

W@S Discrimination

Research on student experiences of discrimination
Schools, teachers, and students matter

Defining discrimination

“Discrimination is when you are treated differently and unfairly compared to others because of a personal characteristic such as your race, sex, or age.”¹

Tackling discrimination is **important** because it impacts negatively on students’ sense of safety, belonging, learning, and mental health.²



ONE IN FIVE

students reported at least monthly experiences of discrimination relating to their culture or family.



108k+
students

643

primary and
secondary schools

Wellbeing@School student survey data from 2023–2025

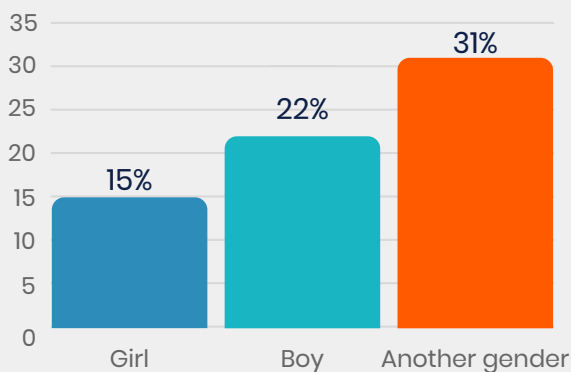
This resource draws on over 108,000 student responses from more than 640 primary and secondary schools to show how schools, teachers, and students all have a part to play in tackling discrimination.





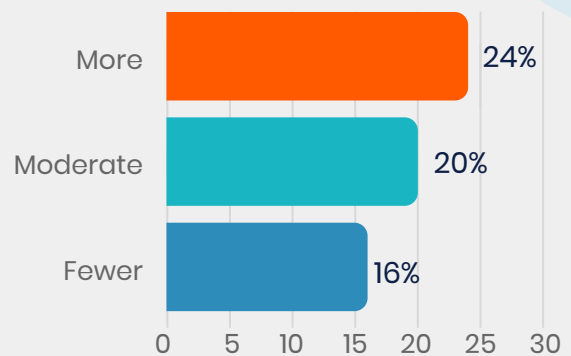
Who experiences the most discrimination at school?

The proportion of students in population subgroups who reported at least monthly experiences of discrimination relating to their culture or family.



Gender patterns

Students who identified as **another gender** experienced the most discrimination.



EQI group patterns

Students at schools with **more barriers** reported more discrimination.

	Pacific	Asian	Māori	NZ-European
Years 4-6	27%	20%	22%	15%
Years 7-8	26%	26%	22%	16%
Years 9-10	22%	23%	22%	17%
Years 11-13	20%	20%	22%	16%
Overall	25%	23%	22%	16%

Pacific, Asian, and Māori students experienced a higher degree of discrimination, more commonly in lower year levels.

What helps to tackle discrimination?

We used the data to model connections and pathways. We found that tackling discrimination depends on the interactions between a range of school, teacher, and student practices.



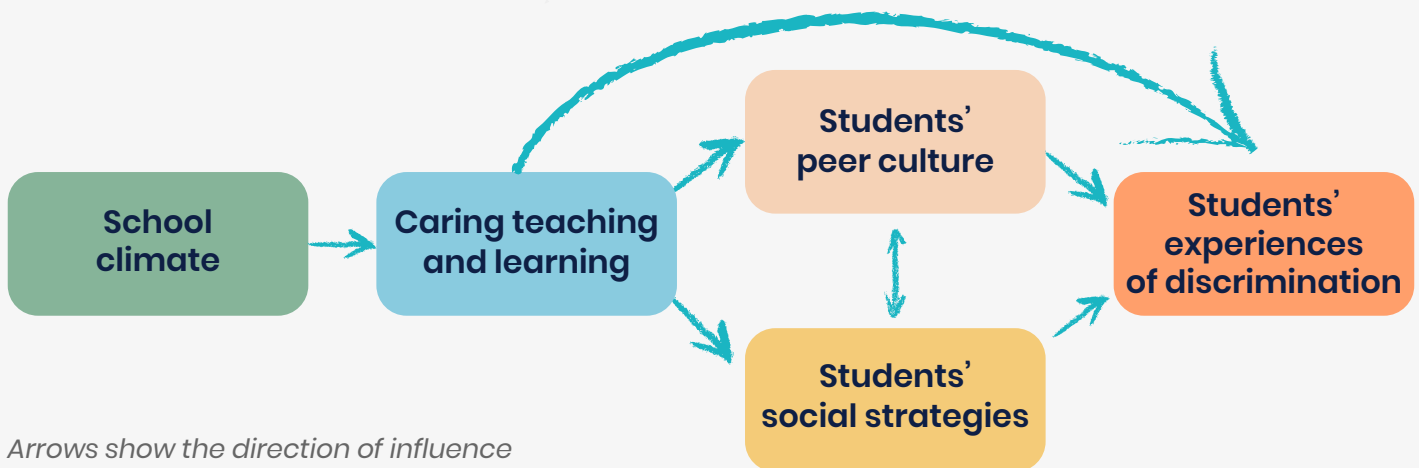
The model

School climate is about ...

relationships, cultural inclusion, safety, values, and listening to students.

Caring teaching and learning is about ...

teacher modelling, caring relationships, acting quickly if there is a problem, and teaching about inclusion.



Students' peer culture is about ...

students including, supporting, and respecting their peers.

Students' social strategies is about ...

knowing how to express feelings, seek help, and stand up for others.

Students' experiences of discrimination is ...

the number of students who reported that other students said "mean things about your culture or family" at least monthly.

What do students think and experience?

Two stories about discrimination

Schools with **low*** discrimination

Example practices	Agreement
Teachers and students care about each other.	93%
Teachers care about how I feel.	89%
Students treat each other with respect.	78%
If I have a problem with another child, I feel I can ask teachers for help.	82%



**From the 10% of schools with the lowest discrimination*

Schools with **high†** discrimination

Example practices	Agreement
Teachers and students care about each other.	65%
Teachers care about how I feel.	59%
Students treat each other with respect.	35%
If I have a problem with another child, I feel I can ask teachers for help.	54%



†From the 10% of schools with the highest discrimination

Schools, teachers, and students all make a difference to discrimination

School climate matters

A school-wide climate that is relational, fair, safe, and culturally inclusive sets the tone for teachers and students.

Teachers play a big role

Teachers model and create this climate in their classrooms. They also support students to develop strategies to address discrimination.

Students' peer culture and their capabilities act to decrease discrimination

If the student culture mirrors the school climate, then discrimination is less common. If students feel they can express themselves, and seek help, this also helps.



What can our school do to tackle discrimination?



School-wide climate matters

Reflection for leaders

How does our school make sure discrimination is noticed and addressed?

How do we seek students' ideas for building a safe and inclusive climate?

In what ways do we act on students' suggestions and report back to them?

Teachers play a big role

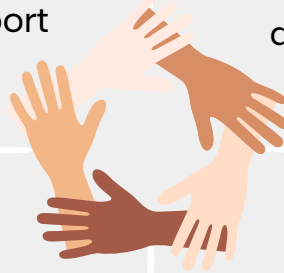
Reflection for leaders

How do we model to teachers the value of caring and inclusive behaviours?

Reflection for teachers

How do we show students that difference is valued and respected?

How do we actively address discrimination if we see it in our classroom?



Students' peer culture matters

Reflection for leaders

How do we show students that listening, inclusion, and respect matter?

Reflection for teachers

In our classes, how do we teach students to include others and stand up for others?

Students' social strategies matter

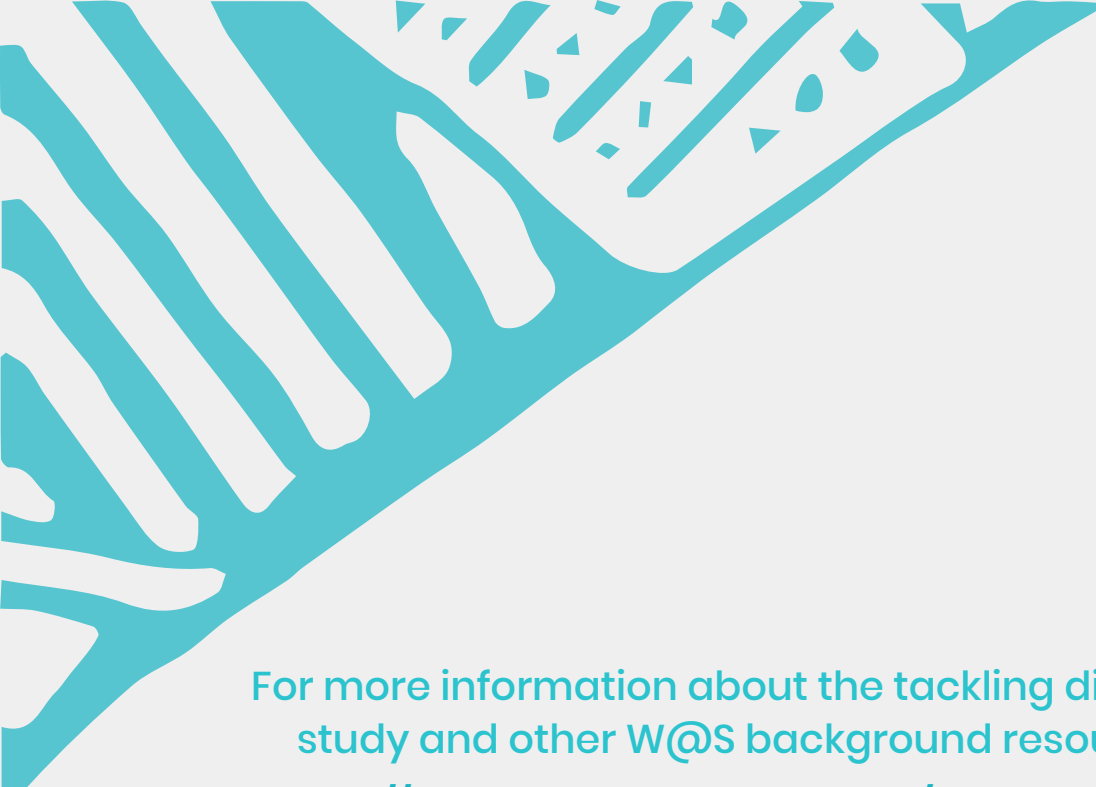
Reflection for leaders

What resources do we provide to help students develop social and emotional strategies?

Reflection for teachers

In our classes, how do we help students learn strategies for expressing their feelings and seeking help?





For more information about the tackling discrimination study and other W@S background resources see:
<https://wellbeingatschool.org.nz/other-ws-resources>



References

- 1 Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). *What is unlawful discrimination*. Author. <https://tikatangata.org.nz/human-rights-in-aotearoa/what-is-unlawful-discrimination>
- 2 Neumann, D., Parr, J., Brown, E., Mejia Toro, C., Park, S. A., Zhang, Y., Crosby, K., Pillai, A., & Paine, S. J. (2026). *Growing up in New Zealand. Now we are 15. Education snapshot*. The University of Auckland. <https://www.growingup.co.nz/snapshots/snapshot-one-education>

Wellbeing@School:

Evidence for a safe and supportive school

Wellbeing@School (W@S) is a free self-review toolkit for schools. The surveys in the toolkit explore factors that create a foundation for student learning (such as a sense of belonging and safety at school).

The toolkit is confidential, locally designed, and managed by NZCER. W@S offers practical evidence-based tools, resources, and services, a 5-step self-review process, and information about how to get started.

The W@S site also houses the Inclusive Practices Toolkit. Both toolkits can be used by schools to confidentially store data, access data reports, find suggestions for next steps or actions, and track changes over time.

The W@S website and services are funded by the Ministry of Education.

<https://wellbeingatschool.org.nz/>



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