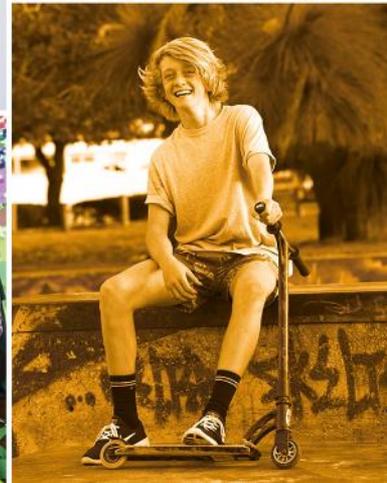




Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

School and learning through the eyes of students

March 2018 - Colin Pettit, Commissioner



Our Vision

That all children and young people are heard, are healthy and safe, reach their potential and are welcomed as valued members of the community and in doing so we build a brighter future for the whole community.





The Act – Four guiding principles

- a) **Children and young people are entitled to live in a caring and nurturing environment and to be protected from harm and exploitation**
- b) **The contributions made by children and young people to the community should be recognised for their value and merit**
- c) **The views of children and young people on all matters affecting them should be given serious consideration and taken into account**
- d) **Parents, families and communities have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of their children and young people and should be supported in carrying out their role.**

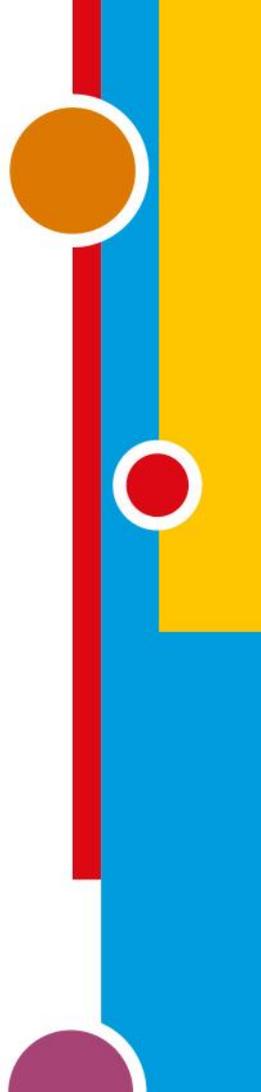


UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account.

Article 28 Children have the right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children's dignity.

Article 29 Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full.





Advocate

Consult

Monitor - laws, policies and practices

Promote the voices of children and young people

Research trends and information

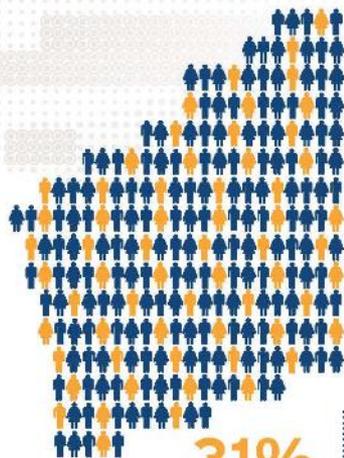
Inquire on behalf of children and young people on issues relating to their wellbeing.



“You can’t let kids going around doing anything they want... they could cause mayhem... there has to be some sort of boundaries.”

13 year-old boy

Western Australia's children and young people



Approximately
589,000

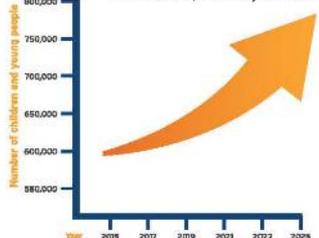
children and young people live in Western Australia, who comprise **23 per cent** of the state's population.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Demographic Statistics, December 2016)



In the last 10 years, there has been a **26 per cent** increase in the number of children aged 0 to 8 years living in WA.

WA's population of children and young people is projected to increase by **31 per cent** to more than 800,000 by 2025.

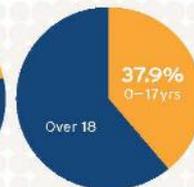


Aboriginal children and young people

There are about **38,000** Aboriginal children and young people aged under 18 years living in WA. Children and young people aged under 18 years comprise **37.9 per cent** of the total WA Aboriginal population.



WA population



WA Aboriginal population

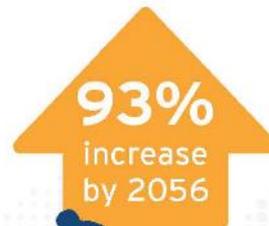


There were **35,652 births** registered in WA during 2016.



Around **152,000** or **26 per cent** of children and young people in WA live in regional and remote areas.

The number of WA children and young people is projected to increase by almost **93 per cent**, to just over **1.2 million** by 2056.





What children tell us is important

- Family
- Friends / community
- **School**
- Connection to culture for Aboriginal CYP





Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians

- Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to ensure schools engage young Australians, parents, carers, families, other training providers, business and the broader community students' progress through schooling, and to provide them with personal development and citizenship opportunities.
- Partnerships between students, parents, carers and families, the broader community, business, schools and other education and training providers bring mutual benefits and maximise student engagement and achievement.



School and Learning Consultation - Overview

Designed to canvas a broad range of factors identified by the literature review as associated with engagement and disengagement including:

- relationships with staff and students
- curriculum content
- help and support
- participation in school activities
- family situation and involvement
- safety
- health
- attendance
- pedagogy
- academic achievement



Profile of participants

98 schools

- all education regions of WA

Survey: 1,812 students

Group discussions: 1,174 students

Students in Year 3 to Year 6: 954 students

Students in Year 7 to Year 12: 837 students

Students attending education support centres: 21 students





Indicators

Four elements emerged from the consultation as clear indicators of a student's engagement in school and learning:

Attendance	Academic achievement	Liking school	Sense of belonging at school
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Value placed on regular attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-reported school results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A lot or a bit• School is OK• Not liking school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indicators 3 and 4 were combined for Year 3 to Year 6 students, to make them easy to understand

By analysing participants' comments in relation to these four indicators, the consultation was able to identify what factors had the most influence on their engagement.



What did students say about their engagement?

Attendance

- **Three-quarters** of Year 3 to Year 6 students and
- **Two-thirds** of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that it is **very important** to them to be at school every day.

Academic achievement

- **One-half** of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they do **well/very well** in their school results.
- **Two-thirds** of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported that their school results are **above average** or near the top.

Sense of belonging and liking school

- **Three-quarters** of Year 3 to Year 6 students said they like school.
- **Three-quarters** of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel like they are part of their school. **One-half** said they like school.

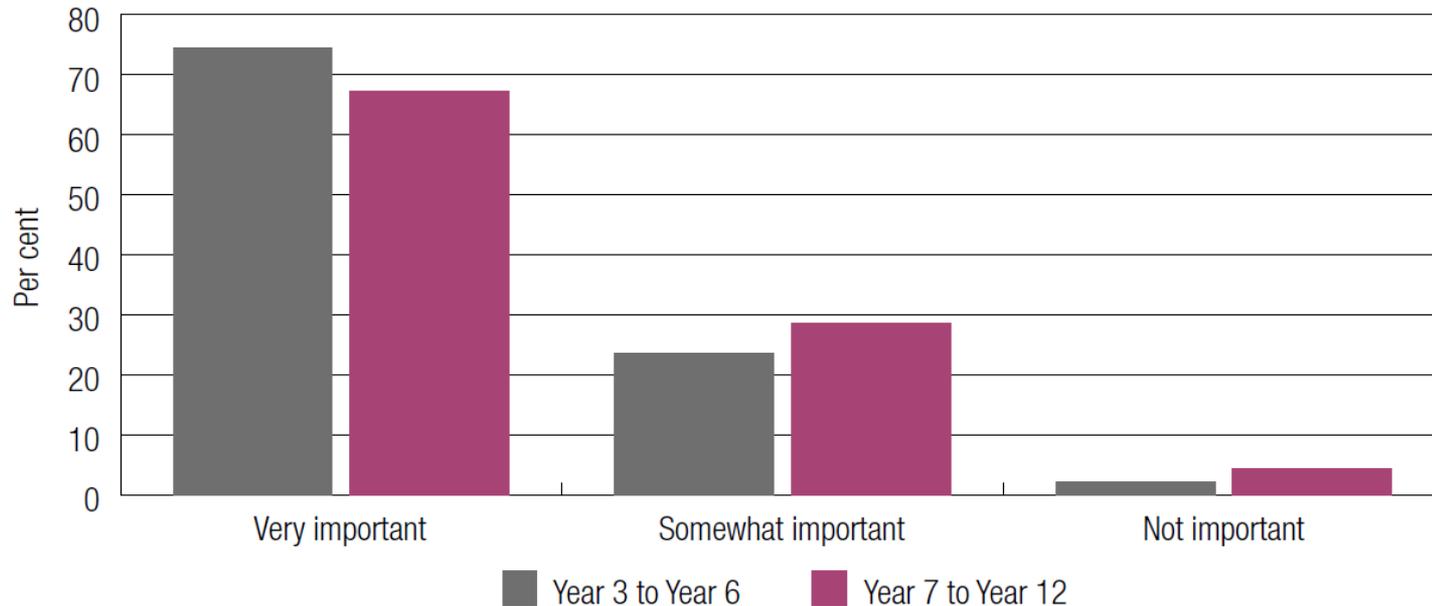


“I feel lucky and privileged to be able to go to school and therefore I try not to take it for granted. Even though sometimes school can be a bit much for me to handle, I just sit back and realise how lucky I am to have an opportunity every single day to learn. That is why what I am learning at school is valuable.”

(14 year old girl)

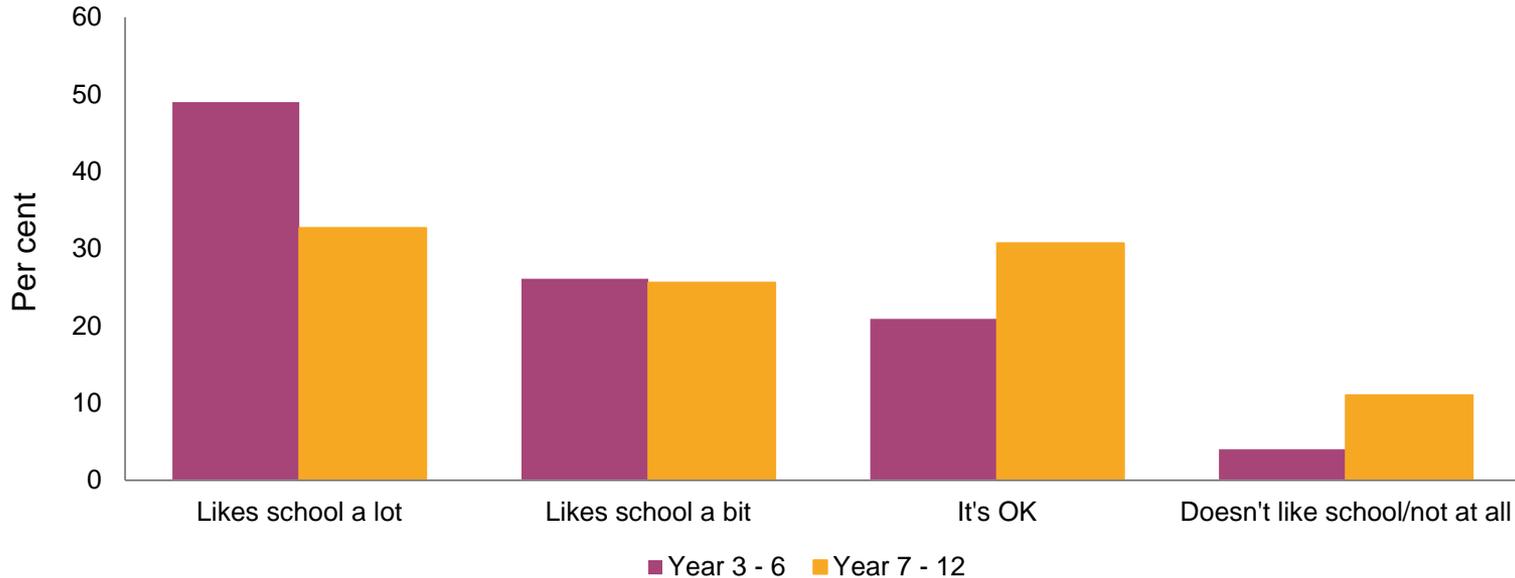


Attendance: Proportion of students saying being at school every day is very important, by year level





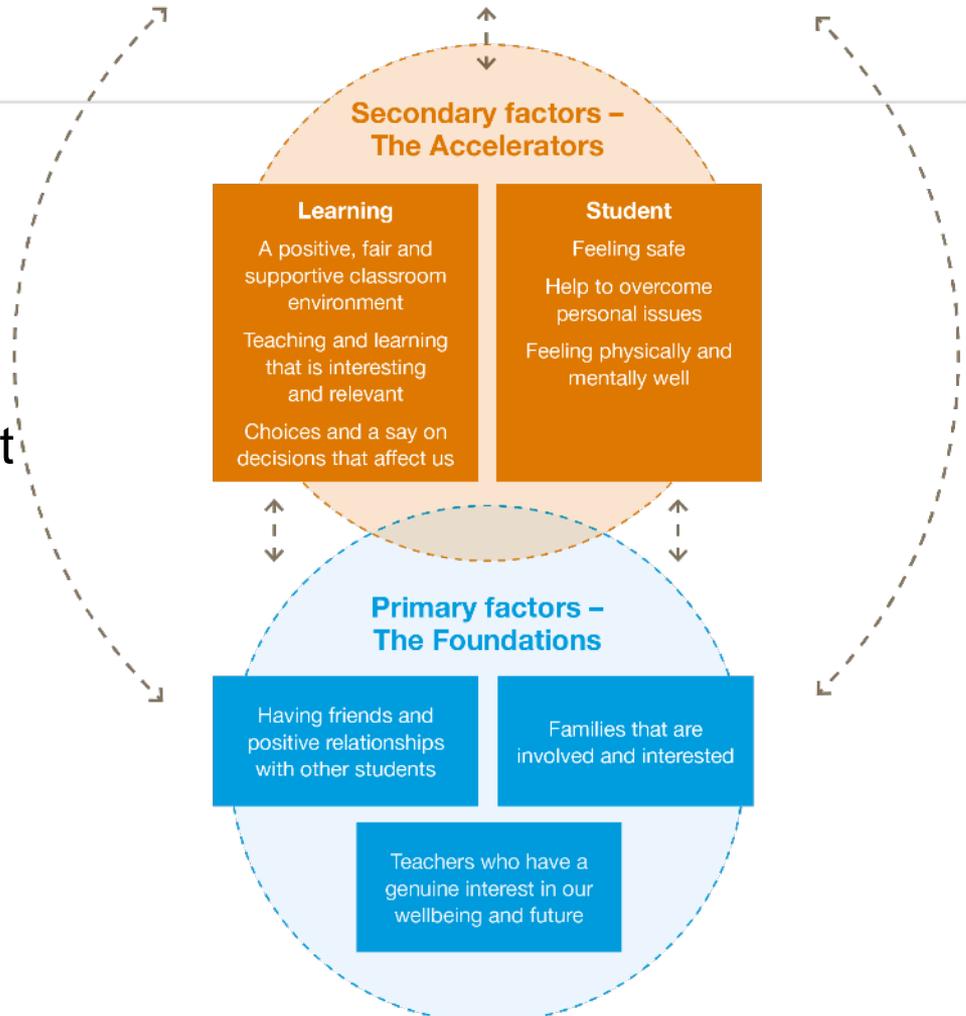
Proportion of participating students liking school a lot, a bit, saying school is okay and not liking school, by year level





The Student Engagement Framework

Level of engagement in school and learning



Secondary factors – The Accelerators

Learning A positive, fair and supportive classroom environment Teaching and learning that is interesting and relevant Choices and a say on decisions that affect us	Student Feeling safe Help to overcome personal issues Feeling physically and mentally well
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Primary factors – The Foundations

Having friends and positive relationships with other students	Families that are involved and interested
Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future	



Primary factors – The Foundations

Having friends and
positive relationships
with other students

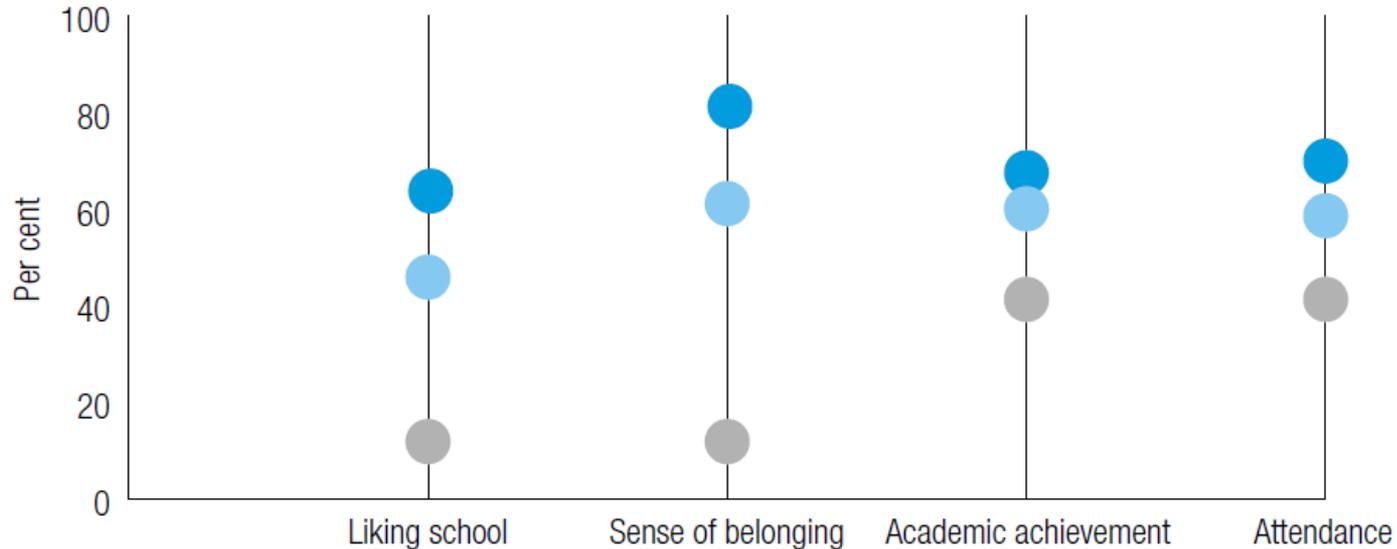
Families that are
involved and interested

Teachers who have a
genuine interest in our
wellbeing and future



Having friends and positive relationships with other students

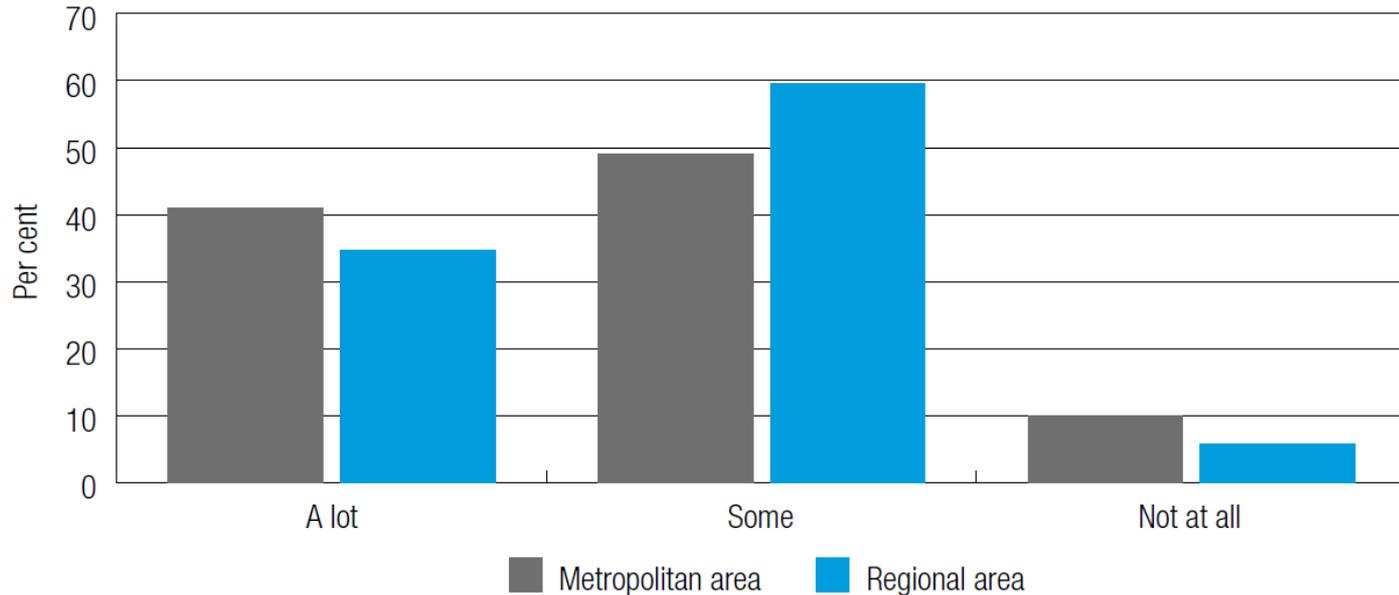
Selected engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students who get along with peers *usually*, *sometimes* or *hardly ever/not at all*





Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future

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





Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future

Influence on engagement

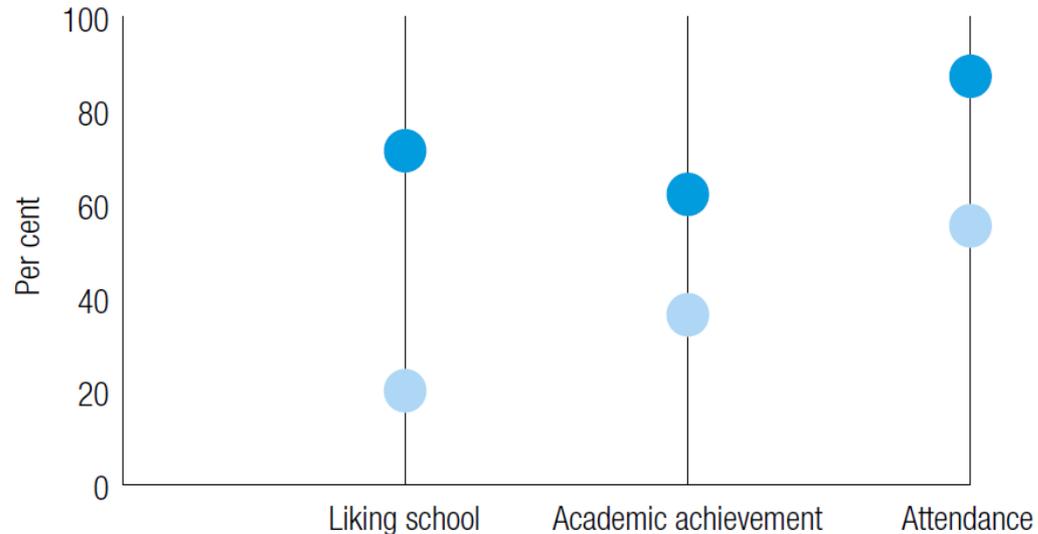
Students who have positive relationships with their teachers are more likely to:

- like school and feel like they are part of school
- achieve higher academic results
- value regular attendance

Engagement indicators for
Year 3 to Year 6 students who
**always get along with teachers
and feel that teachers care a lot**

and who

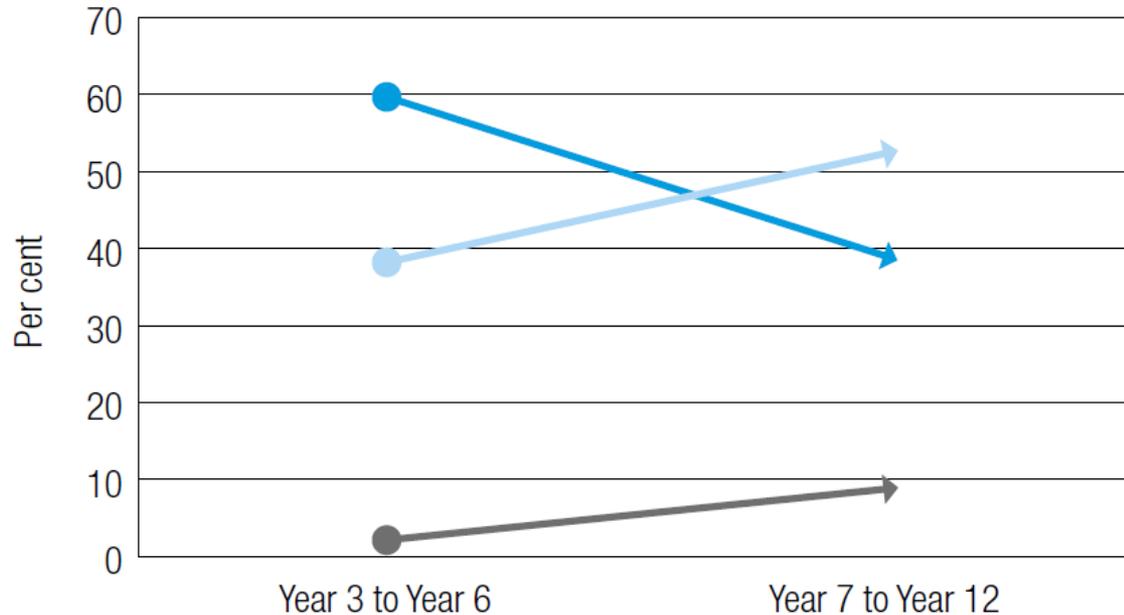
**get along with teachers sometimes
and feel that teachers care some**





Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future

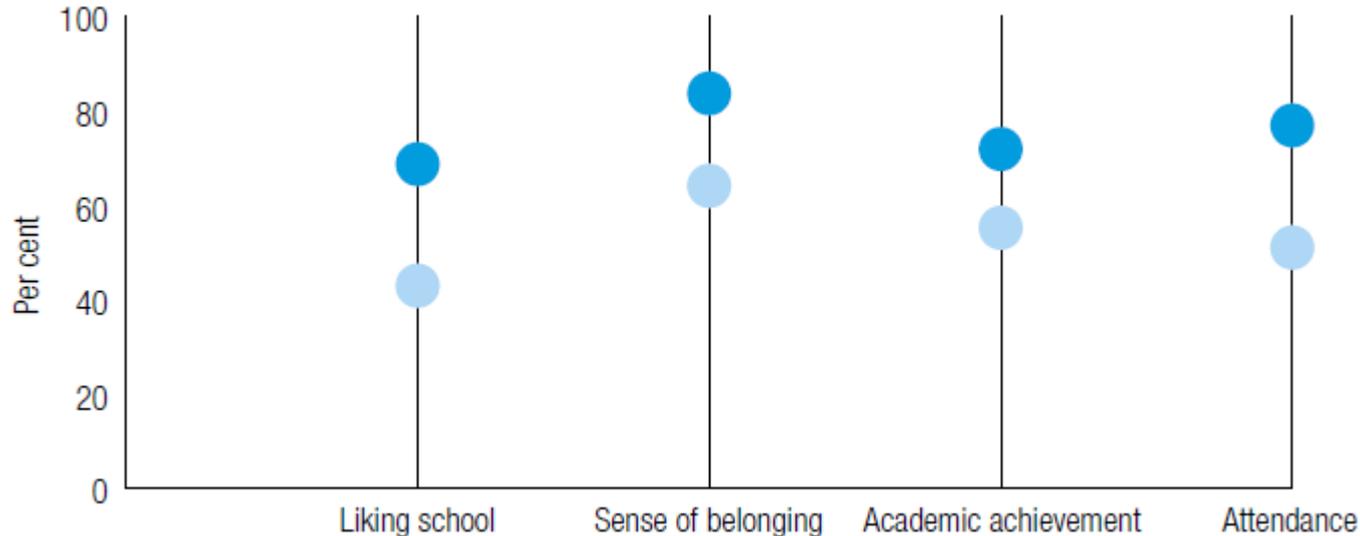
Change in the proportion of students feeling that teachers care a lot, some or not at all, by region





Students with families who are involved and interested

Selected engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students who say their **family asks about school work often and participates in school events** or who say their **family asks about school work sometimes and does not participate in school events**





Secondary factors – The Accelerators

Learning

A positive, fair and
supportive classroom
environment

Teaching and learning
that is interesting
and relevant

Choices and a say on
decisions that affect us

Student

Feeling safe

Help to overcome
personal issues

Feeling physically and
mentally well



A positive, fair and supportive classroom environment - Influence on engagement

Students who **usually get along with their teachers** are more likely to report that

- teachers treat students **fairly** most of the time
- they have **never been treated unfairly**
- they usually **get the help they need** to do their school work.

Students who say that teachers treat students fairly most of the time and those who usually get the help they need are **more likely** to

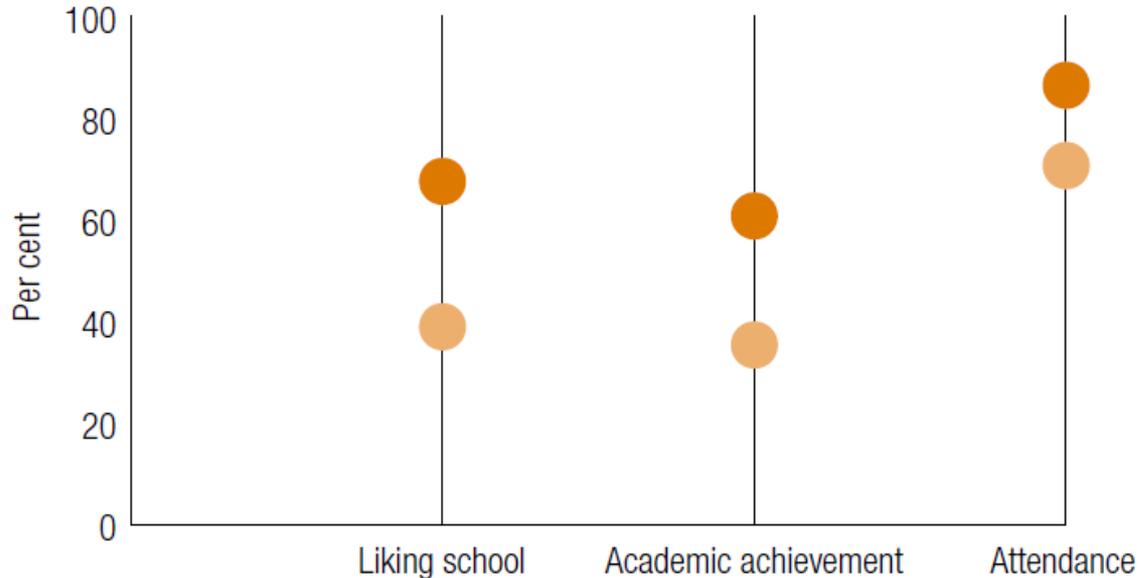
- feel part of their school
- like school
- say it is very important to them to be at school every day.
- they are also more likely to achieve higher academic results and this is particularly influenced by the availability of support for learning.





A supportive classroom environment

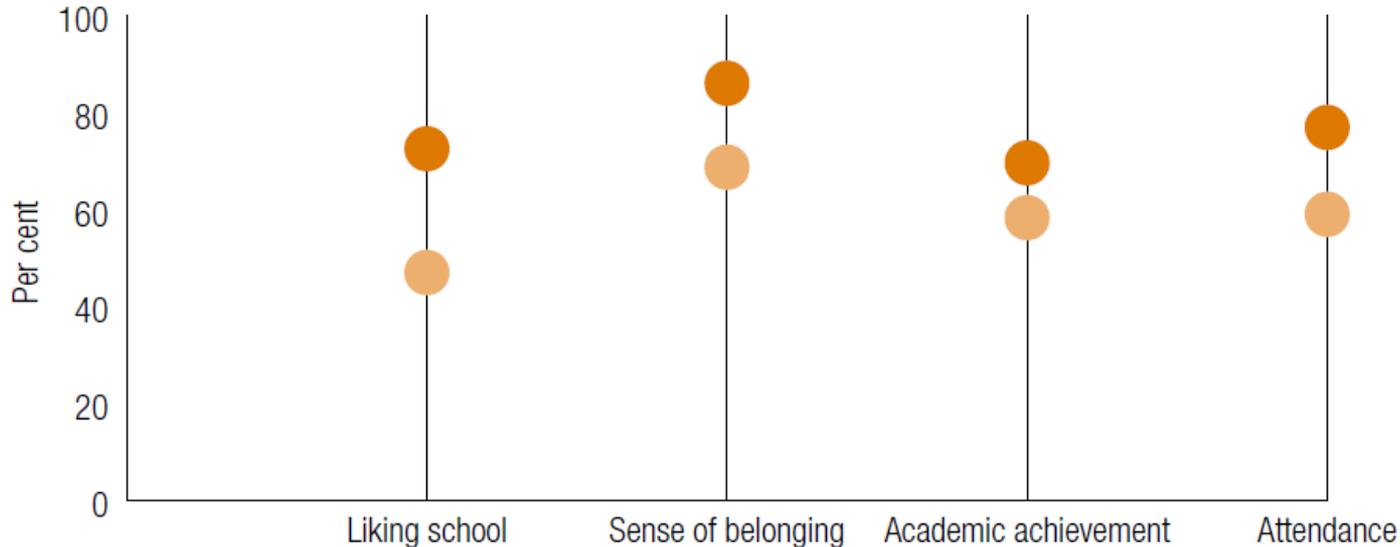
Engagement indicators for **Year 3 to Year 6** students saying they get the help they need **always** or **sometimes**





A supportive classroom environment

Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students saying they get the help they need **usually** or **sometimes**





“I enjoy being in class with teachers who are engaging, can have a laugh with you and treat you with respect. I also appreciate a teacher who takes time to explain concepts that I do not understand.”

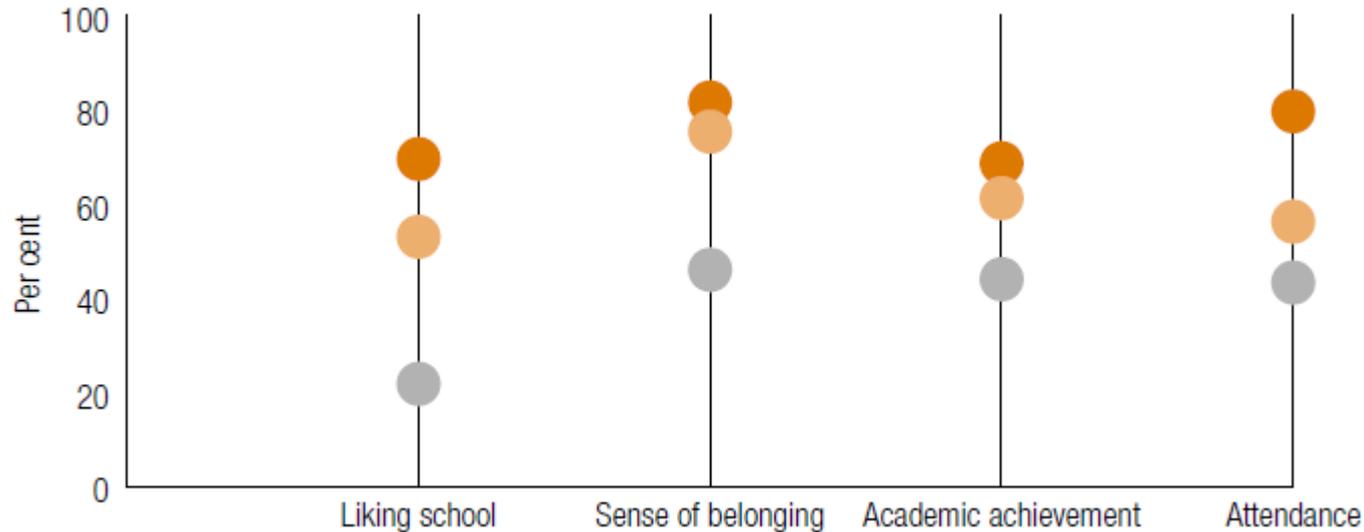
“They encourage me to work to my full potential and they keep me enthusiastic about learning.”

Year 7-12 students



Teaching and learning that is interesting and relevant

Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students saying they find what they are learning at school **very valuable**, **somewhat valuable** or not valuable





“Sometimes my teacher confuses me when she says we are going to one thing but instead we do another and also doesn't explain things enough.”



Year 3-6 WA student



“They are always making school work fun and teaching us students new things. They make coming to school a very enjoyable thing.”

Yr3-6 WA student

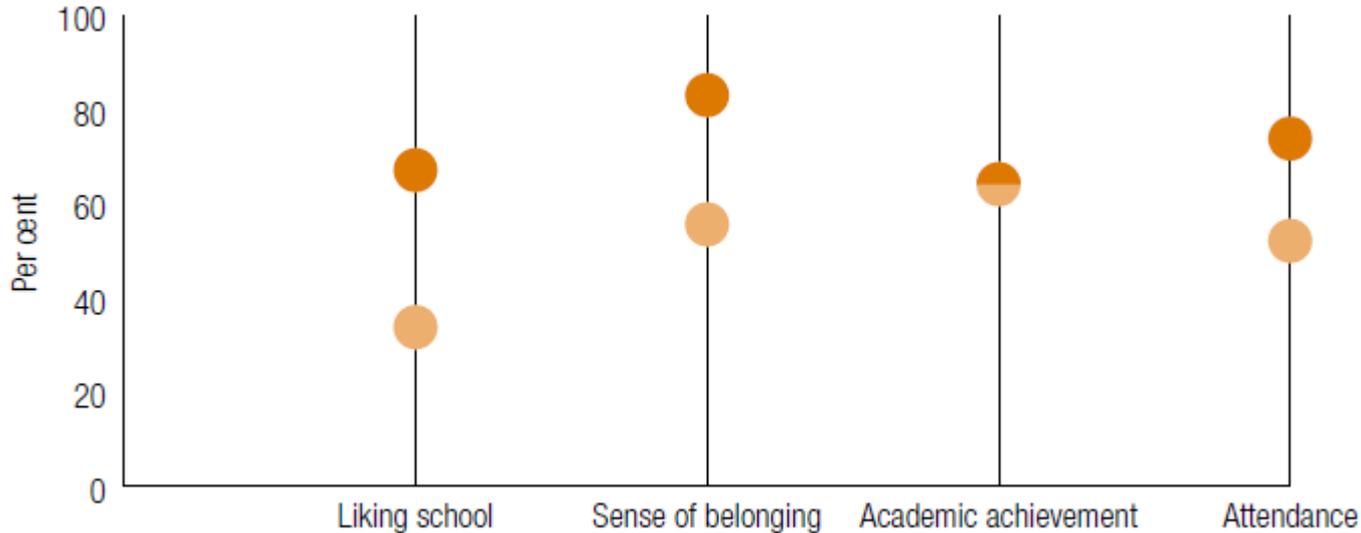
“It can take just one bad experience at school for an Aboriginal child to lose trust in their in teachers, in [themselves] and the school system.”

13 year old Noongar student



Choices and a say on decisions that affect us

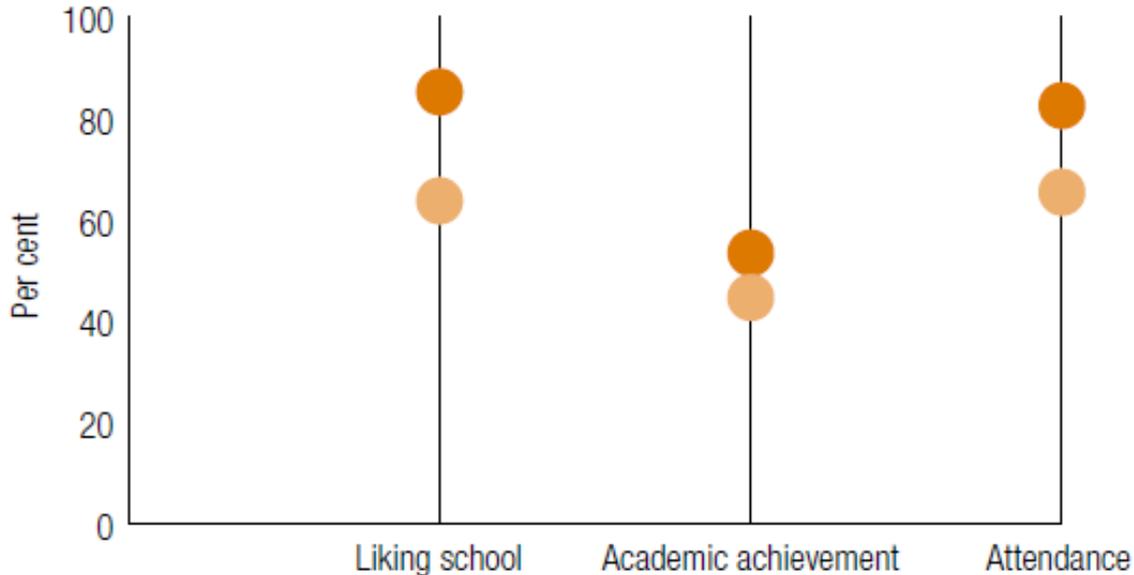
Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students **agreeing** or **disagreeing** with the statement that 'Students in this school have a say in how things work'





Feeling safe

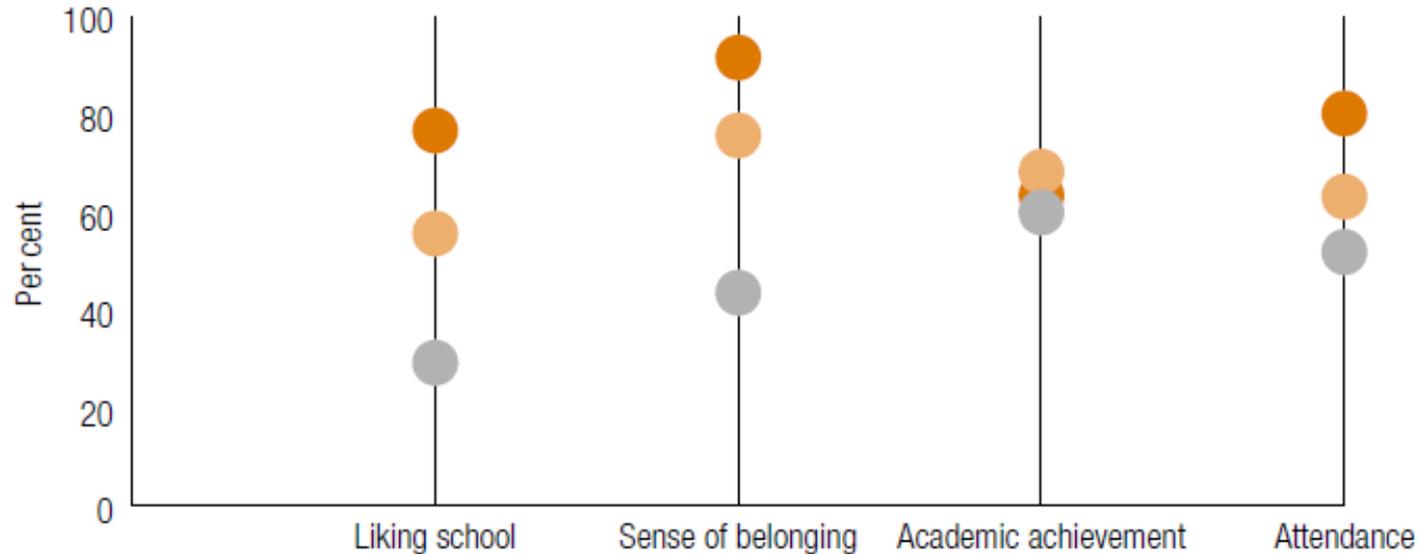
Engagement indicators for **Year 3 to Year 6** students who feel safe **all the time** or **not all the time**





Feeling safe

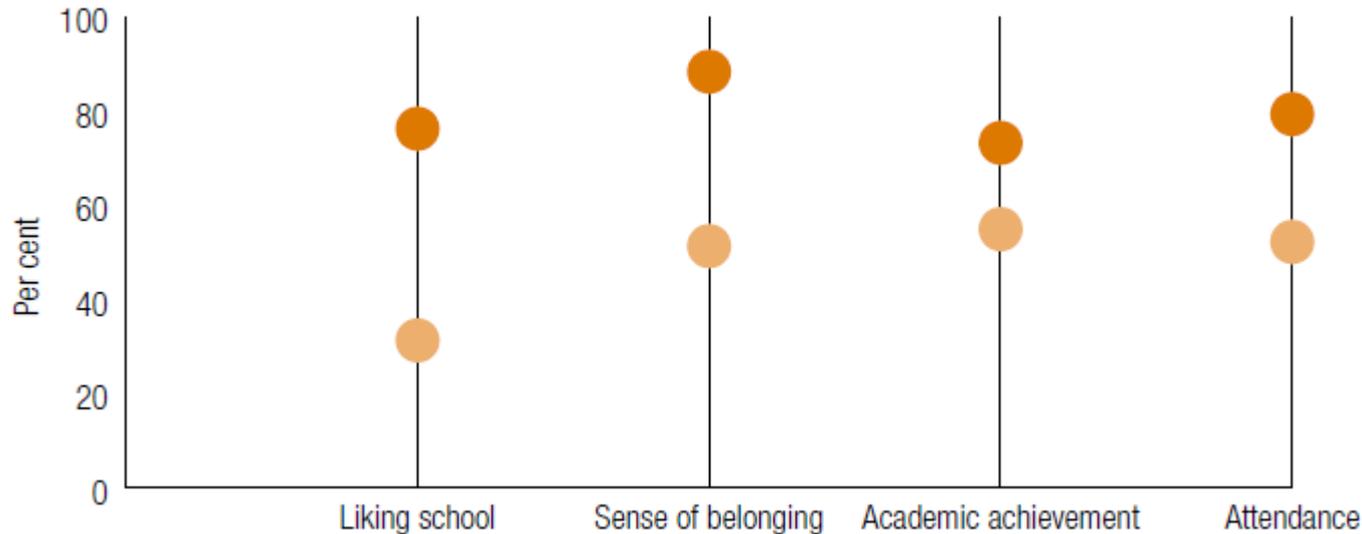
Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students who feel safe **all the time, most of the time** or half the time or less





Help to overcome personal issues

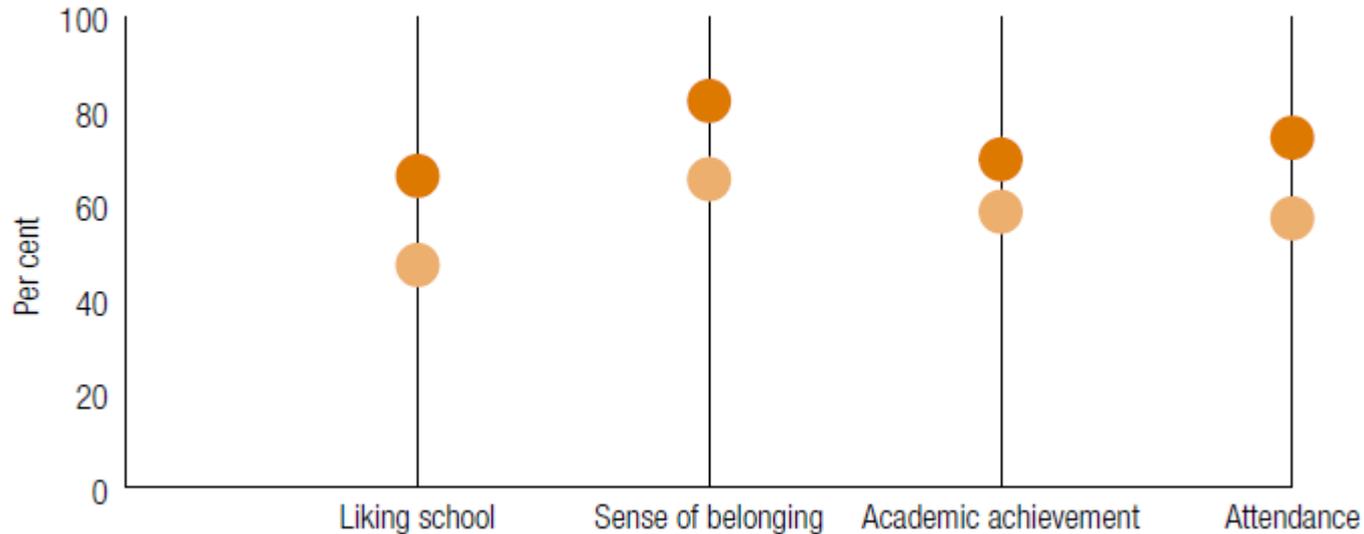
Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students who say they **help others and agree teachers go out of their way to help students** or students who say they **don't help others and disagree teachers go out of their way to help students**





Feeling physically and mentally well

Engagement indicators for **Year 7 to Year 12** students saying they **do not** or **do** have difficulties with concentration, behaviour or feelings





Suggestions from students

Schools to nurture and promote a culture of safety based on positive relationships

- Proactive approaches such as **positive behaviour programs** to reduce bullying and fighting
- Increased **education** for students and school staff about **gender identity and sexual orientations**
- No labelling of students

Clear and consistently applied rules and consequences by school staff

- Particularly in response to bullying and fighting
- Students felt instances of bullying or fighting were sometimes '**noted**' and that this was an **inadequate** response

Schools to implement, promote and share with students different approaches to safety

- **Positive messaging** around the school (such as through posters)
- Increased **natural surveillance** (through more staff on duty, and cameras or walkie talkies for ease of communication)
- **Discussion with students** about the steps schools were taking to keep them safe



Findings

I ♥ SCHOOL





Finding 1



The views of WA school students are an invaluable but underutilised resource that provides an opportunity to challenge our approaches and beliefs regarding education and continually improve our practice.



Recommendation 1

- a. The Minister for Education review the way NSOS data is used and reported on to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policy and practice at a school level across WA.
- b. Governing authorities report on aggregated NSOS data relevant to the school sector in the annual reporting framework to monitor trends overtime.
- c. Schools demonstrate via their annual reports the actions they will take as a result of the NSOS survey of student responses.



Students feel safe at this school

	Teachers	Parents	Students
Strongly agree or agree	96%	90%	83%
Neither agree or disagree	4%	10%	17%



Finding 2

Aboriginal students identified a number of areas that hinder engagement in their education and learning.

The nature and quality of relationships with teachers and peers, the availability of support for learning and personal health problems, particularly difficulties with mental health, emerged as areas where many Aboriginal students experienced greater challenges than their non-Aboriginal peers.





Recommendation 2

Governing authorities review and evaluate the implementation of cultural frameworks for supporting Aboriginal students across schools in WA and report publically on the findings.





Finding 3

The foundations of student engagement are primarily based on the quality of relationships students have with teachers, school staff and other students.

- Importance of having friends and positive relationships with other students
- Relationships with teachers and other school staff

Kind teachers

Supportive teachers

Students should respect
teachers more

Friendship
is a big part
of school.



Recommendation 3

The governing authorities review the use of strategies and resources, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub, available to develop positive and respectful relationships across a school environment and report on the uptake, implementation and effectiveness across WA schools.

Recommendation 4

Schools be resourced to implement a whole-of-school approach to improve student-peer and student-teacher relationships and monitor and report annually on the strategies and outcomes of the approach. NSOS survey results or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on these relationships.





Recommendation 5

Governing authorities incorporate staff selection criteria addressing personal characteristics such as the value that teacher and student support candidates place on the development and maintenance of positive, respectful student-staff and parent-staff relationships into recruitment and selection processes.

Recommendation 6

Universities review current teacher training curriculums/course content in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees with regard to a clear expectation of teacher requirements to include strong interpersonal skills with a desire to build positive relationships with students and parents. This should be incorporated into practical development and assessment.





Suggestions by students – relationships with students and friends

Schools and school staff to provide more opportunities to see and work with friends. Specific examples included learning experiences such as group work or mixed-class activities, longer lunch breaks and collaborative activities such as whole-of-school events and team building activities.

Schools to promote positive relationships through specific rules and programs, the modelling of good behaviour, opportunities for different groups of students to spend time together (different ages or sections of the school), and support to develop and navigate friendships (especially in Year 3 to Year 6).



Finding 4

Children and young people involved in the consultation valued the role that parents or guardians and their broader families played in their learning. The ability of parents or guardians and broader families to understand the significance of a balanced approach to schooling, in particular homework, was significant to students.

“My mum helps me prepare for big tests like NAPLAN. My dad helps me to make sure I’m kind. My siblings help me doing my homework.”



“If they don’t come to school events or talk about what you’re doing in school, it can be quite hurtful and feel like they don’t care about your education.”

Year 7-12 student

“My dad watches TV when I do homework.”

Year 3-6 student

“All my spare time has been shut down to study and my parents have reinforced that [and] that’s no good because I’m not with my mates, so yeah a lot of it is just stress, very stressful.”

16 year-old boy



Recommendation 7

Governing authorities and other parent program providers support schools in accessing information for parents and guardians on how to support their children in their learning, such as the Australian Government's Student Wellbeing Hub website.

Recommendation 8

Governing authorities monitor and report on the effectiveness of reporting procedures and communication processes with students and parents employed by schools to ensure maximum effectiveness. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor this.



Finding 5

The role of teachers in providing a stimulating and positive learning environment was, unsurprisingly, critical to students' school and learning experiences.

Recommendation 9

Federal and State Ministers for Education review the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians with regard to ensuring the relevance of curriculum and other aspects of education meet the contemporary needs of students.





Recommendation 10

Governing authorities review the mechanisms for monitoring the provision of support to students who require assistance to complete their school work and develop strategies to ensure that such assistance is provided. NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor and report on this.



It makes it hard if they don't know how to do things.



If they are bullied
they might be too scared
to tell a teacher

Finding 6

Feeling safe at school was a key issue nominated by children and young people as something that schools should address as a matter of priority.

Students who reported positive relationships with other students and with teachers were more likely to report feeling safe at school. Students with disability or long-term health conditions were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school and worried about issues such as bullying.



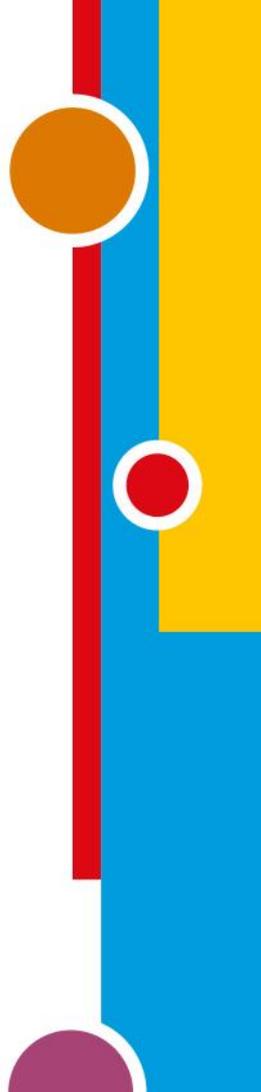


Recommendation 11

Governing authorities review and report on the resourcing, support and ongoing monitoring of the implementation of child safe policy and practice, and positive behaviour management across all schools in WA.

Recommendation 12

All schools implement the principles and practices of child safe organisations, underpinned by their own child safe policy. NSOS or other surveying of students should be used to monitor students reporting of safety at school on an ongoing basis.





Finding 7

Feeling supported to address personal problems and challenges, and feeling physically and mentally well was also important to students being able to attend, participate and achieve at school. Physical and mental health has an impact across a range of engagement factors. There appears to be an under-diagnosis of physical and mental ill-health in schools, particularly for Aboriginal students, which warrants further investigation.

Everyone is there
to help and support
you:)

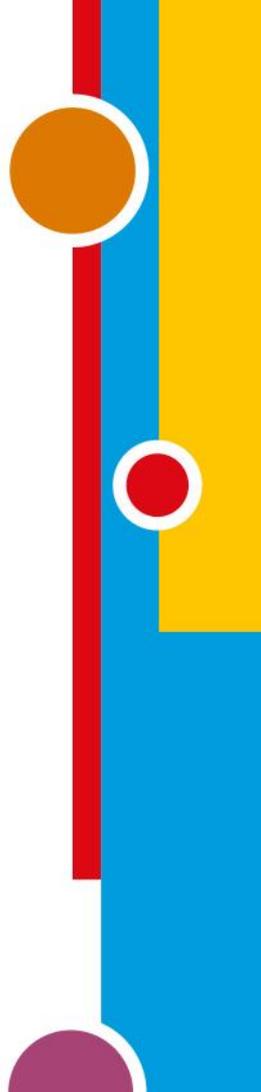


Recommendation 13

The Department of Education commission a research project to investigate across all school sectors the apparent under-diagnosis of health conditions and the impact on students.

Recommendation 14

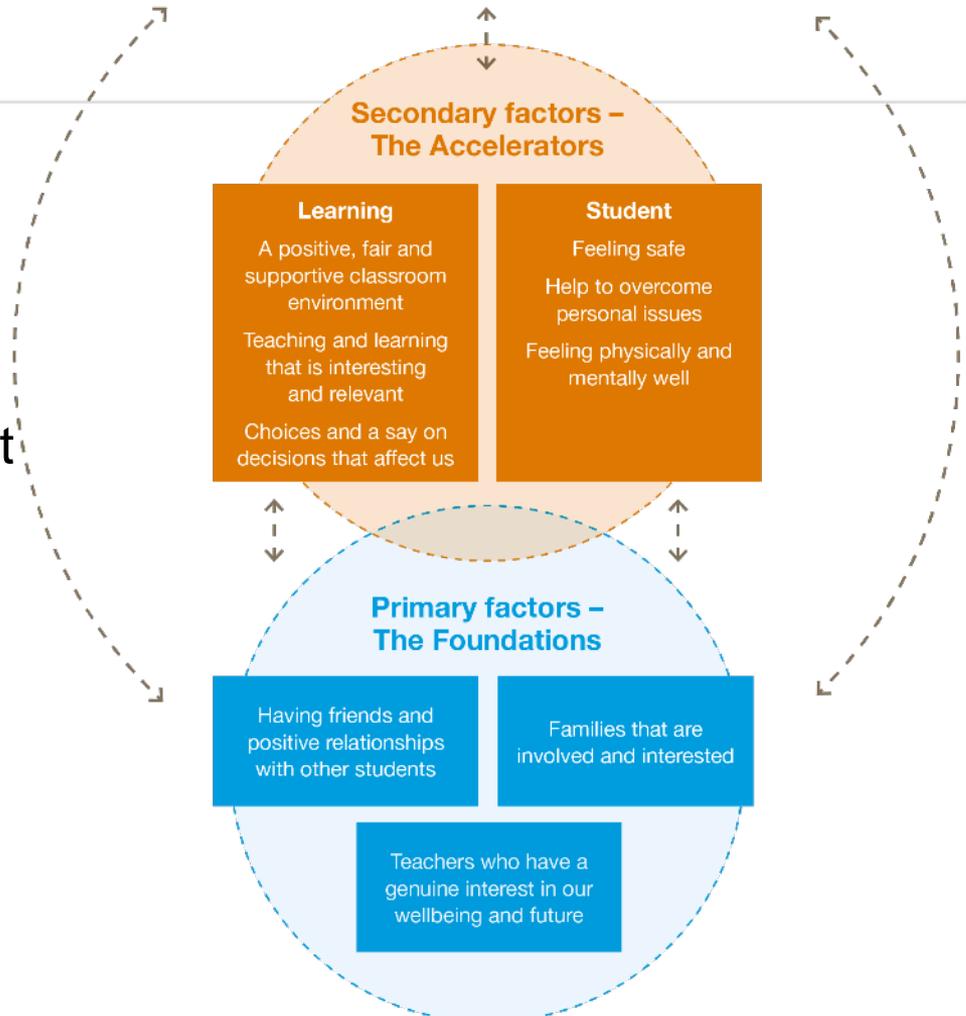
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The Student Engagement Framework

Level of engagement in school and learning



Secondary factors – The Accelerators

Learning A positive, fair and supportive classroom environment Teaching and learning that is interesting and relevant Choices and a say on decisions that affect us	Student Feeling safe Help to overcome personal issues Feeling physically and mentally well
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Primary factors – The Foundations

Having friends and positive relationships with other students	Families that are involved and interested
Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future	



“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 educations and life-long skills.”

Year 7-12 WA student



What children tell us makes a difference

- Having friendly and engaged staff who like children
- Being proactively asked their views
- Having their views taken seriously
- Being given choice and having flexibility around participating
- Having information about expectations and clear rules of behaviour, and
- Seeing action taken to stop problems from continuing
- Doing what you say you will do.



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Policy brief
February 2018



Children and young people speak out about education and safety in schools

"It may be hard for kids to come to school if they are being bullied or don't feel safe."

Education is a key influence on a child's life. Early engagement with school and learning assists a child to develop skills to succeed academically as well as build and maintain social relationships.



Keep in touch:



@CCYPWA

Website www.ccyp.wa.gov.au

Phone 6213 2297