



Department of  
Education  
and Training

## Caring for our children

Exploratory research into pastoral care in Western Australian public schools

Education Policy and Planning Directorate  
Department of Education and Training  
Western Australia

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# Glossary

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- ✧ An **integrated approach** to pastoral care is one where the elements of the school were purposefully and coherently focused on pastoral care.
- ✧ A **segmented approach** is one where the pastoral care of the school was isolated from the overall management and day-to-day activities of the school.
- ✧ A **reactive approach** is one where the pastoral care of the school was not only isolated but provided mostly on a reactive basis and usually in response to a major incident or crisis.
- ✧ **Most** (when used within the context of ‘most principals/administrators, teachers, parents, students or district directors’) refers to at least half of the respective participants or groups.
- ✧ **Many** (when used within the context of ‘many principals/administrators, teachers, parents, students or district directors’) refers to more than one-fifth and less than half of the respective participants or groups.
- ✧ **Some** (when used within the context of ‘some principals/administrators, teachers, parents, students or district directors’) refers to less than one-fifth of the respective participants or groups.
- ✧ An **administrator** refers to deputy principals, student services managers and senior staff within the school.

# Executive summary

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## Why this study was done

This report presents the findings of a study into parents' expectations and schools' understanding and delivery of pastoral care, into how students experience pastoral care provision in schools, and into how district directors assess school effectiveness in this area.

Findings from the research will initially be used by the Department to stimulate discussion about pastoral care in public schools, and will inform the development of a position for the Department including standards and effective practice guidelines.

## How it was done

This report is the culmination of over ninety focus groups and interviews across twenty Western Australian public schools, involving a cross-section of the school community, including district directors, principals/administrators, teachers, students and parents.

## What was found

### What do parents expect from pastoral care?

Parents generally expected schools to provide a caring and supportive environment for their children and believed that this was achieved by school staff, particularly teachers:

- ✧ Showing a genuine interest in students by being approachable and sympathetic.
- ✧ Being present and available to talk with students, helping them with their problems, and providing support as needed.
- ✧ Knowing their children as individuals and responding to their unique needs. Parents were especially concerned that their children do not fall behind academically and expected schools to be particularly responsive when this occurs.
- ✧ Ensuring their children were kept physically safe.

Some parents saw a role for pastoral care in providing values and ethics education and development.

### What do students expect from pastoral care?

Students also expected schools to provide a caring and supportive environment and in this, emphasised the role of school staff, in particular teachers. Aspects they singled out included:

- ✧ School staff being approachable, relating to students, listening to them and understanding their needs.
- ✧ Treating students fairly and consistently in their day-to-day dealings, irrespective of their background, academic ability, or any prior reputation.
- ✧ Effectively resolving issues which negatively impacted upon their quality of school experience, such as school “bullying” or playground “teasing”.

- ✧ Having clear, consistently enforced rules and boundaries.
- ✧ Supporting and encouraging students as they learn in the classroom.

### What do schools understand by pastoral care?

Whilst teachers, principals/administrators, and district directors generally believed that pastoral care was about *caring for students* and *ensuring their physical safety*, there were differences in the aspects of care that each group emphasised. In summary:

- ✧ **Teachers** were mostly concerned with building relationships and *creating a supportive environment* within the school community by “getting to know students” and promoting values of respect, honesty and compassion throughout the school.
- ✧ **Principals** defined pastoral care as any school activity that aimed to solve student problems and issues, especially those relating to their “social and emotional well-being” as opposed to their academic needs.
- ✧ **District directors** emphasised that pastoral care was more than caring for students or meeting their needs, in that it also involved actively developing the “full potential” of a child. From this perspective, schools had an active role in *“assisting young people to emerge as effective adults”* and pastoral care assisted with that process.

### What approaches do schools use in relation to pastoral care?

Schools had a range of practices in relation to pastoral care. In this research they have been classified as having one of the three approaches to pastoral care summarised in Table 1.0 below.

**Table 1.0: Three different approaches to pastoral care used by schools in this study**

	<b>Integrated example</b>	<b>Segmented example</b>	<b>Reactive example</b>
<b>Definition</b>	School was purposefully and coherently focused on pastoral care	Pastoral care was isolated from the overall management and day-to-day activity of the school	Pastoral care was provided on mostly a reactive basis, usually in response to a major incident or school crisis
<b>Focus</b>	Focused on providing <u>effective</u> pastoral care	Focused on <u>having</u> pastoral care activities and programs	Focused on resolving crises within the school
<b>Intervention level</b>	Used a variety of strategies from whole-school approach to individual casework	Used a variety of strategies but generally intervened at the group or individual student level only	Used an individual casework approach and tended to target 'problem' and/or at risk students
<b>Reflective practice</b>	Reflected regularly on effectiveness of pastoral care, usually informally	Undertook limited reflection – continued to do 'things' the way they had always been done	Were busy resolving crises, and had little opportunity for reflective practice
<b>Administration</b>	Actively managed school ethos and student care program towards creating a positive and supportive environment for students  Valued the teaching staff and considered their role instrumental in promoting a positive school culture and in providing pastoral care	Viewed the school ethos as separate from pastoral care and had some awareness of how to proactively manage the school culture  Placed some value on the teaching staff, however was more likely to emphasise the role of pastoral care activities and programs	Viewed the school ethos as separate from pastoral care and had limited awareness of how to proactively manage the school culture  Placed less value on the teaching staff and was more likely to emphasise the role of referral to student services
<b>Teaching staff</b>	Demonstrated a positive attitude towards teaching, the school and its students  Viewed themselves as having an important role in providing pastoral care  Were conscious of modelling positive values	Demonstrated mixed or indifferent attitudes towards teaching, the school and its students  Viewed themselves as having some role in providing pastoral care  Were less conscious of modelling positive values	Generally demonstrated a negative attitude towards teaching, the school and some students. Felt as though they could not cope with workload  Viewed themselves as having a limited role, but believed that they could do more if they had additional time or resources  Were less conscious of modelling positive values, and sometimes modelled negative values
<b>Students</b>	Very satisfied with the level of care provided in the school  Confident in school's ability to resolve pastoral care issues	Mixed levels of satisfaction with the level of care provided in the school  Less confident in school's ability to resolve pastoral care issues	Very dissatisfied with the level of care provided in the school  Not at all confident in the school's ability to resolve pastoral care issues
<b>District directors</b>	Schools provided evidence of "highly effective" pastoral care	Schools provided evidence of "effective" pastoral care	Schools provided evidence of limited, or "ineffective" pastoral care
<b>School characteristics</b>	Low to moderate socio-economic profile (generally)	High to moderate socio-economic profile (generally)	Low socio-economic profile (generally)
<b>Number of schools</b>	Seven	Ten	Three

How effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care from the perspective of district directors, students, and parents?

Evidence suggesting that schools provided effective pastoral care included:

- ✧ The assessment by district directors that the majority of schools in the sample provided “effective” pastoral care (according to their own criteria as outlined in the chapter *Effectiveness* under the section *District Directors*).
- ✧ The fact that most students declared themselves satisfied with their school experience in relation to pastoral care.

There was also contrasting evidence:

- ✧ Many of the schools classified by district directors as “effective” were later described by them in the interviews as providing “mediocre” pastoral care. This was because these schools were seen to be taking a minimalist approach to pastoral care by doing “what they have always done” or meeting only basic “duty-of-care requirements”.
- ✧ Parental decisions to move their children from a public school (to another public school or a private school) were motivated equally by pastoral care and academic considerations.
- ✧ Less than half of the students agreed that “teachers take a special interest” in them or in “dealing with their problems”.

## What can be done to improve pastoral care from the perspective of schools and parents?

**School staff** mentioned the following issues as being important to them:

- ✧ The availability of **resources** was seen as a major issue that can impede the provision of pastoral care services. Principals stated that considerable resources were required to cater for the individual needs of all students. Many teachers, especially those from *segmented* and *reactive* schools, were already working at full capacity and found it difficult to implement pastoral care initiatives involving additional demands upon their time. These teachers saw pastoral care as involving duties above and beyond what was normally required of them.
- ✧ Most school staff discussed the need for much greater **clarity** in relation to the provision of pastoral care. They believed that there was no formal departmental position on the subject, and that the responsibilities and boundaries of schools, students, parents, community agencies and the wider community were undefined and at times confused.
- ✧ Many teachers and principals felt that they did not have the necessary **skills and training** to deal effectively with some pastoral care issues, such as behaviour management and mental health issues.
- ✧ Many school staff found it difficult to access **community services**. Either these services were unavailable, or had long waiting lists, or the work (especially paperwork) required to access them was seen as excessive.
- ✧ Some principals suggested that schools could benefit from **improved public perceptions**. It was believed that government schools do provide good pastoral care and that this should be promulgated through the media, or via the wider community.

**Parents** said that they would like to see the following done differently by schools in relation to pastoral care:

- ✧ Many parents wanted to be **more informed** about the progress of their children. These parents expected schools to notify them if their children’s academic progress or behaviour became of concern. They were particularly clear about wanting to be informed about issues before they became serious.
- ✧ Some parents wanted **greater consistency between schools** in relation to pastoral care. These parents did not know what standards of care they could reasonably expect or who to contact within the school if their child was experiencing a problem.

- ✧ Some parents felt that schools could deal with **behaviour management** more effectively, specifically that poor behaviour should entail more serious consequences which were consistently applied.
- ✧ **Bullying** was an issue of importance to most parents. Specifically, these parents wanted staff to be more aware that bullying was occurring and greater commitment from schools in dealing with it.

## How do district directors currently measure the effectiveness of pastoral care provision in schools?

District directors generally did not assess pastoral care per se, but did so within the wider context of assessing overall school effectiveness.

Many district directors believed that schools required improved data collection and data interpretation skills and that more empirically based measures of pastoral care were needed.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study point to five suggestions for improvements.

### 1. Consider establishing a Departmental position regarding pastoral care

This study does support the need to consider establishing a Departmental position regarding pastoral care in government schools including standards and effective practice guidelines, as evidenced by the following:

- ✧ Across the school system there were a variety of interpretations about pastoral care and what it involves.
- ✧ Principals and teachers believed that the responsibilities and boundaries of schools and the wider community were undefined and at times confused, and that there were no standardised guidelines and procedures across schools for meeting those responsibilities.
- ✧ There appears to be great variation across schools in terms of the perceptions of the levels of student care. Whilst most students in this study felt cared for by their school there were some schools where this did not seem to be the case. The perception of ineffective student care was found to be an important factor leading to parents withdrawing their children from public schools.
- ✧ Some parents wanted greater consistency between schools in that they did not know what they could reasonably expect from a public school in respect to their child's care.

Developing standards and guidelines in pastoral care could assist in reducing uncertainty surrounding school responsibilities and could contribute towards greater consistency between schools in relation to levels of student care.

Specifically this may involve outlining:

- ✧ A formal **definition** of what pastoral care is and what it involves in schools;
- ✧ Effective approaches to pastoral care, including criteria for **effective practice**;
- ✧ A **minimum standard** of pastoral care, including the roles and responsibilities of districts and schools, and how/if it would be assessed.

### *Towards a common understanding of pastoral care*

The views of participants in relation to pastoral care as presented in the two chapters *Expectations of pastoral care* and *Understanding of pastoral care* provide some insight into what a common understanding of pastoral care could entail, including the following:

- ✧ Caring and supporting students (mentioned by all participants)
- ✧ Knowing children as individuals and understanding their needs (emphasised by parents)
- ✧ Building relationships and creating a supportive environment within the school (emphasised by teachers)
- ✧ Meeting students' "social and emotional needs" (emphasised by principals)
- ✧ Actively assisting young people to emerge from their schooling as "effective" adults (emphasised by district directors)
- ✧ Effectively resolving student pastoral care issues (emphasised by students).

As part of any process of developing standards and guidelines, alternatives for the phrase "pastoral care" should be identified, or instead, its meaning explained through school and Departmental communications, as this term was not widely understood by parents.

### *Towards effective practice guidelines in pastoral care*

There are various findings in this study that could inform debate about what is effective practice in pastoral care, including a chapter (see *Effectiveness*) which summarises the criteria that district directors use, or another chapter (see *School approaches to pastoral care*) that classifies the approaches used by schools. Of the three approaches to pastoral care described, the *integrated approach* may be of greatest assistance in informing effective practice guidelines. It was schools using an integrated approach that were considered by district directors as having "highly effective" pastoral care and at which the students interviewed mentioned a high level of satisfaction in relation to student care.

### *Standards and resourcing implications*

There is a need to better understand the relationship between pastoral care and resource utilisation. Many principals and teachers discussed the benefits of obtaining additional resources. However when defining pastoral care, they also commented that everyday interactions between school staff and students, an element which is not necessarily resource dependant, was a major component of effective pastoral care. The intention here is not to be dismissive of school concerns surrounding resources, but rather to highlight the need to clarify the optimum requirements involved.

## 2. Develop a process for evaluating the effectiveness of pastoral care

Whilst the standard of pastoral care in schools as a whole was considered by district directors and students to be adequate, many students described examples of pastoral care programs that were perceived to have been unsuccessful in their outcomes. This research suggests that some schools tended to perpetuate ineffective pastoral care practices by doing what they had always done without evaluation or critical review. This suggests that there may be a need to provide schools with access to processes, tools and support to enable them to better assess the effectiveness of pastoral care on an ongoing basis.

### 3. Develop outcome measures for pastoral care or student care

To assist with the above, there is potentially the need to develop better quality system level data that could be used to monitor the effectiveness of pastoral care in schools. District directors affirmed that data currently used by schools in the *School Review Process* was largely insufficient for this purpose.

If the Department considered it appropriate to develop such measures, these could be used to assist schools in their self-review process as well as to help guide and direct system wide strategies and interventions.

If measures were to be developed, it would be important to note the value of using students as a key data source. In this study, it was found that the interviewed students' levels of satisfaction generally corresponded with district director assessments of levels of care, which suggests that students are potentially a useful *barometer* in determining the general effectiveness of pastoral care within a school.

It is also important to note that any measures utilised should not exclude 'softer' qualitative data. Highly effective pastoral care relied substantially upon soft data, such as informal discussions with students and teachers, to guide their activities. However, outcome data may provide information that enhances and supports other data collection processes used in the school's assessment process and in validating and reviewing pastoral care.

### 4. Increase the promotion of pastoral care in schools

There is some evidence to suggest that the public school system is under-promoting its ability to provide quality pastoral care to students in their publicly available literature, websites and promotional materials. Even schools described as highly effective in this regard understated the quality of pastoral care they provided.

### 5. Better understand links to school bullying and behaviour management

Both parents and students drew connections between pastoral care and bullying and behaviour management. The extent to which schools met these needs varied, however it was clear that many interviewees felt that schools could do more to reduce the occurrence of undesirable behaviour. Furthermore having a positive impact on these behaviours would probably enhance perceptions of pastoral care held by teachers parents and students.

# Introduction

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## Background

The Department of Education and Training is seeking to understand how it can enhance the level of pastoral care in public schools and share effective practice across the school system with a view to improving student outcomes.

## Purpose

This report will present the findings of a study into the differences between parents' expectations and schools' understanding and delivery of pastoral care: into students' experience of pastoral care provision in schools, and into the assessment by district directors of school effectiveness in this area.

Findings from the research will initially be used by the Department to stimulate debate and discussion about pastoral care in public schools, and may inform the development of a position for the Department regarding pastoral care in government schools, including standards and effective practice guidelines.

## Focus

In order to achieve the above aims, the following research questions were investigated:

### A: Schools

- ✧ What do schools understand by pastoral care?
- ✧ How do schools perceive the expectations of others regarding pastoral care (system, parents, students and wider community)?
- ✧ What is the range of approaches to the provision of pastoral care in schools?
- ✧ Do schools include pastoral care in school planning, and if so, how?
- ✧ How do schools evaluate/assess the effectiveness of their pastoral care programs?
- ✧ What are the issues and challenges that schools face in providing pastoral care (including factors which impede or enhance their efforts)?
- ✧ What support do schools need to improve pastoral care provision?

### B: Parents

- ✧ What are parents looking for in terms of pastoral care for their children?
- ✧ How effective do they think schools are at providing it?
- ✧ What would parents like to see done differently?

### C: Students

- ✧ How do schools show they care about students' interests and welfare?
- ✧ How effectively do schools show they care, according to students?

- ✧ What would students like to see done differently?

D: District Directors

- ✧ From a district director's perspective, how effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care and what evidence do they use to make that judgement?

## Approach

This research sought to identify what people currently understood by pastoral care. To achieve this, a qualitative research design was used, which mostly involved a mixture of focus groups and interviews with school members and other stakeholders.

Of the 25 schools randomly selected, 20 schools agreed to take part in the study. Twelve of these schools were from within the metropolitan region and eight from regional and remote areas. Nine were secondary schools, nine were primary, and two were district high schools.

At participating schools, focus groups were conducted with teachers, parents<sup>1</sup> and students, and interviews were carried out with principals and some administrators<sup>2</sup>. Altogether the following number of participants was involved:

- ✧ 20 principals and 7 administrators;
- ✧ 141 teachers;
- ✧ 140 students; and
- ✧ 70 parents.

Interviews were also conducted with the district directors responsible for the schools in the sample, resulting in 12 interviews altogether<sup>3</sup>.

Across these same schools, in addition to the above:

- ✧ 151 parents, of students who had left these schools prior to completing their education, were interviewed via telephone<sup>4</sup>; and
- ✧ A review of each school's public documentation (including web-site materials) was also undertaken.

During the focus groups and interviews, open-ended questions were asked to allow participants the opportunity to fully explore the issues<sup>5</sup>. These questions have been presented in Appendix 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Nineteen groups were conducted due to the difficulty one school had in getting parents to volunteer. At this school and in other schools which had small numbers of participants, supplementary face-to-face or telephone interviews were held with parents.

<sup>2</sup> See *Glossary section* for a definition of 'administrator'.

<sup>3</sup> Some district directors were accountable for more than one school; hence 12 interviews covered all the schools sampled.

<sup>4</sup> This part of the research was only intended to be exploratory and hence it had a small sample of 151 parents. This sized sample renders any generalisation of the findings inaccurate. Further to this, there was some potential for response bias as only 10 out of the 20 schools participated in this aspect of the evaluation, due to its timing and close proximity to the end of the school year. Of those participating, five were primary schools, four senior high schools and one was a district high school. Equal numbers of schools were from the country and metropolitan regions. In addition to this, there were differences as to how schools defined former students, which introduced some inconsistencies into the sample. Finally, the sample only included parents of former students, as opposed to all parents, making it biased towards schools with greater recidivism.

<sup>5</sup> In student focus groups, students were presented with a series of statements about pastoral care in their school and were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement by physically moving to what was the "yes" or "no" side of the room. They were then asked to individually justify their choice.

The focus groups and interviews commenced in November and the majority were completed by early December 2004.

## Report structure

The research findings have been presented in this report according to the structure in Table 2.0.

**Table 2.0: Report structure**

<b>Structure</b>	<b>Key focus questions</b>
<u>Expectations</u> of pastoral care	What do parents and students expect from schools in relation to pastoral care?
<u>Understanding</u> of pastoral care	What do teachers, principals and district directors understand by pastoral care?
<u>Approaches</u> to pastoral care	What approaches are used by schools in relation to pastoral care?
<u>Effectiveness</u> of pastoral care	How effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care from the perspective of students, parents and district directors?
<u>Enhancing</u> pastoral care	What can schools do to enhance pastoral care from the perspective of principals, teachers and parents?
<u>Evidence</u> used to determine effectiveness	How do district directors currently measure the effectiveness of pastoral care provision in schools?

# Expectations of pastoral care

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## Overview

This section examines what parents and students indicated that they expected from schools in relation to pastoral care. The findings of parents are followed by those of students.

## Parents

When asked “what is pastoral care?” most parents initially expressed a great deal of uncertainty about the meaning of the term. For example:

“This is the first time I have heard of pastoral care.”

“Weren’t sure what it [pastoral care] was initially – maybe farming or church-based.”

[Parents]

Those parents who had greater confidence as to the meaning were from schools where the term was used regularly by the school in their public documentation and school correspondence.

As each session progressed, parents began to feel more comfortable and confident, allowing a general notion of pastoral care to evolve which involved the “school caring for students”. As parents discussed what they meant by “caring for students” a variety of meanings emerged including:

- ✧ Teachers and school staff showing a genuine interest in students by being approachable and sympathetic to students. By showing a genuine interest in students it was believed that students would be more likely to discuss “problems”, or alternatively, that school staff would be more likely to notice if something was wrong.
- ✧ School staff being available to talk with students, help them with their problems, and to provide support.
- ✧ Identifying and responding to the individual needs of children. Many parents believed that school staff should be able to tell when a student was in crisis, and able to effectively respond to that crisis.
- ✧ Most parents mentioned that they expected schools to ensure that their children were safe. While most parents were satisfied with this aspect, some parents discussed the inability of schools to effectively deal with bullying and its negative impact on the “victims” and the school climate in general. In particular, these parents wanted schools to be observant and aware if bullying was occurring and a commitment from them to effectively address it...
- ✧ Caring for the “full” child, including the child’s “social, emotional and physical well-being” was mentioned by some parents. Schools were seen to have a role in ensuring that students were “happy and healthy” whilst at school.

Parents were more likely than any other group to see student academic interventions as part of pastoral care<sup>6</sup>. They often used examples in which a student’s academic performance had declined and the school had been responsive and effective in addressing the issue, as an example of effective

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<sup>6</sup> District directors also saw pastoral care as related to academic outcomes. However, they tended to emphasise a cause-effect relationship, in that pastoral care could be used to improve academic outcomes

pastoral care. Parents were especially mindful of their children's academic progress and wanted schools to be particularly responsive if they fall behind. Some parents also believed that pastoral care involved screening for and addressing the learning difficulties of students.

Behaviour management was also considered by some parents to be related to pastoral care, in that the way a school approaches behaviour management was seen to affect the well-being of students and the way they felt at school. It was believed that the more effective a school was at managing behaviour the more positive the school experience was for its students.

There was limited discussion among parents about how pastoral care could be used to develop a child socially and emotionally (except within the context of teaching their children about values - see below). Generally pastoral care was regarded as a way of *caring for students* rather than as a means of helping them to *develop socially and emotionally* - although it could be argued that proper care (which was expected by parents) involves assistance in this respect.

Some parents did however see a role for pastoral care in providing values and ethics education and development. Parents were relatively clear that any values taught should be basic human values such as "common respect" and "honesty". Role modelling was also mentioned in this context. It was felt that school staff should behave in a positive manner by modelling the values of respect, courtesy, trust, and honesty, in their interactions with students and in the decisions they make about students and the school.

## Students

Students were able to clearly communicate the ways in which they felt that schools cared about them and what they expected from schools in relation to student care.

The relationship of students with school staff, in particular teachers, was of foremost importance to most students in determining the extent to which they felt cared about by the school. Students discussed the need for teachers to be approachable, to relate to them and to listen and to understand their needs, and how this equated with caring. For secondary school children this involved teachers being "on their level", not talking down to them, and being receptive to their needs. For primary school children this involved staff noticing when they were upset or "down" and cheering them up, taking care of them, and, making them feel better if they were physically hurt.

It was important for all children that they felt comfortable talking to teachers in a general sense and also in relation to any problems they might have. Teachers were considered to be approachable by students if they had a friendly and welcoming demeanour and were positive in all their interactions. Teachers were also considered approachable if they could be relied on to deal with sensitive information confidentially. This point was of particular interest to students in regional areas or small communities.

Alternatively teachers who yelled at students "all the time", did not treat them with respect, talked down to them or did not listen to them were considered to be less caring and less approachable.

"Most teachers care, there are some grumpy ones"

"They talk over you and don't listen."

[Students]

It was important to students for school staff to be fair in their day-to-day dealings and to treat all students the same, irrespective of their backgrounds, academic ability, or previous reputation. Some students felt that some teachers treated them differently because of things they had done in the past. Others felt picked on by school staff and that "higher grade" students or "smarter children" received better treatment.

“They treat you well, but you are labelled from the beginning as either a good or bad student and continually labelled even if you are doing better work.”

“Division between TEE and non-TEE students, get treated like an outcast if you are non-TEE.”

[Student]

Another issue that emerged consistently across most student groups was that of responsiveness. Most students expected schools to be responsive to student needs and to be able to effectively resolve pastoral care issues, such as school bullying or playground teasing. When telling their stories, they would often indicate that they were disappointed when a pastoral care initiative had been unsuccessful. For example:

“Teachers will sometimes bust students for bullying, but it doesn't always work, you still get teased.”

“They developed a buddy system at the school but it didn't work.”

[Students]

Alternatively, they indicated that they were pleased when the school's response was effective. For example:

“When kids get bullied by other kids the teachers help to stop it and sort it out.”

“If there was a problem it is addressed and identified.”

[Students]

These examples suggest that students were sensitive to the outcomes of pastoral care initiatives and positively associated their success with the school caring for them.

To many students the presence of rules and boundaries also equated with the school's care for them. Students wanted clear boundaries in regards to what was “right and wrong” and “safe and unsafe” and expected those boundaries to be consistently reinforced. Some students further suggested that they expected to be kept physically safe while at school and when travelling between school and home. They talked about general safety issues such as playground and facilities safety, and road safety within the immediate vicinity of schools.

Finally, some students wanted to be encouraged academically and to be provided with guidance and support in the classroom. This involved informally keeping an eye on their progress, being receptive to their learning needs and moods, and being flexible in the approaches to learning and teaching. Students also wanted to be encouraged and rewarded fairly in their academic efforts.

“The maths teacher encourages us to work; he does not push us hard and lets us work at our own pace...he hands out rewards when we do a good job.”

[Student]

# Understanding of pastoral care

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## Overview

Teachers, principals/administrators and district directors were asked various questions designed to explore their understanding of pastoral care<sup>7</sup>. Across these *groups* there was a general consensus that pastoral care involved notions of *caring for students* and *ensuring their basic physical safety*. Whilst this was common, the groups differed in respect to:

- ✧ the meanings they attached to the word “pastoral care”;
- ✧ the elements of “student care” they considered to be more important; and
- ✧ their understanding of what pastoral care in schools actually involved.

## Teachers

To the question “what is pastoral care?” teachers consistently said that it involved “caring for students in other ways, besides the “academic” or “ensuring the social and emotional care of students”.

When asked about “what pastoral care involved” teachers would usually focus upon the importance of caring for students through the building of a supportive environment. According to them this means:

- ✧ “Getting to know students” by being approachable and able to connect with students
- ✧ School staff being respectful to students and to each other, and modelling the values of respect, courtesy and compassion throughout the school.
- ✧ Establishing partnerships with other teachers and school staff, especially in respect to designing and implementing intervention strategies to meet individual student needs.
- ✧ To a lesser extent “teachers supporting other teachers” in that they themselves need to feel supported to enable them to provide support to students.
- ✧ Developing support networks for students with parents and other government agencies.

Teachers also discussed other aspects of pastoral care.

One such element was the provision of pastoral care services, including psychological, counselling, school-nursing and general student services. However it seems that these services were seen as secondary in importance to building relationships and as often applicable to only a minority of “at risk” or “in-crisis” students.

Another element emphasised by teachers was simply the provision of a safe protected environment for students within the school.

Similarly to parents, many teachers saw behaviour management as being inseparable from pastoral care. Providing rules and boundaries for students, including treating them “fairly and consistently”, were considered central in gaining respect and in creating a positive school ethos. Some teachers

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for the specific questions relating to each group.

further mentioned that they would be able to provide better pastoral care if they did not have to dedicate so much of their time to controlling a “minority” of students.

Some teachers discussed the importance of either teaching or modelling the values which were considered fundamental to creating and maintaining a positive and supportive school ethos.

Except in a few instances, teachers did not mention that they used the learning process to promote and facilitate the social and emotional development of students. When this was mentioned it was within the context of teaching the values inherent in the *Curriculum Framework* to students.

## Principals/administrators

Principals/administrators generally provided a consistent definition of pastoral care. The most common definition incorporated elements of physical, social and emotional care.

“The definition for pastoral care is very broad and involves the school supporting the emotional, physical and social needs of children.”

[Principal]

When principals were asked various questions designed to explore their deeper understanding of pastoral care, most focused on initiatives aimed at “meeting students needs”, particularly “social” and “emotional” ones.

To a much lesser extent, pastoral care was also seen as involving the resolution of student academic needs. Few principals explicitly discussed a connection between pastoral care initiatives and student learning outcomes. There were however some examples provided of pastoral care initiatives that were expected to produce learning outcomes, for example the *after school homework classes* and *school breakfast programs*. It seems that these principals implicitly believed there was a connection between the two.

To the question “how is pastoral care defined in this school?” most principals automatically responded with lists of programs and initiatives that their school had undertaken or of the pastoral care services the school provided. For example:

“We have a Friendly Schools Program, peer mediation, lunch-time activities and games, and sport at lunchtime. We also have a school psychologist, DOTT [duties other than teaching time] time for year level teachers, and a school nurse once a week, who provides programs.”

[Principal]

Whilst it could be expected that most principals would talk about the initiatives of their school, the mention of these programs tended to significantly outweigh mentions of other possible aspects of pastoral care. Less than half of the principals, for example, suggested that pastoral care was a whole-school issue, and only some principals talked about using the learning process to promote the social and emotional development of students.

## District directors

District directors had a different understanding of pastoral care from the other groups. They emphasised that pastoral care was more than *caring for students, creating a supportive environment* or *meeting student needs*, in that it also involved “actively developing the full potential of a child”. Schools were thus seen to have an active role in assisting young people to emerge as effective adults, and pastoral care as an activity that could assist with that process.

“Schools should support kids to emerge as effective adults. Pastoral care is about providing support to facilitate that process.”

[District Director]

Most district directors believed that pastoral care was a whole-school issue that was deeply embedded within the school's ethos and the school's operations. They discussed the many aspects of a school which affect its climate and the quality of its care (including the leadership style, formal planning, school structure, resource allocation, etc), and the ways in which each of these can be actively managed to promote pastoral care.

“It [pastoral care] is a way of life within the school...not just an add on”

[District Director]

District directors further believed that there was a link between good pastoral care and the positive academic development of students. As such, improving pastoral care was seen as an effective strategy for attaining better academic outcomes.

District directors, more so than any other group, emphasised that pastoral care should be founded upon a shared school vision and an ethos based on values of respect, honesty, trust and compassion. They felt that it was important that school staff consistently model those values in all aspects of their day-to-day activities.

# School approaches to pastoral care

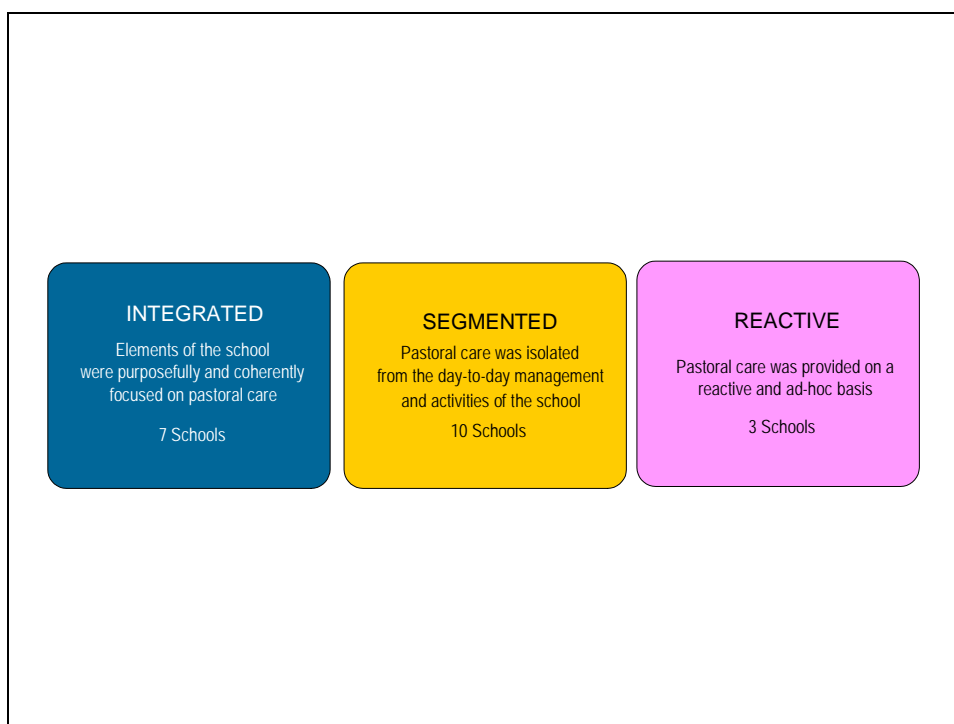
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## Overview

This section examines the different approaches used by schools in relation to pastoral care.

**Based on school staff descriptions of pastoral care in their school, corroborated by information provided by district directors, parents and students,** it was possible to group schools in three groups, according to their approach. These groups have been presented in Figure 4.0 and have been discussed in turn below.

**Figure 4.0: Three different school approaches to pastoral care**



## Integrated approach

In schools that were categorised as using an *integrated* approach, all the major elements of the school were described by school members as being purposefully and coherently focused upon pastoral care. In these schools, according to principals and teachers, the high level of commitment was said to be reflected in many of the major decisions of the school. These schools were also described as having a school ethos and climate centred on achieving a supportive and nurturing environment.

“Pastoral care is reflected through the school’s policies and its accountability framework...People have a common understanding of pastoral care at this school, including students, parents, staff and the community...We make our decisions upon an agreed vision for the school.”

[Principal]

In respect of leadership in these schools, principals seemed to have a vision or understanding of where the school needed to go in relation to pastoral care, and this was reflected in their annual school plan and/or other school planning documentation.

“The school has a fully planned approach to student behaviour and well being.”

[District Director]

Principals themselves believed that they were the ‘orchestrators’ of a positive school culture, and responsible for actively promoting it. They further believed staff had a central role in reinforcing the school ethos and values throughout the school.

At schools using an integrated approach, teachers were regarded by students as genuinely interested in assisting and supporting them. Many teachers themselves believed that they had a major role in building relationships with all stakeholders. They also believed that their modelling of values was vital in promoting a positive school ethos. At these schools there was less of a tendency for teachers to view the expectations of parents and students as unrealistic, and their discussions reflected a more positive outlook about their work.

Principals and teachers from schools using an integrated approach considered staff commitment to be the common thread drawing together all the different elements of pastoral care. School staff needed to be highly committed and it was this level of commitment that was considered essential to the ongoing sustainability and effectiveness of pastoral care.

Students reported that they felt cared about and supported at these schools. Importantly, many students had a high level of confidence in the ability of their school to effectively resolve pastoral care problems as they arose.

“They are always making the school better for us and as enjoyable as possible...It is more of a friendship instead of a student-teacher relationship...Teachers give a lot of their time and resources...Teachers notice if you are upset or not performing and assist.”

[Students from the same school]

At these schools, there was some evidence that pastoral care activities were conducted at different levels of the school – working at the individual student level, group level and whole-school level as required. For example:

“The structure of the school is unique. We have four vice principals, two vice principals concentrating on student services...An autistic child has been integrated into the class...We recently built a skate park to get students together, working on a project, with a common goal, so that they would forget their differences...We implemented a wilderness intervention program for those students who are less suited to a classroom situation. The idea is to engage these students in some ways and then to leverage that engagement.”

[Administrator]

It is worth noting that most of these schools were from average or low socio-economic areas, suggesting that an integrated approach to pastoral care is possible in areas potentially having a more challenging clientele.

District directors were more likely to consider integrated schools as providing “highly effective” pastoral care.

## Segmented approach

The distinguishing characteristic of schools classified as using a *segmented* approach was that pastoral care was isolated from the overall management and day-to-day activities of the schools. These schools provided pastoral care activities, sometimes extensive activities, however in an ad-hoc and uncoordinated fashion. They seemed to lack a common thread that tied them to a wider agenda or plan. In this sense, pastoral care within these schools appeared to be almost “accidental”.

“Accidental approach to pastoral care...rather than a coordinated effort.”

[District Director]

“We have no explicit pastoral care strategy, we have an anti-bullying policy, but we mostly try to create an environment where we lead by example.”

[Principal]

In schools using this approach, pastoral care programs were often put in place without a clear conceptualisation as to what the school set out to achieve and how it could be achieved, and there was little emphasis on ensuring its effectiveness. For example:

Teachers should do more about bullying; they need better ways.”

[Student from a school with a bullying program in place]

There was also anecdotal evidence from students that some schools were more concerned with implementing programs than with ensuring they provided any real benefit, as illustrated by the following quote:

“Our chaplain tries too hard, he just interrupts conversations. We [referring to all students] wouldn't talk to him if we needed to.”

[Students]

Generally at schools using a segmented approach students seemed less inclined to believe that the school cared for them and that the teachers took a special interest in them.

“Our teachers should be more caring...They should be nicer and listen to us more...Teachers should be less grumpy towards us”.

[Student]

According to district directors, many of these schools were “coasting”. They were providing only the minimum services to meet duty-of-care requirements in relation to their students and were thus considered to have “effective” yet “mediocre” pastoral care.

“School has a minimalist approach...quality of pastoral care is quite low...The school makes the assumption that everything is ok.”

“Pastoral care [in a particular school] is by nature of what is expected in a regulatory way.”

[District director]

Of these schools there were those which saw no need or pressure to change their pastoral care practices and those which recognised the need for, and even had plans to adopt, a more integrated or comprehensive approach.

Typically many of the schools using a segmented approach came from moderate-to-high socio-economic areas where there was hypothetically less incentive or need for a comprehensive strategy. Some schools however did come from lower socio-economic areas. In these schools in particular, which typically have a more demanding clientele, it could be argued that there was a need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to pastoral care.

## Reactive approach

Schools classified as *reactive* in their approach generally provided pastoral care in response to a crisis, and as such concerned themselves mainly with serious student issues. At these schools there was very little focus on proactive or preventative care practices. Pastoral care was usually centred on particular “problem” students or groups, and hence mostly on a small minority of the school population.

“Everything is piling too much onto everyone in the administration team. We can't keep up with the workload...No time to build relationships with the students I haven't had time to get out there.”

[Principal]

“There are more kids with special needs...Teachers are stretched and asking them to do more and more. There is frustration for the vast majority because of a bad minority”

[Administrator]

At schools using a reactive approach, as with those having a segmented approach, there was no pastoral care plan or overarching strategy, neither did it seem that the school culture was purposefully managed so as to promote pastoral care objectives. Essentially, pastoral care was provided on an ad-hoc basis resulting in programs being perceived as ineffective in resolving the issues of concern. For example:

“Pastoral care programs always fall over; they aren't systematic, not funded or not part of the school.”

[Principal]

“It feels like we are not getting anywhere, and it [providing pastoral care programs] doesn't seem like an effective use of resources.”

[Administrator]

School staff generally felt overwhelmed with their workloads and the sentiment that pastoral care issues were insurmountable was present. Many school staff felt disempowered and burnt out, and apparently had few personal resources left to invest in pastoral care initiatives.

“We can't consolidate and implement it [effective practice in pastoral care], and staff stop being motivated because of it.”

“Teachers not as involved [in pastoral care initiatives] as I'd like”

[Principals]

Schools using a reactive approach, in particular, had difficulty in defining the boundaries in relation to student care. School staff were unsure as to the extent to which they could intervene into student lives, especially outside of school, and about the role of the parent versus the role of the school.

“Pastoral care is incredibly broad, the boundaries are not clear. It should be more overt, not covert...Should be having home visits as they expect us to address home issues with very difficult students, when is it enough? Boundaries are never defined, it makes it hard, and we have to keep going.”

[Administrator]

Schools using a reactive approach placed a greater emphasis than other schools upon forming partnerships with other community organisations. They seemed to value the relationships they had formed with outside agencies in bringing community resources into the school. Ironically, most felt that these resources were insufficient, and that the community organisations could be more supportive.

Students at these schools unanimously indicated that they were dissatisfied with aspects of their school experience, and said that that they did not feel cared about by the school, and that if they were upset at school their teachers, and to a lesser extent other students, would not notice.

“Teachers don’t even notice or care. One teacher left a child after school by themselves, when their parent did not pick them up. Teachers only notice if parents notice.”

[Student]

Staff at schools using a reactive approach were also described (by many students and some teachers) as much more likely to model negative behaviours and this seemed to influence the extent to which students feel cared about.

“Teachers sometimes treat students like dirt, yelling. They don’t really care about us.”

[Student]

# Effectiveness

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## Overview

This section examines the effectiveness of schools in their provision of pastoral care from the perspective of students, parents and district directors. Each of these perspectives is discussed in turn below.

## Students

Overall, students<sup>8</sup> were positive about their experiences at school, which indicates that schools on the whole are providing effective care, as evidenced by the following:

- ✧ To the question “does this **school care about kids?**” most students answered in the affirmative. When asked to support their answer, some students mentioned that staff listened, were fair and consistent in their treatment, were approachable, and were genuinely interested. Others provided examples of when they, or another student, had been involved in a situation which had been effectively resolved.

“Most important thing is friendship with the teachers, there is always someone there to talk to.”

“When you get into a fight, the teacher stops it and he makes you sit down with the student to work the problem out.”

[Students]

- ✧ Most students also believed that if they “were **upset at school someone would notice**”. Their teachers probably would, however their peers were more likely to be the first to notice.
- ✧ In response to the statement “if there is a **problem at home there is someone at school you could go to for help**” most students agreed, saying that they could go to a teacher, school psychologist, or other staff member. Many believed that this person would be friendly and have a genuine interest in assisting. Students who disagreed with the statement were mostly concerned about being dealt with sensitively and confidentially.

However there were some aspects of pastoral care which could be considered to be less than effective from the perspective of students.

- ✧ Students were less inclined to agree that “**teachers take a special interest**” in them. Those who disagreed with the statement felt that they did not have a special bond with any particular teacher, or that they could not generally relate with teachers because teachers had different interests or ideas. Some, particularly older, students believed that it was inappropriate for teachers to take a special interest in them.
- ✧ Students were also less inclined to agree that “**if there was a problem with a group of students something would be done**”. Of those who disagreed with the statement, many students provided *school bullying* as an example of an issue that had not been effectively resolved.

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<sup>8</sup> The questions asked of students can be seen in Appendix 1.

- ✧ There was widespread disagreement with the statement “the **school cares about what I think**”. Most students believed that their school did not understand their needs and that they had little or no influence within the school.
- ✧ Lastly, many students disagreed with the statement that “the **school is safe and secure**”. They were mostly concerned with playground equipment, school boundaries and fencing and busy roads outside school. Again, school bullying was one of the issues raised.

## School approach to pastoral care

It should be noted that in schools using a reactive approach to pastoral care almost all students disagreed with all of above statements, indicating that their satisfaction with the level of pastoral care was very low.

## Parents

The *survey of parents of former students* provides some insight into parent perceptions of pastoral care effectiveness. In the survey, parents of students who had left the school to continue their schooling elsewhere (in either a private school or another public school), were asked to identify the factors that contributed to their decision to withdraw their child from their particular school.

*It is important to note that there were various methodological limitations<sup>9</sup> related to the administration of the survey that make it difficult to generalise the findings to parent groups as a whole, hence the results from the survey are only indicative at best.*

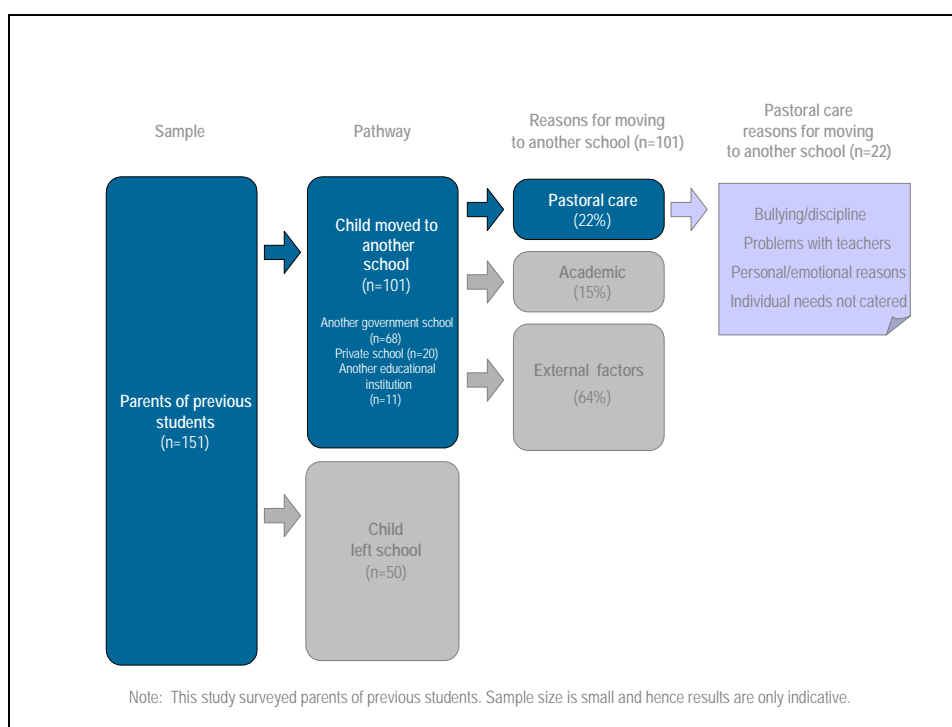
Twenty-two percent of parents who had moved their child to another school<sup>10</sup> did so primarily for pastoral care reasons, with the remainder for academic (15%) and incidental reasons not directly related to their child’s education (64%), as can be seen in Figure 5.0. It is interesting to note that the proportion of parents who moved their children for pastoral care reasons was similar (i.e. no significant difference) to those who did so for academic reasons, suggesting that pastoral care is at least of equal importance to parents in influencing the decision to move a child.

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<sup>9</sup> See the *Introduction* section, under the *Approach* sub-section for a brief discussion of the methodological issues.

<sup>10</sup> The sample of parents who moved their children to private schools was not large enough to make comparisons with those who moved their children to other public schools.

**Figure 5.0: Factors that influence parental decisions to move a child from a particular public school**



The actual pastoral care reasons parents identified as being most important in influencing their decision to move their child were:

- ✧ the school did not deal effectively with bullying and disciplining;
- ✧ the child was experiencing problems with particular teachers;
- ✧ students were experiencing personal and emotional problems at the school (other than bullying); and
- ✧ individual student needs (non-academic) were not being met.

In the next chapter, the ways parents believe system can better meet their children’s needs have been discussed.

## District directors

District directors were asked about the effectiveness of pastoral care in relation to the schools in our sample.

Most schools (13/20) in the sample were described as providing “**effective**” pastoral care. Schools so classified by district directors were later described by them in interviews as having an “average” or “mediocre” approach. Many of these schools were seen as minimalist in their approach, doing what they have always done or meeting only basic duty of care requirements. In this sense, the level of pastoral care was considered to be sufficient.

Five of the twenty schools were considered by district directors to have “**highly effective**” pastoral care, which was characterised by the following:

- ✧ A strong focus on students, where the well-being of the student was considered paramount, and was planned in many aspects of the school’s management.
- ✧ The school’s ethos was considered to be “conducive to pastoral care”.

- ✧ Students were looked upon as individuals and schools were considered to be effective in responding to their needs.
- ✧ There was an ethos where students were encouraged to work towards independence.
- ✧ Positive relationships were fostered throughout the school.
- ✧ There was a concerted focus on inclusivity.
- ✧ Leadership and staff were committed to “actioning” pastoral care objectives within the school.
- ✧ The school had a planned and effective approach to behaviour management.

The remaining schools (2/20) were considered to provide “**ineffective**” pastoral care, and were seen to have no shared values, attitudes or beliefs, low staff and student morale and excessive levels of critical incidents.

## Pastoral care literature and materials

An assessment was undertaken of the schools’ public documentation, including general school promotional materials, school development plans and websites, to understand<sup>11</sup> how schools presented themselves in respect to pastoral care.

The following findings were noted:

- ✧ Almost half the schools did not have any public documentation that was easily accessible. In other words there was no documentation that was readily available in the school office foyer, including over the counter, or available through a school website.
- ✧ Of those schools which did have public documentation, none were assessed by the researchers according to the criteria in Appendix A, as having a quality of documentation that was equal to many of the local private schools. Private schools were generally better at presenting their schools as warm and inclusive and importantly as having a sophisticated and integrated pastoral care system. An example of private school literature is:

“As a Christian community, the School regards caring for each individual student to be of paramount importance. To that end, a pastoral care system which emphasises active responsibility is in place to ensure that the needs of each student are met. In the primary school, the classroom teacher is the obvious choice to offer support in a caring and nurturing classroom environment. In the secondary school, pastoral care is developed and maintained through the House system. Each of the four Houses is made up of eight Home Groups based on a vertical age structure. A Home Group comprises approximately eighteen students from Years 8-12 who meet daily. It is the role of the Home Group teachers to ensure that all of the students in their care are provided with support and an environment in which self-esteem can blossom. As well as Home Group teachers, there are many others who care and contribute to the overall well-being of each student. Classroom teachers, House Heads, the School Chaplain, the School Counsellor, the Deputies, the Headmaster and significant student leaders all work together to provide a supportive school environment in which care, respect and friendship prevail”.

[Excerpt from a private school website]

- ✧ Most government schools had documentation that portrayed the schools as having established pastoral care processes and programs, but overall did not present pastoral care as being well integrated within the school’s day-to-day activities and management.

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<sup>11</sup> The criteria used to review the materials can be seen in Appendix 4.

Nevertheless, many of these schools did manage to communicate that they were warm and friendly. For example:

“During young adulthood, students require different levels of support and encouragement. The focus of our Student Support Programs is early intervention when required. This has been achieved through establishing a Student Services Team to oversee the following:  
A Mentor Program, which is to be the cornerstone of the relationship between staff and students. This program, with its emphasis on early intervention, will maximise student attendance, participation and achievement. Each mentor teacher is responsible for monitoring the performance of their students and helping them with their transition, goal-setting and study skills;  
A case management approach for students identified as educationally at risk; and,  
A program to develop a positive ethos and assist students in their transition to the school”.

[Excerpt from a public school website]

- ✧ Some government schools only mentioned pastoral care in a limited sense, focusing more upon the schools’ academic functions or operational matters.

# Improving pastoral care

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## Overview

This section examines what schools can do, according to school members, to enhance the provision of pastoral care. Specifically, this will involve discussing the:

- ✧ **Factors impeding pastoral care:** What did principals and teachers identify as being the impediments to pastoral care?
- ✧ **Support required by schools:** What support did schools mention they needed to enhance pastoral care?
- ✧ **Improving pastoral care:** What did parents say could be done differently by schools in relation to pastoral care?

## Factors impeding pastoral care

Principals/administrators and teachers were asked varying questions relating to the factors that “hindered” their school (or schools in general for teachers) in providing pastoral care. The responses have been discussed below.

### *Accessing resources*

All schools discussed the availability of resources as a major issue that can impede the provision of pastoral care. Principals mentioned that considerable resources were required to provide pastoral care services that could cater for the individual needs of all students. They felt that staff resources were already at what they considered to be minimum levels which made it challenging to implement any new pastoral care initiatives. To do so principals often borrowed resources from other areas within the school, or relied upon the goodwill of staff.

Many teachers mentioned that they were already working at full capacity and that it was not possible to implement any pastoral care initiatives if this involved additional demands upon their time.

“Stress levels upon teachers is another issue, I am already giving up my recesses and lunchtimes and choose to work right through, and it is difficult to see how I could dedicate any more energy to provide pastoral care to students.”

[Teacher]

Some teachers added that they needed to prioritise their time, and often did not get the opportunity to identify and address what they considered to be lower priority issues such as pastoral care.

There was also some concern expressed by principals and teachers about limited access to pastoral care services, including school psychologists, school nurses and police services. This was seen to be particularly problematic in rural and isolated schools.

Principals and teachers mentioned that many students were on psychologist waiting lists, but in the meantime, schools had to persevere in teaching these young people without the problem being resolved. Moreover school psychologists often only had the opportunity to work with students on a one-on-one basis whereas there was an equally important need for them to implement group or school level programs.

Finally, principals in small schools mentioned that their schools do not achieve the same economies of scale as larger schools, making it often impractical for them to implement pastoral care programs.

### *Accessing specialised knowledge and expertise*

Somewhat related to access to resources is access to specialised expertise and knowledge. Many teachers and some principals felt that they did not have the knowledge or skills to deal effectively with serious pastoral care issues. In particular they believed that they needed additional support to teach students with mental health and extreme behaviour management problems.

### *Accessing external support agencies*

Accessing external services was also considered to be an issue. Community services were either unavailable or had extensive waiting lists. Staff also discussed the work, especially paperwork, required to access these services as often being excessive.

### *Increasing parental involvement*

Teachers and principals mentioned that they faced a major challenge in including parents in pastoral care initiatives. According to them, many parents showed little interest in activities such as parent surveys and information sessions, despite genuine attempts to involve them.

### *Meeting shifting expectations*

Many teachers and principals felt that parent and student expectations, in relation to pastoral care, were becoming increasingly unrealistic. Many schools believed they schools were becoming more responsible for many areas that had traditionally been the parents' role.

“Parents expect too much. They expect teachers to play a surrogate role, to look after the emotional side of a student as well”

“Some parents have shifted their responsibilities to the teacher, for example sex education, etiquette, and values.”

[Teachers]

This was seen to lead to shifting perceptions surrounding school responsibilities in relation to pastoral care and result in increased uncertainty and anxiety among school staff.

### *Responding to the needs of the community and managing the school culture*

Principals from schools using an *integrated* approach to pastoral care mentioned that their school's major challenge was responding to changes in the community. The school was seen as an integral part of the community and understanding and responding to its needs was considered important.

“The socio-economic status of our community is constantly changing, and this changes the welfare of the school. There are both extremes [advantaged and disadvantaged] in our community and we need to be aware of what the community wants and needs.”

[Principal]

In these schools, placements other than local merit select were also considered to be an issue affecting pastoral care. Essentially the placements meant that principals were sometimes unable to control who gained employment at their schools; in this respect, schools were less able to ensure that staff shared the same philosophy of teaching and commitment to the school's approach to pastoral care.

### *Lack of staff commitment*

Schools using a reactive approach to pastoral care mentioned staff commitment, or lack thereof, as one of the major factors impeding pastoral care. Principals noted that there was very little ‘good will’ among teachers that the school could draw upon to initiate programs. They further believed there was a lack of staff commitment to actioning pastoral care ideals across the school community. Indeed, many staff at these schools were said by other teachers to model negative behaviours and act in ways that were detrimental to a positive school culture.

## Support required by schools

Schools were asked not only about the factors impeding its provision, but also about the support they needed with regard to pastoral care. The results are presented below.

### *More resources*

A lack of resources was considered a major impediment: not surprisingly, schools saw increasing them as the most important form of support required.

The following resources were emphasised:

- ✧ Increased student services (including psychologists, school nurses, other allied health services and police officers) to provide greater casework support to students and professional advice to teachers.
- ✧ Smaller class sizes or more non-teaching time to free teachers to focus more effectively on providing care for students.
- ✧ Increased program-based resources (for example the ‘Friendly Schools’ program), where some pastoral care programs could be developed at a system level and then implemented by schools.

### *Standards in pastoral care provision*

There was a general belief across most school staff of the need for much greater clarity in relation to the provision of pastoral care. For example:

“At the moment teachers are just winging it, they require...clear processes in place, at the moment they are just using common sense.”

[Principal]

Specifically, the following issues were mentioned by most principals and teachers:

- ✧ There is no formal departmental position concerning what pastoral care is and what good pastoral care actually involves.
- ✧ The responsibilities of schools versus students, parents, community agencies and the wider community were undefined and at times confused.
- ✧ There were no standardised guidelines and procedures across schools for meeting those responsibilities.

Many principals and teachers thought that these issues could be resolved by the development of an overarching Departmental framework that would provide greater clarity and clear guidelines in relation to pastoral care provision in schools.

### *Improved promotion of pastoral care in schools*

Some principals suggested that schools would benefit from improved public perceptions. It was believed that government schools do provide good pastoral care and that this should be promoted, either through the media, or by working with the parents and the community.

## Improving pastoral care

Parents were asked what they would like to see done differently in relation to pastoral care.

### *More information and greater involvement*

Many parents mentioned that they wanted to be more informed about **the progress of their children**. These parents expected schools to notify them if their children's academic progress or behaviour became of concern. They were particularly clear about wanting to be informed about issues before they became serious, and suggested that the current reporting mechanisms within the school did not provide this information until too late.

Of priority to parents was being informed immediately following any **major incidents involving their child**, and then for them to be included in any decisions concerning the consequences.

Some parents were further interested in being informed about the school and its processes. They wanted more information about the **support services available** to students and how to access those services.

Of those schools where parents did not raise the above as an issue, they were more likely to report that teachers and the school's administration were approachable and accessible to them. To a lesser extent these parents also felt that the school would be responsive to any issues raised.

### *Clearer standards*

Some parents wanted greater consistency between schools in terms of the pastoral care. These parents did not know who to contact within the school if their child was experiencing problems, or how to access the available services. It was suggested in one parent-group that common standards across schools in the form of a parent-friendly document could assist parents with this.

### *Improved behaviour management*

There were some parents who wanted improved behaviour management in schools. Specifically, these parents felt that schools could be more effective by listening to students and sorting out behaviour management issues, by instigating more serious consequences for actions and by more consistent application of those consequences. Some parents also mentioned that there should be a better balance of teachers' time between the "naughty" students and "good" students.

### *Reducing bullying*

Bullying was mentioned by most parents as an issue of importance. These parents particularly wanted school staff to be more observant and aware that bullying was occurring and greater commitment from the school in addressing the problems.

# Evidence used to determine effectiveness of pastoral care

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## Overview

This section examines how district directors currently measure the effectiveness of pastoral care provision in schools. Thus, it seeks to answer the question “what evidence is used by district directors to assess school effectiveness in their provision of pastoral care?”

The majority of district directors did not assess pastoral care by itself, but did so within the wider context of assessing school overall effectiveness by administering the *School Review Framework*.

## School Review Framework

Within the *School Review Framework* schools are required to monitor and report school performance data against *Key Outcome 3: The school offers a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment*. It is the evidence that schools present against this indicator that district directors use to assess the effectiveness of an individual school’s pastoral care provision.

“Within the School Review Framework indicators of school effectiveness are being used by schools which we [district directors] use to determine the effectiveness of pastoral care.”

[District Director]

An important point of clarification is that most district directors saw their assessment as a way to validate and support a school’s self assessment processes, rather than as an opportunity to judge its performance against the indicators contained in the *School Review Framework*. The assessments being made on this basis were noted by most district directors as having a strong focus on “confirming the pastoral care outcomes reported by schools”, and as validation of the programs and strategies being implemented.

“The requirement for schools to present their information allows me to validate their processes”

[District Director]

In short, district directors considered an individual school to provide excellent pastoral care if there was evidence of a coherent, strategic approach to the selection and implementation of pastoral care related programs, practices and processes<sup>12</sup>.

## Assessment and validation

In most cases, district directors reported building a picture of the effectiveness of a school by cross-referencing the information gathered by their own consultations and observations with the performance data reported by schools in their *Self Assessments*.

District directors suggested that the bringing together of objective data and subjective information allowed them to form an overall impression of the quality of pastoral care provided by schools.

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<sup>12</sup> Further information is available in the section *Effectiveness*.

“I review school data and validate claims made in this by speaking to people and cross referencing...a mixture of data and corroborative evidence”

[District Director]

Some district directors mentioned that they provided feedback to schools on their analysis of, and responses to, the pastoral care performance data reported for their *School Review*. The form this feedback takes is varied, and may include a statement of support to the school leadership team; an opportunity to discuss issues and challenges faced by the school; and/or referral to support agencies.

## Objective data - quantitative evidence

The quantitative evidence presented by schools to district directors consisted of varying combinations of the following:

- ✧ Behaviour Management in Schools (i.e. BMIS) records
- ✧ Critical incident reports
- ✧ Number of complaints/disputes
- ✧ Student profiles and performance data
- ✧ Contacts made with external agencies and access to external support programs
- ✧ School community survey outcomes.

Many district directors felt that the quantitative evidence that schools presented against *Key Outcome 3* was insufficient. Some believed that schools required improved data collection and data interpretation skills. These district directors further mentioned that there was the need for more empirically based measures of pastoral care, and that these could be developed at a system-wide level.

## Subjective information - qualitative evidence

In addition to examining school performance data, most district directors gather additional information through ongoing and often informal consultation with the wider school community. This typically involves a sample of students, parents, teachers, school administration staff, student services and specialist education staff and support agency representatives.

Some district directors found school visits useful in making their assessments of overall school effectiveness and pastoral care provision. Spending time in schools was seen to provide them with an opportunity to experience the overall “feel” of a school, that is, to observe the level and integration of pastoral care in day-to-day school activities. Factors raised by district directors as being of interest in this context include the range of programs in place at a school and the engagement of both staff and students in these programs; the general level and tone of interactions between teachers, administration staff and students; the observable focus and flow of the teaching and learning practices used in the classroom and in the playground; and the apparent levels of staff motivation and student engagement throughout the school.

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1: Focus group or interview questions

Group	Evaluation question	Focus group or interview questions	
Schools		Principals/Administrators <i>Interviews</i>	Teachers <i>Focus groups</i>
	What do schools understand by pastoral care?	<p>What is pastoral care?</p> <p>How would you define pastoral care in your school?</p> <p>What does 'good' pastoral care look like?</p>	<p>What is pastoral care?</p> <p>How is pastoral care defined in this school?</p> <p>What is the aim of pastoral care?</p> <p>What does good pastoral care look like?</p>
	How do schools perceive the expectations of others regarding pastoral care (system, parents, students and wider community)?	<p>How do you perceive the <u>expectations</u> of others regarding pastoral care?</p> <p>What are the department's expectations?</p> <p>What do you think parents expect?</p> <p>What do you think students expect?</p> <p>What do you think the wider community expects?</p>	<p>How do you perceive the expectations of others regarding pastoral care?</p> <p>What do you think parents expect?</p> <p>What do students expect?</p> <p>What does the Department expect?</p> <p>What is expected of individual teachers?</p>
	What is the range of approaches to the provision of pastoral care in schools?	<p>Do you have specific objectives/outcomes for pastoral care?</p> <p>Why are those aspects so important, why have you put emphasis on these things?</p> <p>Who, in your school, are the key players in implementing pastoral care?</p> <p>How do you communicate to students and parents about your pastoral care approach?</p>	<p>What are the key elements of pastoral care in action in this school? What is so important about these aspects? Are there other things that you do?</p>
	Do schools include pastoral care in school planning, and if so, how?	<p>Is it part of your school planning?</p> <p>Are teachers / parents / students involved in decision making about pastoral care?</p>	<p>How are decisions made about which approaches will be used? Is pastoral care included in school planning?</p>
	How do schools evaluate/assess the effectiveness of their pastoral care programs?	<p>How do you evaluate or seek feedback from students and parents about their experience of school?</p>	<p>How do you know how effective pastoral care is in this school?</p>

Group	Evaluation question	Focus group or interview questions
	What are the issues and challenges that schools face in providing pastoral care (including factors which impede or enhance their efforts)?	<p>What are the issues and challenges that your school faces in providing pastoral care?</p> <p>What factors are <u>assisting</u> this school in providing future pastoral care?</p> <p>What factors are <u>hindering</u> this school in providing future pastoral care?</p> <p>What support would assist and improve pastoral care?</p> <p>What support has your school accessed for help in developing pastoral care programs?</p> <p>Do you receive any direction/communication from the district office about the delivery of pastoral care?</p> <p>What helps teachers provide good pastoral care? What gets in the way?</p> <p>What are the biggest challenges facing schools with pastoral care provision?</p> <p>In the future, what would you need in the way of support to make it better?</p>
Parents <i>Focus groups and some interviews</i>	<p>What are parents looking for in terms of pastoral care for their children?</p> <p>How effectively do schools provide it?</p> <p>What would parents like to see done differently?</p>	<p>What is pastoral care?</p> <p>What does 'good' pastoral care look like?</p> <p>As parents, what do you expect from this school regarding the care of your child?</p> <p>In this school what are the biggest threats to students' well-being?</p> <p>Can you give some examples where your child has had a problem in the school and has received help?</p> <p>Are parents aware of the kind of pastoral care provided by this school?</p> <p>How do you find out what is available?</p> <p>If you had concerns about your child, how accessible are the staffs at this school?</p> <p>What process would you follow to get help?</p> <p>Who do you think are the key players in giving pastoral care? Teachers?</p> <p>To what extent are parents involved in decision making and planning about pastoral care?</p> <p>Does this school seek parent opinions about pastoral care?</p> <p>Are schools just a vehicle for learning or do you expect much more?</p> <p>Are these parents' responsibilities?</p> <p>In your experience how has the school responded to your suggestions/concerns about issues related to your child?</p> <p>What suggestions would you offer to the Principal to improve pastoral care in this school?</p>
Students <i>Focus groups</i>	<p>How do schools show they care about students' interests and welfare?</p> <p>How effectively do schools show they care?</p> <p>What would students like to see done differently?</p>	<p>Does this school care about kids?</p> <p>Is this a safe and secure school?</p> <p>If kids are upset at this school someone would notice?</p> <p>If kids had problems at home, would there be someone at school they could go to for help?</p> <p>Are there teachers in this school who take a special interest in you?</p> <p>Does this school care about what students think?</p> <p>If there was a problem with a group of students in this school would something be done?</p> <p>Does the school need to do more to have kids feel cared about at school?</p>

Group	Evaluation question	Focus group or interview questions
District Directors <i>Interviews</i>	From a District Director's perspective, how effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care and what evidence do they use to make that judgement?	<p>What is pastoral care? What are the important elements of pastoral care?</p> <p>What does 'good' pastoral care look like in a school? What do you expect of schools?</p> <p>How effective is the school in its delivery of pastoral care? What are the issues and challenges that the school faces in providing pastoral care?</p> <p>How do you determine the quality of pastoral care within the school? What evidence did you use to make a judgement?</p>

**Appendix 2: Questionnaire items from the *Parents of Former Students Survey***

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S1 Has Xyzchild left school altogether or did he/she move to another school.  
1 Moved to another school/alternative form of training  
2 Left school..... → **CLOSE**

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S2 Was it another government school or a private school? Or TAFE college?  
1 Another government school  
2 Private school  
3 Home schooling  
4 Other educational institution (eg. TAFE)

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1 Which one of the following best describes why you decided to move your child from Xzyschool? Read out.  
1 You or your partner changed jobs..... → **CLOSE**  
2 You moved houses ..... → **CLOSE**  
3 Family circumstances changed..... → **CLOSE**  
4 You felt that the new school could better meet your child's academic needs..... → **CLOSE**  
5 You felt that the new school could better meet your child's social or emotional needs  
6 Your child was not happy at the school  
7 Other

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2 Would you mind talking to me about the decision you made and why? What were the issues or what was the situation that made you decide to move? Was there anything else? Any other reason?

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3 What would you have liked the previous school to have done differently (to stop you from moving schools)?

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### Appendix 3: Report structure mapped back to the original research questions

Research questions	Reporting structure	
	Themes	Specific questions
What are parents looking for in terms of pastoral care for their children?	<u>Expectations</u> of pastoral care	What are student and parent expectations in relation to pastoral care?
What do schools understand by pastoral care?	<u>Understanding</u> of pastoral care	What do parents, schools and District Directors understand by pastoral care?
What is the range of approaches to the provision of pastoral care in schools?	<u>Approach</u> used by schools	What approaches are used by schools in relation to pastoral care?
Do schools include pastoral care in school planning, and if so, how?		
How do schools evaluate/assess the effectiveness of their pastoral care programs?		
How effectively do schools show they care?	<u>Effectiveness</u> of pastoral care	How effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care from the perspective of students and District Directors?
How do schools show they care about students' interests and welfare?		
What would students like to see done differently?		
How effectively do schools provide what parents expect?		
From a District Director's perspective, how effective are schools in their provision of pastoral care?		
What are the issues and challenges that schools face in providing pastoral care (including factors which impede or enhance their efforts)?	<u>Enhancing</u> pastoral care	What can schools do to enhance pastoral care?
What would parents like to see done differently		
From a District Director's perspective, what evidence is used to judge standards in pastoral care?	<u>Evidence</u> used to determine effectiveness	How do District Directors currently measure the effectiveness of pastoral care provision in schools?

#### Appendix 4: Criteria used to assess school publications and materials

### FOCUS QUESTIONS ON PASTORAL CARE FOR EVALUATION OF SCHOOL WEBSITES/MATERIALS

School:  
Sector:  
Website development:

#### Focus questions

#### Website/Materials rating

The websites and materials present the school as having which of the following:

1	2	3	4	5
No reference to pastoral care or welfare of the student	Reference to the welfare of the student but does not describe explicit pastoral care processes	Describes some explicit pastoral care processes	Describes extensive pastoral care processes, but they do not appear to be consistent or well integrated	Presents a sophisticated and fully integrated pastoral care system

#### Considerations/evidence

- 1) Overall impression of the pastoral care provided at the school
  - a) How important does student *well being*, *social development* and *emotional development* seem to be at the school?
  - b) Does the school seem to foster *positive values* and a *sense of connectedness* and community membership?
  - c) How prominent is pastoral care versus academic versus other?
  
- 2) Content of material
  - a) How (in what terms) is pastoral care referred to?
  - b) Is there a pastoral care philosophy statement or set of outcome objectives for the school? If so how *sophisticated* is it?
  - c) Is there information available on how to access pastoral care services?
  - d) Does the website refer to support and assistance with individual student development?
  - e) Does the school seem to encourage parental communication and involvement?
  
- 3) Quality of material
  - a) Is the pastoral care material well *constructed* and of sufficient *depth*?
  - b) Are references to pastoral care easily located and *accessible*?