girls were twice as likely than boys to say that they like their teacher because he/she is ‘helpful/helping/help me’ (30% of girls mentioned this quality compared with 16% of boys).

Year 3 to Year 6 students saw teachers (rather naturally) as the most significant source of help. When asked what type of help students need at school, 54 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls said they would ask ‘my teacher to explain it.’

When Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked to think about teachers they like and to articulate what they liked about them, the most commonly mentioned personal characteristic or quality was ‘helpful/helping/helps me’ (26%) followed by ‘fun/funny’ (20%) and then ‘understanding/understand’ and ‘nice’ (12% respectively).

There was some difference between the genders, with female students being twice as likely than male students to say they liked their teacher because they ‘understand/are understanding’ (16% of girls mentioned this characteristic compared with 7% of boys). Female students were also more likely to say they liked their teacher because they were ‘helpful/helping me’ (28% of girls compared with 22% of boys).

When asked about what type of help Year 7 to Year 12 students need at school, 39 per cent of male students and 37 per cent of female students answered ‘talking to the teacher’, which was the second most popular answer after ‘more explanations’.

Students’ assessment of fairness in teachers

Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked about teachers’ fairness towards students. These questions were not part of the survey for Year 3 to Year 6 students.

A little less than two-thirds of students (62.8%) reported that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’ but one in 10 (8.7%) said that teachers ‘hardly ever’ treat students fairly.

There was little difference between students of different genders, in different geographic areas or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in regard to their assessment of teacher fairness. It is worth noting however that among those students who gave their gender as ‘other’¹⁸⁷ not one respondent answered that teachers treat students fairly ‘most of the time’. Most of these students in fact answered ‘hardly ever’. More research with a larger sample size of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex is recommended to further explore these issues.

Table 3.7: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying teachers at their school treat students fairly most of the time, sometimes or hardly ever, by selected characteristics

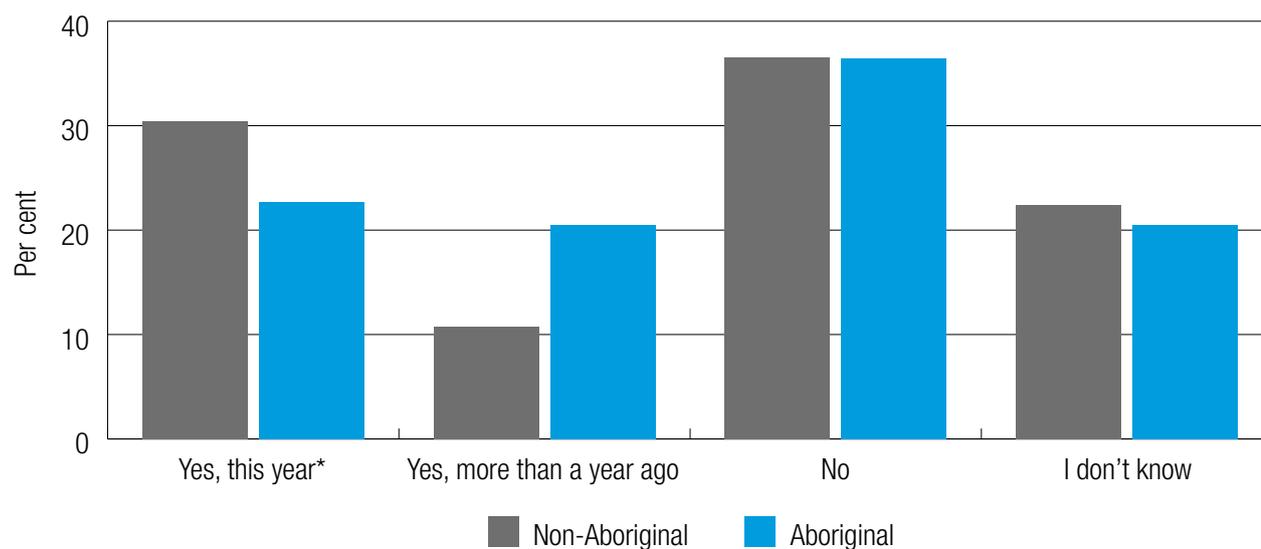
	Male	Female	Other*	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Most of the time	65.3	62.1	0.0	63.9	62.4	63.2	56.8	62.8
Sometimes	25.6	30.5	33.3	28.8	28.3	28.1	34.1	28.5
Hardly ever	9.1	7.4	66.7	7.2	9.3	8.8	9.1	8.7

* $n < 10$

When Year 7 to Year 12 students were asked if they had ever been treated unfairly, just over one-third (36.6%) answered in the negative. Almost 30 per cent of students said they had been treated unfairly ‘within the last month’ or ‘this year’, 11 per cent said ‘more than a year ago’ and 22 per cent ‘did not know’. There were no significant differences found between the genders and students in regional and metropolitan areas.

Aboriginal students were the group least likely to say they had been treated unfairly by a teacher in the past month or year. Compared to their non-Aboriginal peers, Aboriginal students were more likely to say they had experienced unfair treatment more than a year ago.

Graph 3.14: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by Aboriginal status



* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

Table 3.8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they have been treated unfairly (e.g. treated differently) by a teacher this year, more than a year ago, never or they don’t know, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Other**	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes, this year *	30.2	29.0	66.7	30.0	29.4	30.4	22.7	29.9
Yes, more than a year ago	10.9	11.8	0.0	10.8	12.5	10.7	20.5	11.3
No	36.1	37.2	16.7	37.6	34.1	36.5	36.4	36.6
I don't know	22.8	22.1	16.7	21.6	24.0	22.4	20.5	22.3

* Includes students who answered ‘yes, this month’ or ‘yes, this year’.

** $n < 10$

Students who get along with their teachers and feel that teachers care about them – Year 3 to Year 6

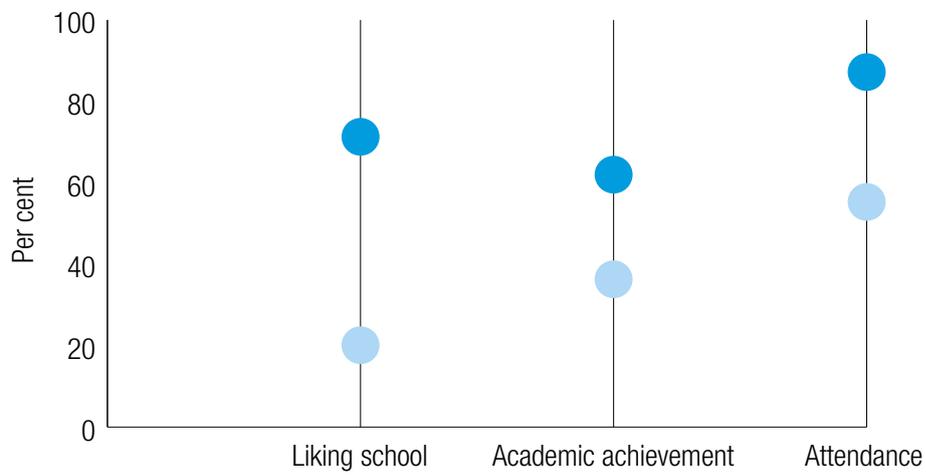
Compared to students who said they ‘sometimes’ get along with teachers, those who said they ‘always’ get along were more likely to give a positive rating of the engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (64.4% compared to 27.6%).
- Students report that they do ‘well’ or ‘very well’ at school (58.6% compared to 35.2%).
- Students say being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (82.5% compared to 63.8%).

The following graph shows results for Year 3 to Year 6 students who said they ‘always’ get along with their teachers and feel their teachers care ‘a lot’ about them, and compares them, to the results for students who said they ‘sometimes’ get along with their teachers and feel that their teachers care ‘some’.

There are significant differences between the two groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.15: Selected engagement indicators for Year 3 to Year 6 students who always get along with teachers and feel that teachers care a lot or get along with teachers sometimes and feel that teachers care some



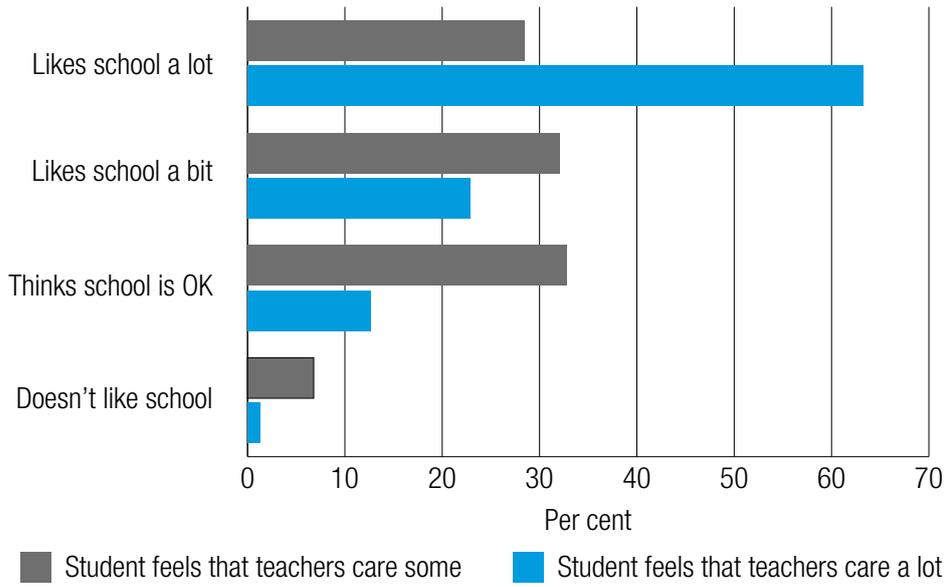
Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’, academic achievement includes students who said they do ‘well or very well’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student said they always get along with their teachers but feel teachers care some or less) have been omitted in this graph.

Further analysis of the data and in particular comparison between how students feel about their teachers with how they feel about school, showed how significant a functioning and caring teacher-student relationship is in the context of achieving strong student engagement with school and learning.

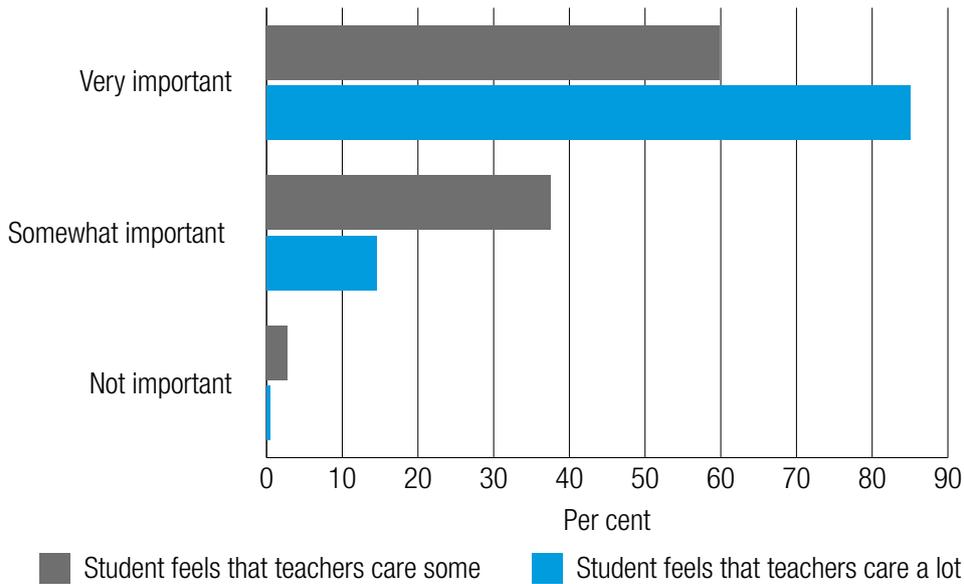
For Year 3 to Year 6 students, compared to students who said they feel that their teachers care ‘some’, those who said they feel that their teachers care about them ‘a lot’ were more likely to give a positive rating against the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ (63.2% versus 28.4%).
- Students report that they do ‘well or very well’ at school (54.5% versus 40.8%).
- Students say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them (85.1% versus 59.8%).

Graph 3.16: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don't like school, by how much they feel teachers care about them



Graph 3.17: Proportion of Year 3 to Year 6 students saying it is very important, somewhat important or not important to be at school every day, by how much they feel teachers care about them



Students who get along with their teachers and feel that teachers care about them – Year 7 to Year 12

As with the results for Year 3 to Year 6 students, the analysis of data gained from Year 7 to Year 12 students equally showed a positive association between students' assessment of their student-teacher relationships and their rating of the engagement indicators.

Students who said that they 'always' get along with their teachers, who felt that people at school care 'a lot' about them and who said that teachers treat students fairly 'most of the time', were more likely than other students to like school 'a lot', to feel like part of their school and to say that coming to school every day is 'very important' to them.

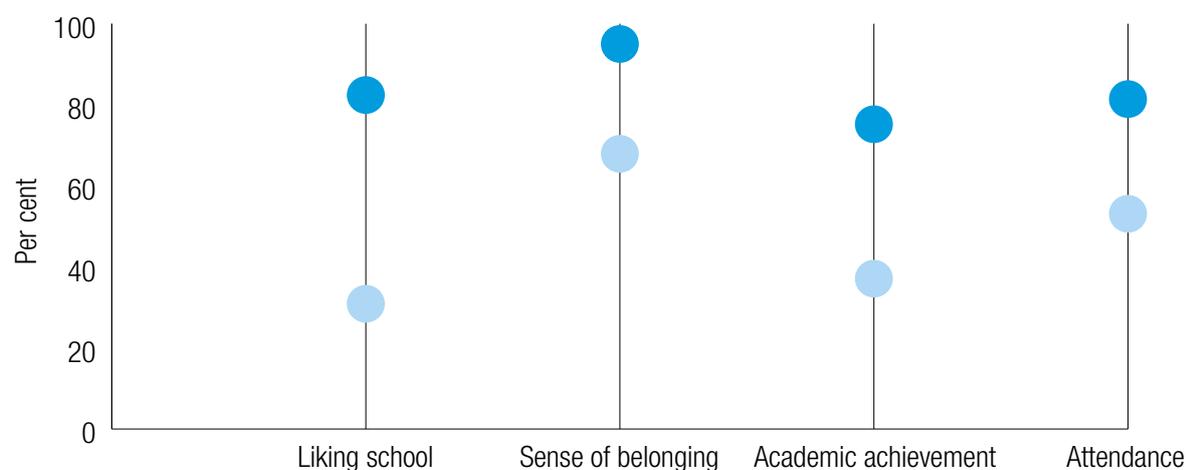
In particular, students who said they feel that people at school care 'a lot' about them were more likely than students who felt that people care 'some' to give a positive rating of the following engagement indicators:

- Students like school 'a lot' or 'a bit' (79.3% versus 50.9%).
- Students feel like part of their school (92.9% versus 70.5%).
- Students say being at school every day is 'very important' to them (79.9% versus 61.2%).
- Students' academic achievements are 'near the top' or 'above average' (72.0% versus 60.7%).

The following graph shows results for Year 7 to Year 12 students who said they 'usually' get along with their teachers and who also feel that their teachers care 'a lot' about them and compares them to the results for students who said they 'sometimes' get along with their teachers and they feel that their teachers care 'some'.

There are significant differences between the two groups of students in regard to all selected engagement indicators:

Graph 3.18: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who usually get along with teachers and feel that teachers care a lot or who get along with teachers sometimes and feel that teachers care some



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. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student said they usually get along with their teachers but feel teachers care some or less) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“Teachers are more than just teachers, they are mentors, role models, a shoulder to lean on and best of all they’re the best type of resource for educational and life-long skills.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 clearly articulated the significant influence of teachers in relation to their experiences of school and learning. Positive relationships facilitated engagement with school and learning, whereas poor relationships contributed to negative experiences and impeded engagement. Students largely spoke of their relationships and experiences as highly dichotomous in nature, with this dichotomy being more pronounced in the responses from students in Year 3 to Year 6.

A multiplicity of factors contributed to positive relationships that encompassed teacher attitudes, classroom practices and personal qualities. Students desired teachers who embodied the qualities and practised the behaviours that made them feel comfortable and valued. That is, teachers who showed an interest in and encouraged students, were welcoming, and who created enjoyable learning experiences within an emotionally and physically safe learning environment.

“The teachers that I like would be the caring ones. My teacher cares for us and is a great educator. I have learnt a lot from her.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“We wouldn’t ever fall through the cracks because our teachers would never let us. Our teachers are the best.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When teachers worked in these ways they promoted emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement with school and learning. Students enjoyed school more, were motivated to learn, and felt comfortable at school and when learning. Some indicated that positive relationships also contributed to improved academic achievement and a positive future.

“They teach you lots (while being fun) to help you have a better future.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

“Our teachers care about us, our future and our education.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When quality interpersonal relationships with teachers did not exist, students perceived they were more likely to disengage from learning and school, feel targeted for discipline and not receive support for learning.

Teacher characteristics contributing to positive student-teacher relationships

“They are very friendly. Instead of a little kid you are just an equal that wants to learn. If they get straight to the point and give us working time. Firm but fair attitude helps us get along with teachers.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified teacher characteristics significant for positive student-teacher relationships. The characteristics students described referred to:

- interpersonal qualities or attitude towards students
- classroom practices, including pedagogy or teaching methods and behaviour management
- personal qualities and characteristics.

Students expressed clear views about the actions and characteristics of teachers, preferring those who worked to build relationships with students, made learning enjoyable, provided support for learning, were kind and had a sense of humour. Respectful, trusting relationships in which teachers showed interest and demonstrated understanding towards students meant that students were more likely to feel comfortable and engage in learning.

Only one comment from all group discussions stated that the student/s did not like any teachers: *“Don’t like any”* (Year 7 to Year 12).

Interpersonal qualities

“They help me with my work and listen to my ideas. If I got hurt they help me. The teachers give me different work from others if they think the work’s too easy.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The ways teachers communicated and interacted with students resonated strongly with them. Students consistently highlighted that teachers who communicated clearly, took an interest in students, understood and valued the perspective of students and who displayed mutual respect were preferred.

Teachers who took a genuine interest in students as individuals and as children and young people were important for positive relationships. Students said teachers demonstrated their interest in students and their welfare through their verbal communication (asking questions about their life, not just about school and learning, listening to the responses and making connections) and non-verbal communication (smiling and positive body language). Relatively small actions were noted and appreciated by students, including teachers who smile, who know their name, who greet them and say goodbye, and who proactively ask how they are. These actions made students feel valued and cared for within the school, and also made communication with teachers easier.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“He is easy to get along with and he is easy to talk to and he makes an effort to take an interest in you.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Name of staff] because she talks to me like a friend not as a teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“Compliments.”</i></p> <p><i>“Whole body listening: looking at person and your whole body is listening.”</i></p> <p><i>“The teacher pays attention to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because she treats me like I’m her son!”</i></p> <p><i>“I like [name of staff] in my school because he listens to you and is fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Talks to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They listen to you.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Majority of teachers at my school. The teachers build an emotional bond/connection but still don’t cross the student/teacher boundary.”</i></p> <p><i>“She talks to me and not just about school, like her out of school life, we have a respectful relationship, it is also easy to communicate.”</i></p> <p><i>“Ask [about] health issues, not just about marks.”</i></p> <p><i>“Care about personal things – make you feel noticed.”</i></p> <p><i>“They talk to you about other things not just school work. They include you in conversations and they smile.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are involved with you as an individual and encourage you and make learning fun.”</i></p>

Having their voice heard mattered to students from Year 3 to Year 12 and contributed positively to student engagement in school and in learning. As such, teachers who sought the views of students, listened to their opinions and responded to their suggestions were highly valued. Relationships underpinned by mutual respect contributed to students feeling comfortable and valued at school. However, students in Year 7 to Year 12 also recognised that their lives beyond school would require active engagement on their behalf and therefore welcomed teachers who strove to develop these skills and treat them as young adults.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They treat me how I would treat them."</i></p> <p><i>"They let me be myself in class. Teachers that I have respect me so I respect them."</i></p> <p><i>"She is nice and helpful and respects me."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me when I need it and I do jobs for them if they need it."</i></p> <p><i>"They help whenever I ask and they trust you with laptops. Also they can sometimes be humorous."</i></p> <p><i>"He is nice to everyone and he respects the students and is funny."</i></p>	<p><i>"Make use of your ideas and thoughts."</i></p> <p><i>"They give you responsibilities."</i></p> <p><i>"Mutual respect."</i></p> <p><i>"Tell you the truth."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] includes you in stuff."</i></p> <p><i>"That you [are] more like an equal rather than a lower person than them."</i></p> <p><i>"They treat you with respect and like you aren't a little kid."</i></p> <p><i>"They have a nice personality, they understand that student opinions matter."</i></p> <p><i>"Treat you like a friend not like you're a student/treat us like adults not kids, to help us when we leave school."</i></p>

Students welcomed teachers who understood their perspectives and lives, and demonstrated concern for them. Empathy from teachers supported students to navigate and respond positively to concerns. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 referred to the stress of navigating friendships and juggling academic demands, whereas students in Year 7 to Year 12 highlighted various complexities and competing demands in their lives and referred to mental health concerns. When teachers understood students, students felt able to be themselves, increasing their self-confidence, self-esteem and feelings of acceptance at school.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"She understands everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me be confident about who I am."</i></p> <p><i>"They extend the due dates."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand some of the things you are going through because they were in primary school once."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help you with problems because they understand."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand if you are having a hard time with friends and how it impacts!"</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] because she always understands me."</i></p>	<p><i>"They understand how to manage the fun and serious times in class. They understand how we feel and help to maintain positive vibes."</i></p> <p><i>"Make us more confident about ourselves."</i></p> <p><i>"They understand you. They connect with you. They love you, care, support, encourage, like an older sister who protects us."</i></p> <p><i>"[My teacher] lets me see the Psych when my anxiety or my PTSD gets bad. She understands what I'm feeling."</i></p> <p><i>"Understands that we have other work."</i></p> <p><i>"Can relate to students."</i></p>

Teachers who took a genuine interest and understood the lives of students were also noted as reliable and important sources of advice and assistance. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 valued teachers who understood them well enough to notice when something was bothering them and were proactive in providing support. Advice and support to find a solution to any issue, not just those directly relating to school and learning, was an important factor for students in Year 7 to Year 12.

Importantly, student perception of the trustworthiness of teachers influenced their level of comfort in discussing concerns and whether they valued the advice provided. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 defined various barriers to accessing help and support (as discussed further in Chapter 4.7 – Help to overcome personal issues), including fear, embarrassment and judgement. Teachers who demonstrated genuine interest in students allayed many of these concerns.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“They help me when I’m upset.”</i></p> <p><i>“They check in on you if something is bothering you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help with small problems, which makes a BIG difference.”</i></p> <p><i>“She cares for us when we get injured.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because when I get bullied she helps me.”</i></p> <p><i>“She helps and talks to us about the hard times.”</i></p> <p><i>“They tell jokes a lot, they help me understand things, and they are trustworthy.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher, because she helps me with a lot of things and I can trust her with my problems.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They try to help you when you are in a hard issue and they try to keep you happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“They understand my situation and are very caring. They’re there for me when I need it most. They understand us.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are there to help you with problems in and out of school.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are two teachers I get along with the most. They help me when I feel down. Sometimes we go to say hi and ask how they are.”</i></p> <p><i>“You know that you can trust them and if you told them something you know they wouldn’t tell.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain things very well to you, personally and you completely trust their advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“They sound down to earth and not like god and only take charge when you need [them] to.”</i></p>

Classroom practices

“Each teacher has a fun and special way of teaching their students. I think that each student likes a different teacher because of the way they teach.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The classroom practices used by teachers influenced student perceptions of the teacher and learning. Students recognised the important role teachers have in creating enjoyable learning experiences, establishing classroom culture and providing assistance for learning. Throughout the consultation, students expressed a clear preference for learning that was interesting and meaningful, in a supportive learning environment and in which they received personalised assistance. Relationships between students and teachers, and subsequently engagement in learning, were enhanced when teachers worked to create the optimum conditions for engagement as described by students.

Students identified a variety of teaching methods that increased their engagement with learning. These included being ‘hands-on’, interactive and learning through games, strategies, excursions or incursions. Clear explanations from teachers were also essential for learning and contributed positively to student-teacher relationships and learning. Teaching methods that contribute to engaging learning experiences from the perspectives of students are explored in more detail in Chapter 4.3 – Teaching and learning that is interesting.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“She teaches things in a fun way and not a boring way.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher played learning games with me.”</i></p> <p><i>“My teacher made learning fun by doing real things with us in science, kind of like experiments, and let us use lolly snakes in maths and we could eat them after!”</i></p> <p><i>“Because she knows how to teach in different ways.”</i></p> <p><i>“She explains things well and it helps me learn stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain stuff right.”</i></p> <p><i>“They explain things really easily.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They make class fun while teaching us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Proactive and engaging.”</i></p> <p><i>“Try new ways of teaching.”</i></p> <p><i>“They actually teach you not just give you worksheets.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make class fun but still educational.”</i></p> <p><i>“They make the lesson more upbeat.”</i></p> <p><i>“Can talk to you in a way you will understand and get along and can communicate their ideas in a way we will understand.”</i></p> <p><i>“They give me actual important information that helps me ace tests.”</i></p> <p><i>“The way [they] explain the question and if you still don’t understand they keep finding a way to explain it better to help you.”</i></p>

Notably, teacher expertise and interest in the learning content was influential in student engagement in learning and their relationships with teachers. Students preferred teachers who knew and were passionate about their content area and who were passionate about teaching and learning generally. This was more commonly raised by students in Year 7 to Year 12, however, several suggestions for change from students in Year 3 to Year 6 related to teacher expertise.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“I’d get a trained scientist to teach us.”</i></p> <p><i>“When we get taught a different language the teacher needs to speak fluently and not get it off the internet.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Strong understanding of material in course.”</i></p> <p><i>“They’re passionate about teaching and what they teach.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are very enthusiastic about learning; make it fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivated to actively teach you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Enthusiastic and admit that they don’t know. Explains in multiple different ways.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need a real teacher not a fake one that gets stuff from the internet.”</i></p>

Students felt better positioned to engage in learning in an emotionally-safe, positive, inclusive and supportive learning environment. Consistency and predictability in attitude and responses of teachers and the environments they created were significant in students feeling safe and comfortable to learn. Students felt comfortable in a well-managed environment conducive to learning when teachers were calm, with clear and consistent rules and expectations, and provided encouragement and support.

Fairness was a particularly important classroom practice for students across Year 3 to Year 12. Students clearly disliked any perception of favouritism and those in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested teachers should have training so as not show favouritism or compare students. They suggested that it was helpful when teachers used the work of peers to showcase how to do something, but it was not helpful when used to show right vs wrong or put students down. Comparisons between students lowered their self-esteem, confidence with learning and sense of belonging.

High expectations, inclusive practice, encouragement and support for learning were significant teacher practices for engagement with school and learning. Students variously described how teachers enhanced their behavioural engagement through facilitating participation in learning activities, which also contributed to their sense of belonging at school, or assisted emotional engagement through encouragement and supporting students to do their best, and also developed their persistence with learning. Encouragement included the ways teachers spoke to students and their aspirations for them, and also rewards, such as free time, food or prizes – all contributed positively to student motivation.

Finally, support for learning contributed positively to student engagement and the relationships between teachers and students. Teachers who provided help for learning were valued by students as this enabled access to the curriculum, reduced anxiety and facilitated experiences of success. Students wanted teachers to be proactive and interested in providing individualised assistance. The willingness of teachers to help students outside of class was appreciated by students in Year 7 to Year 12.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
Fairness or no favouritism	
<p><i>"They're fair!"</i></p> <p><i>"They DON'T pick on me."</i></p>	<p><i>"Equality."</i></p> <p><i>"They are fair and care for each kid equally."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't show favourite students."</i></p>
Clear and consistent rules	
<p><i>"They are relaxed and not as many strict rules."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't get too frustrated."</i></p> <p><i>"They don't scream or yell. They are strict but nice. They don't give much homework. Explain thoroughly."</i></p> <p><i>"They are kind, they don't shout a lot and give you a second chance."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't shout and get angry easy."</i></p> <p><i>"[Name of staff] is amazing (doesn't be mean to us) (doesn't go off his head at one mistake) (he is chill) (doesn't yell at people) (listens) (kind) (doesn't overreact) (he lets us do what we want) (he answers questions)."</i></p>	<p><i>"He makes every lesson fun and isn't too strict unless he needs to be."</i></p> <p><i>"Laid back and not too crazy but sometimes you need a bit of nagging to get stuff done."</i></p> <p><i>"Chilled but serious."</i></p> <p><i>"They make a lot of jokes to distract from just learning. They don't punish you for things that are unimportant and don't affect you much."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers are funny and make learning more fun by not yelling at you all the time."</i></p>
High expectations, encouragement and inclusive practice	
<p><i>"My teacher likes to make sure everybody is doing the best they can."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher likes to make sure every single person is included and having fun."</i></p> <p><i>"It DOESN'T matter if you make a mistake."</i></p> <p><i>"The teachers I like make me like them because they are kind and encourage me to keep going. The ones that make it fun."</i></p>	<p><i>"The way they got people involved."</i></p> <p><i>"When it was a smaller group and your opinion was asked for."</i></p> <p><i>"Our teachers love their jobs, therefore they're always pushing us to the best of our abilities."</i></p> <p><i>"Constantly cheers me on, helping my anxiety."</i></p> <p><i>"They are encouraging and want you to get better."</i></p> <p><i>"Challenge you but leave the decision up to you if you will participate."</i></p>

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
Support for learning	
<p><i>"I think we get along really well with them because they help you so much."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher helped us by sitting down and doing the work with us."</i></p> <p><i>"He helps us with our work and always comes to us when we get stuck."</i></p> <p><i>"They help when you ask for it."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you on a hard question that you can't work out."</i></p>	<p><i>"They know what's best for us and when we're struggling."</i></p> <p><i>"They help me when I get stressed when I start a test."</i></p> <p><i>"Offer help, even when not asked."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher will give private help to students who need it and give them extra time or less work if all or one students struggle with a task."</i></p> <p><i>"When I need help they are actually interested in helping me, not just looking bored and annoyed that I asked."</i></p>

Personal qualities

"They are friendly, helping, protective and caring!" (Year 3 to Year 6)

The personal qualities that contributed to effective student-teacher relationships were clearly articulated by students. Teachers who were kind, happy, friendly and had a sense of humour, or who incorporated humour into teaching and learning, were viewed positively.

Teachers with an easy-going nature, who were calm, friendly and happy made students feel that school was enjoyable. From the perspective of students, these qualities made teachers more approachable and easier to talk to, and students felt teachers valued and cared for them.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They care about you."</i></p> <p><i>"The teacher that I like makes me get along by being kind to everyone."</i></p> <p><i>"Be really nice and caring because we're awesome."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you and are very friendly and happy."</i></p> <p><i>"At the start of the day, the teacher greets me with a big smile. The teacher is always funny and gets along with children really well."</i></p> <p><i>"They make sure you enjoy school."</i></p> <p><i>"My teacher makes school fun."</i></p> <p><i>"Because she always smiles and is ready to have fun."</i></p>	<p><i>"My math teacher is my favourite because she's so nice and talkative and that certainly helps us get along with them as well."</i></p> <p><i>"They be nice and help."</i></p> <p><i>"They do sport that I like, and it is easy to make a conversation because they are nice people."</i></p> <p><i>"Always smiling."</i></p> <p><i>"Approachable."</i></p> <p><i>"Friendly, easy to talk to."</i></p> <p><i>"Our teacher is patient and calm."</i></p> <p><i>"Those teachers are not so 'in your face'."</i></p>

A sense of humour made students feel relaxed and, when incorporated into lessons, humour made learning more enjoyable. Humour helped students to get along with teachers.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“They have a sense of humour.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because she’s fun and a funny person.”</i></p> <p><i>“They become lively and make jokes to make us happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Tells interesting stories.”</i></p> <p><i>“The thing I like about the teachers are they are funny, silly, forgetful.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like my current teacher because she has a sense of humour and she does a lot of fun activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers make me laugh.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They make you laugh.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sarcastic.”</i></p> <p><i>“Willing to joke when the time is right.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like all my teachers because they are funny and cool.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get along with most of my teachers because they are not all serious and like to have a laugh.”</i></p> <p><i>“They make jokes as well as teaching us.”</i></p> <p><i>“They have a good sense of humour.”</i></p>

Relationships with teachers and experiences of school and learning

“Because they can help when in need. They give us advice. They protect you from getting bullied, they support and encourage you. They teach you new things and make you achieve your goals.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Student’s experiences of school and learning were highly relational. Relationships with teachers influenced a range of aspects, including the environment, student learning, student behaviour, and whether students felt supported. For students across Year 3 to Year 12, the link between their relationships and experiences were highly dichotomous. That is, getting along with teachers contributed strongly to positive experiences, whereas not getting along with teachers meant more negative experiences. Generally, for students in Year 3 to Year 6, poor or antagonistic relationships with teachers were associated with increased likelihood of ‘getting into trouble’. While there were a few comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 in this vein, they were more likely to refer to the influence of relationships on their feelings of comfort at school or in the classroom, which in turn influenced learning behaviours and motivation.

For the majority of students, quality interpersonal relationships with teachers were viewed as important. Positive relationships were defined by teachers using effective communication, having a positive attitude towards students, being student-focused, creating interesting learning experiences and providing help as required. Through these relationships students described being more motivated to be at school and to learn. The amount of time spent at school was acknowledged by students in Year 3 to Year 6 and therefore underscored the importance of getting along with teachers. They explained if everyone gets along then school is ‘easier’ for students and teachers and everyone is ‘happy’. Year 7 to Year 12 students were also cognisant that student-teacher relationships affected teachers as well.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“If you don’t like your teacher it makes school difficult.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you see your teacher almost more than you see your parents so they are a big part of your life. If your teachers like you it means they will scream and yell less and that makes school more enjoyable.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they have an easier job.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you can’t agree with them you can’t learn. It’s important you have a friendly relationship. Because they’re going to be someone you’ll need to work with throughout your time at school.”</i></p>	<p><i>“[It’s important to get along with teachers] So you enjoy school.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can enjoy your classes with them more and learn more too.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have to come to school so if you like your teacher you will enjoy coming.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because you can help them and they can help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“So you can have more fun with them (i.e. jokes, etc).”</i></p> <p><i>“Respect teachers more.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because they are just human like us.”</i></p>

Some students indicated it was not important to get along with teachers and gave a variety of reasons, as detailed below. Some students referred to qualities and practices of individual teachers, and particularly attitude towards students, as influencing their relationships. While others simply stated that it was the role of teachers to teach rather than to get along with students. A few comments from students in Year 7 to Year 12 indicated they did not get along with any teachers.

Through the consultation students highlighted that when teachers were antagonistic or in conflict with students, students were less likely to attend or engage in school or learning because they did not feel safe, motivated or respected, or feel respect for the teacher. The notion that academic achievement may be influenced by relationships was a concern for some students.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Because you can still graduate and get good scores in stuff without being friends with them."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you have friends to hang out with."</i></p> <p><i>"No, they give you homework."</i></p> <p><i>"NO NO but not too sure."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes."</i></p> <p><i>"It shouldn't affect your grade whether they like you or not."</i></p> <p><i>"It's not important because not all teachers are nice."</i></p> <p><i>"Depends who they are otherwise NO!"</i></p> <p><i>"Yes but not if they hate us, well, prac students anyway."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are no fun."</i></p> <p><i>"It just doesn't happen."</i></p>	<p><i>"NO!!"</i></p> <p><i>"There are some teachers that don't get along with the students in our school. Some even don't care."</i></p> <p><i>"We don't know because we don't get along with teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they don't all respect you (students) the way we are meant to respect them (some)."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are acquaintances."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they're here to teach you not to talk to."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't have to get along with them but don't disrupt the class/not forced to like them (no)."</i></p> <p><i>"Only with some teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Because it is more important to learn than have a relationship with your teacher."</i></p>

School environment

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 also made a clear connection to positive relationships, the creation of a safe and comfortable environment and their learning. Students described the characteristics of a supportive and cohesive learning environment in which they felt capable of learning and acknowledged how relationships with teachers effected the learning environment.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They make us all become friends and help us get along with each other."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can work well in the classroom."</i></p> <p><i>"Because then you can work with them easier."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you do not want to get into a fight with your teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"So you can talk to them nicely."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you will get angry at the teachers and say things you will regret."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because then they can help you learn better and make you feel confident and have more education."</i></p>	<p><i>"Because maintaining a healthy relationship increases your overall happiness and allows you to feel comfortable talking to them."</i></p> <p><i>"Allows for a good and safe environment to learn in."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along with your teachers, you may feel too uncomfortable, sad, stressed out etc. to learn and perform to your best ability."</i></p> <p><i>"It allows students to feel happier, safer, more comfortable and makes learning easier."</i></p>

Learning

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 acknowledged the critical role of teachers for learning. Many comments related to the importance of getting along with teachers because teachers provide education for students.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Because they are teaching to help you and others.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they can teach me things I don’t know. So they can teach you lots of stuff.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because they give you education.”</i></p>	<p><i>“They try to give you good education for your future.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is easier to learn if you get along with the adults teaching you. Also, if they know you dislike them they will dislike you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, I think that having a good relationship with a teacher impacts learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you need to create a bond/relationship with those who we spend majority of our time with. We need to feel comfortable in order to learn and receive the best type of learning for our future/education.”</i></p>

Critically, students emphasised the significant influence of positive relationships on their learning. They recognised that positive relationships were underpinned by clear communication, which translated to a number of benefits. Teachers had a better understanding of the student and their learning needs, enabling them to tailor teaching as required. For students, it also meant they felt comfortable approaching the teacher for assistance, as discussed further in Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Because you can understand them better and it will help you learn better.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because they can teach you better.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it affects your learning and they need to help you when you need it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t you will have trouble understanding them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then they might understand you better.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Because if you have a strong healthy relationship with your teacher it’s easier to communicate with him/her and allows the student and teacher to explain and understand task and information given.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then teachers know you better and can cater to your learning style.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it makes it easier to communicate with them if you have an issue or problem.”</i></p>

Relationships with teachers strongly contributed to student behaviour and disposition towards learning. Students described being motivated and engaged with learning and practising learning behaviours, such as being attentive in class and completing homework, when relationships with teachers were positive. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also described feeling less anxiety when learning when relationships were positive.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Yes because then they don’t ask you difficult questions.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they won’t target you so you can learn better and they can help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t [get along with your teacher] you won’t know what to do because you won’t want to listen to them.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you fight/argue with your teachers then you might spend more time arguing then and effecting your friend’s learning opportunity.”</i></p> <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>“You are more attentive with people you get along with.”</i></p> <p><i>“You might not want to learn or come to school/class.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you dislike the teacher it can affect your learning and your view on the subject.”</i></p> <p><i>“Easier to learn if you respect them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gives you more motivation to do well.”</i></p> <p><i>“It affects your learning and motivation to focus and study.”</i></p> <p><i>“It means that they can encourage and get you interested in your learning.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you’re more likely to pay attention if you like the teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“You are looking forward to class.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you resent the teacher then you will resent the subject.”</i></p> <p><i>“It can make learning a lot easier and a good relationship with your teacher can make you want to strive harder to achieve higher marks.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have more motivation to listen and learn.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because then you would want to learn and ask questions.”</i></p>

For students in Year 7 to Year 12 in particular, student help-seeking behaviour was enhanced by positive relationships. Students felt comfortable and willing to ask for assistance when required and were confident in the predictability of teacher responses and that their questions were welcomed.

Year 7 to Year 12

“So you aren’t afraid to ask for help.”

“If you don’t get along with them, they might not help you, but if you do get along with them, they are more approachable to ask for help.”

“So that you have the courage to work + ask questions to them.”

“So you don’t feel awkward when you ask a question.”

The perceived level of support for learning provided by teachers was also influenced by student-teacher relationships. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 remarked that teachers were more likely to provide support if the student-teacher relationship was positive, with poor quality relationships resulting in reduced provision of help and support. However, students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt teacher support was also influenced by student interest and effort in the subject or learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"It means that if you have a good friendship with your teacher, she/or he might give you extra tips, also if you are really stuck, she will/ or he will give you some help and a tip for later on the same question."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if you're not kind to them they won't help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you don't want to let them not like you or they won't help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because then if you don't understand then you can ask her/him and they listen."</i></p> <p><i>"If you're naughty and silly, but you want help but they don't take you seriously."</i></p>	<p><i>"They will help you with your school work even when you don't need it they will always be there for you."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers are more likely to help you (out of their way) if they feel you're someone that wants to be interested in the subject."</i></p> <p><i>"To get more help in understanding the subjects and getting more information about the topics."</i></p> <p><i>"They help you learn extra."</i></p> <p><i>"They can help you with your work."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they can support you in class."</i></p>

Finally, students made an association between relationships and academic achievement. The power of teachers in relation to grades was noted by students and they felt strongly that relationships should not affect achievement. Some students highlighted that "it shouldn't affect your grade whether they [teachers] like you or not" and "you can still graduate and get good scores and stuff without being friends with them." However, the majority of comments intimated that positive student-teacher relationships contributed to higher achievement in school.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"You will not get a good report."</i></p> <p><i>"You will do better in school."</i></p> <p><i>"You will do better in class if you like your teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"So you get good grades."</i></p> <p><i>"Because you can be a suck up and get an A."</i></p>	<p><i>"Yes, because if you don't then they will give you bad grades."</i></p> <p><i>"They will also not care how well you do at school."</i></p> <p><i>"Get good grades/behaviour grade (yes)."</i></p> <p><i>"If you don't get along well with them it could affect your grade."</i></p> <p><i>"You won't fail."</i></p>

Beyond academic achievement, students also expressed a clear connection between relationships with teachers and a good education and future.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Yes because you will get a better life ahead."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they help you improve your education and be a better person."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers can help you get a better future so you get a better opportunity."</i></p>	<p><i>"Teachers are more than just teachers, they are mentors, role models, a shoulder to lean on and best of all they're the best type of resource for educational and life-long skills."</i></p> <p><i>"Also, getting along with teachers is good for learning how to get along with workmates."</i></p>

Interactions with teachers

Students felt strongly about equality and fairness and were attuned to differing teacher practices towards students. They explained it was not beneficial for student-teacher relationships when students were treated differently by teachers and, for some, having poor relationships with teachers meant a student was more likely to be judged, picked on or treated unfairly.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Because they might be mean to you if you hate them."</i></p> <p><i>"So you're not on your teacher's bad side."</i></p> <p><i>"So then they don't give you the so called 'evil eye'."</i></p> <p><i>"It is important to get along with your teachers so you won't get into trouble and you won't get suspended."</i></p> <p><i>"So you don't get detention."</i></p> <p><i>"So that you don't get in trouble for things that you didn't do."</i></p>	<p><i>"If you don't get along they'll think less of you."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, because it's great to get along with your teacher so that they don't pick on you without any reason."</i></p> <p><i>"Some teachers will downgrade students or exclude students in discussions between students."</i></p> <p><i>"Because if not they might be harsh on you because they don't like you."</i></p> <p><i>"Because otherwise they will teach you different and give you lots of punishments."</i></p> <p><i>"More detentions if you don't get along with them."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they are the ones who teach us and who can get us in trouble and build a bad reputation."</i></p>

There were a range of benefits associated with having positive relationships with teachers. Students described an increased level of trust, responsibility, autonomy and voice, which made them feel valued. Further, students in Year 7 to Year 12 perceived greater understanding and leniency from teachers.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"If you do get along with your teacher they will be nice to you."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they will listen to you and you get rewards."</i></p> <p><i>"So you get certificates."</i></p> <p><i>"Give us freedom to do things on our own."</i></p> <p><i>"Rely on you to be responsible!"</i></p> <p><i>"So they trust you."</i></p>	<p><i>"You can get extension easier."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes because they won't be so hard on you. When you don't finish work. Also they won't get so angry."</i></p> <p><i>"Because the teachers will favour you in class."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes so you can convince them to doing things you want them to do for your class."</i></p> <p><i>"Trust and responsibility is given/built."</i></p> <p><i>"Get picked for important things."</i></p> <p><i>"Because they give us free time."</i></p>

Suggestions from students

“Teachers who care about us, not just the school work.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

When asked to consider what they would change about their school, students articulated a desire for ‘better’ school staff.

Students wanted school staff who were enthusiastic, responsive, qualified, helpful, approachable, and who employed engaging pedagogy and treated students fairly and equally. Such behaviours helped students engage in learning and feel comfortable at school rather than practising disruptive behaviour as a result of boredom, frustration or feeling uncomfortable or incompetent. Many students already had teachers who acted in these ways, as such comments often referred to having more teachers like this or more time with preferred teachers.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“[...] Only the nice teachers can stay e.g. [name of staff] can stay.”</i></p> <p><i>“More teachers like [name of staff].”</i></p>	<p><i>“More teachers like [name of staff]; understands students, makes learning interesting – [name of staff]; gets along with students – [name of staff]; because he makes school work fun and gives homework – [name of staff] – because he is really engaging and fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bring our old principal back please!”</i></p>

Students described the ways in which staff acted that did not promote engagement. This included yelling or using a raised voice, being rude, mean, overly strict or racist, showing favouritism and bullying.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“I would get rid of all the very mean teachers who are very disrespectful to the students.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change my teacher because she is not very nice to the students and favours some.”</i></p> <p><i>“For the teacher to respect everyone the same.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not to have racist teachers and principals because some people think it’s not fair.”</i></p> <p><i>“Make the teacher nicer and kinder to the children.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers should want to come and eat with us and shouldn’t be allowed to go somewhere no limits.”</i></p> <p><i>“I would change the teachers because I would want them to help students when they’re hurt and crying.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The teachers and principal should be nice and not racist to everyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“We shouldn’t feel anxious as we walk into a certain class with a certain teacher.”</i></p> <p><i>“The thing I would like to change is the teachers because some of them are racist and they favour other students.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers need to treat students equally.”</i></p> <p><i>“If the teacher didn’t get worked up about little things.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Principal:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• We need someone who personally knows us and is ALWAYS nice.</i> <i>• Don’t come in guns blazing.</i> <i>• Don’t tell me I’m on drugs.”</i>

While the vast majority of students spoke of positive and productive relationships with teachers, some students in Year 7 to Year 12 stated that they experienced bullying from teachers and emphasised that this should not occur.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Teachers keep hands to themselves.” (Facilitator discussed this comment with the group of students who explained this meant the teacher pushing or pulling a student’s arm to prompt or move students, such as when lining up).

“[Name of staff] is strict but can be rude and sometimes bully us.”

“Teachers treating you poorly:

- yelling*
- pushing*
- slapping (once).”*

To ensure they were working with school staff who embodied qualities and enacted practices that facilitated engagement, students in Year 3 to Year 6 suggested removing school staff they did not like, making school staff nicer and more respectful, ensuring preferred school staff were employed full-time and enhancing school staff stability (through limiting the use of relief teachers, frequent changes in relief teachers and school staff leave). As a way to improve how students and teachers got along, students in Year 7 to Year 12 suggested improved qualifications for teachers and school employment practices.

Ways to build relationships – the perspective of students

“Children learn better and teachers teach better if they like each other and are friends.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students were asked for their suggestions on how to improve the relationships between students and school staff. As identified throughout the report, the vast majority of students already had positive relationships with school staff and acknowledged the ways in which staff worked to build relationships, support student learning and future aspirations.

Comments to improve relationships largely related to the characteristics that contributed to positive student-teacher relationships as discussed earlier in this chapter.

The majority of comments from students suggested relationships with school staff would be improved by school staff demonstrating care and respect towards students and showing interest in their wellbeing. This included teachers having conversations with them about more than school work, being consistent, supportive and approachable, and treating all students fairly.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“When you say things like ‘Good Morning’.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers should give us more attention because then we can get along easily.”</i></p> <p><i>“Being respectful and helpful so all the staff and students can like each other and agree with each other’s decisions.”</i></p> <p><i>“We can get along if the teacher is nice, caring and fun.”</i></p> <p><i>“By being happy.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Always be interacting in a friendly matter.”</i></p> <p><i>“Speak cheerfully.”</i></p> <p><i>“Addressing student’s needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers need to care about the students and try to help them at all times.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t abuse the power they have over students.”</i></p> <p><i>“Certain teacher/s who make me dislike school. There is only 1 or 2 but they don’t treat pupils and have unpredictable behaviours.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not so strict!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t yell at us if we don’t do anything wrong just because you’re having a bad day.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they say they will do something they should actually do it.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers shouldn’t be allowed to lose their temper at students for little things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Treat every student fairly!”</i></p>

For students in Year 7 to Year 12, demonstrating care and respect meant recognising and supporting their emerging desire for autonomy.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Make sure teachers and students both understand how important mutual respect is.”*
- “Allow students to be more independent with learning.”*
- “Don’t put us on the bench.”*
- “Teachers should not look down on us and treat us like our parents expect them to treat us. We always respect them so we just ask for the same in return.”*
- “Don’t treat us like lesser beings.”*
- “Don’t assume all students want to cause problems.”*
- “Understanding that they both have opinions, that may be different. They don’t treat us like little kids and we don’t treat them rudely.”*
- “Don’t hold grudges against students when they did something stupid 3 years ago.”*

Students also suggested school staff work in ways that create the optimal environments for engagement. That is, school staff who were relaxed, lenient and consistent, designed effective learning experiences, worked to understand students and provided encouragement with regard to learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Some of my ideas are that students don’t like teachers that yell all the time so if the teachers don’t yell all the time it will be better.”</i></p> <p><i>“To talk and know how they work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Giving students a chance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Positive reinforcement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Well the teachers go crazy when we ask a question.”</i></p> <p><i>“Explain the instructions clearly.”</i></p> <p><i>“They tell more jokes.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Not bombarding us with unnecessary tasks, if you can see we aren’t finishing/doing all the work, reflect and try to understand why.”</i></p> <p><i>“Finding ways to interact with students during the learning process.”</i></p> <p><i>“Actually teach us not just give us heaps of worksheets and be lazy = students don’t know how to do and the teacher gets angry.”</i></p> <p><i>“Get teachers that aren’t only good in their field, that are good at teaching too.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can teach us in a way that we understand not how they know.”</i></p> <p><i>“Be open to giving help, and don’t use fear.”</i></p> <p><i>“Take you out in the sunshine so you’re not always in a dark room.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have more engaging yet still educational activities.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers could give rewards for children so that students work hard.”</i></p>

Students clearly articulated a desire to be more involved in the decisions regarding their learning and the school more generally as this demonstrated the school and teachers valued and respected students. Students explained their relationships with school staff would be improved if they felt accepted, when participation was enabled and their ideas utilised. Several suggestions were put forward as to how students could be supported to voice their ideas, such as through discussions about ways to change the school or the focus of learning and within employment processes for school staff.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"They have to accept us the way we are."</i></p> <p><i>"Listen to other people's ideas because some people think their ideas are the best but other people's ideas could be better."</i></p> <p><i>"To listen to them and respect their rights and maybe make friends with them."</i></p> <p><i>"I think we could have a talk with our teacher about what we like in a teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers should listen to kids for their ideas."</i></p>	<p><i>"Let the students have a voice."</i></p> <p><i>"Make a student be a teacher."</i></p> <p><i>"More student involvement in learning decisions (more co-operation)."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers listen to students' point of view."</i></p> <p><i>"Respect other values/cultures ideas."</i></p> <p><i>"Have regular school meetings and everyone has to have a suggestion."</i></p> <p><i>"Have a few interviews and find out their teaching styles... etc."</i></p> <p><i>"Understanding the student's point of view."</i></p> <p><i>"Get kids to interview them (sensible ones)/get example lessons for students then get feedback/employ or don't employ them."</i></p>

Critically, students recognised that they also had an active role to play in the development of positive relationships. They referred to a range of student behaviours that would support positive relationships, including being polite, friendly and demonstrating mutual respect.

Students noted that the attitudes and behaviours of some of their peers needed to change – with students showing more respect towards teachers, particularly when teaching. To support this, students felt teachers needed to respond appropriately when students were being disruptive in class.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Be nice to the teachers so they will be nice to you."</i></p> <p><i>"Treat people the way you want to be treated."</i></p> <p><i>"By buying your teacher a present."</i></p> <p><i>"Students not arguing back at staff or teachers. Because students get annoyed or angry at teachers but it makes it worse if students argue back with them."</i></p>	<p><i>"The students are rude to some of the teachers and they have to be thankful for all the teachers do for us, they even help us at lunch time."</i></p> <p><i>"A bit more support from the students, not degrading teachers before they even do anything to them."</i></p> <p><i>"Students should behave better/respect others and not distract people during class time."</i></p> <p><i>"Students should behave and try and get along with staff and teachers."</i></p> <p><i>"Respect from students."</i></p> <p><i>"Don't kill their teaching buzz."</i></p> <p><i>"Get rid of the annoying/naughty kids!"</i></p> <p><i>"Not call out in class (students)."</i></p>

Students felt that collaborative activities could support the development of quality interpersonal relationships between school staff and students. A range of activities were put forward that enabled time spent together and collaboration, including talking, introductory lessons, ice-breaker activities or quizzes, morning teas or lunches, tutoring, sports, competitions, activities such as excursions, camps or plays, and extracurricular activities such as clubs, socials and projects.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“A class at a time could meet with the teachers and staff for tea.”</i></p> <p><i>“There could be a session where we get to know each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some ideas maybe to have a student, teacher and staff ‘fun’ day to help build relationships.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fun activities that include everybody.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some ideas to improve the relationships between students and teachers are maybe doing some more fun events like going to the beach as a class doing fun stuff as a group.”</i></p>	<p><i>“By interacting outside of class.”</i></p> <p><i>“You talk to each other.”</i></p> <p><i>“For all they know they might actually like someone that they never originally talked to. So they could just get along with them anyway.”</i></p> <p><i>“More whole school activities when everyone can get involved.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not staff morning teas – school morning teas.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a school meeting where students go to their favourite teachers and talk about getting along.”</i></p> <p><i>“Student vs teacher games to show everyone’s skills and talents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Teachers not in their staff rooms all day, and instead come and play with us and bond with us because we are awesome and why not?”</i></p> <p><i>“Combine classes so we get to interact with other students and teachers (even if it’s only for a day).”</i></p> <p><i>“By holding school events that get every year group to co-operate with other years allowing them to mingle (remove segregation and increase culture).”</i></p> <p><i>“Team bonding/building games fun, comfortable and healthy environment.”</i></p> <p><i>“They could organise teacher-student meetings as right now we only really have meetings with our parents about our school work. This way we could talk about our outside-of-school life.”</i></p>