

# STUDENT-LED GENDER EQUALITY PILOT EVALUATION REPORT

MARCH 2025

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RESPECTFUL  
COMMUNITY**



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# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Building a Respectful Community (BRC) Partnership acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we provide our services – the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin nation – and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future. WHIN acknowledges that Aboriginal sovereignty was never given up and that we stand on stolen land. We are committed to Aboriginal self-determination and to supporting Treaty and truth-telling processes.

We recognise the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community on gender equality and the health, safety and wellbeing of women and gender-diverse people. As First Peoples, Aboriginal Victorians are best placed to determine a culturally appropriate path to these in their communities.

## Acknowledgements

The BRC Partnership would like to thank the staff and students at Fitzroy North Primary School for their active participation in the Student-led Gender Equality Pilot throughout 2024. Their enthusiasm and support for the aims of the project made everything possible.

We would like to thank colleagues at Banksia Gardens Community Services and healthAbility for their contributions to the early scoping and design of the Pilot. We would also like to thank Lydia Phillips for her contribution to the design and implementation of the Pilot evaluation.



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# Executive Summary

## Background

The Student-Led Gender Equality Pilot ('the Pilot') was developed as part of the Building a Respectful Community (BRC) Partnership, an initiative coordinated by Women's Health in the North (WHIN). This collaborative effort aimed to prevent gender-based violence by addressing its root cause: gender inequality. Guided by the Respectful Relationships education framework, the Pilot sought to empower Grade 6 students to identify and address gender inequality through a student-led, co-designed approach. Fitzroy North Primary School was selected as the pilot site due to its readiness, strong leadership support, and progressive community culture.

## Pilot Objectives and Scope of Evaluation

The Pilot aimed to enhance understanding of gender equality among students and teachers, strengthen leadership capabilities to drive gender equity actions, and foster deeper engagement with the Respectful Relationships Initiative. Students participated in a series of workshops and co-designed projects that addressed gender-based issues within their school environment. The evaluation sought to assess the implementation, outcomes, and sustainability of the Pilot, with a focus on capturing learnings for broader application.

## Implementation Highlights

The Pilot successfully delivered seven workshops covering topics such as gender stereotypes, bystander action, and project planning. These workshops built foundational knowledge and empowered students to co-design initiatives addressing gender inequalities they identified in their school. Students created four group projects which were showcased to the school community at a celebratory assembly.

The Pilot's success was supported by several factors, including strong school leadership, teacher commitment, and a tailored, inclusive facilitation style. A collaborative governance model ensured alignment among project partners and allowed for iterative adjustments based on feedback. However, challenges included the resource-intensive nature of the co-design process, ethical constraints limiting flexibility, and the need for more structured guidance to help students scope their projects effectively.

## Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining student and staff surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document reviews. A theory of change informed the design, emphasizing short-term outcomes like knowledge gains and capability-building, alongside long-term goals for sustainability and cultural change. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the credibility of findings.

## Key Findings

### Implementation Successes

**Enabling environment:** A supportive school culture and strong leadership facilitated high engagement. Opt-out participation maximized inclusivity, reaching disengaged students and fostering a shared experience.

**Student-led approach:** Workshops and co-design processes empowered students to identify and act on gender issues. Iterative adaptations ensured relevance and responsiveness.

**Inclusive facilitation:** Gender-sensitive and adaptive teaching methods fostered a safe learning environment and encouraged participation across diverse student groups.

### Challenges

**Time and resources:** The co-design process required significant time and effort, leading to extended timelines.

**Ethical constraints:** RISEC approvals limited flexibility in tailoring content to the school context.

**Project scoping:** Students needed more structured guidance and scaffolding of key skills to translate ideas into actionable projects.

### Outcomes

**Knowledge Gains:** Students reported increased understanding of gender stereotypes, equality, and active bystander strategies. Awareness of gender-based violence showed moderate improvement.

**Capability Building:** Confidence in planning and implementing gender equality actions grew significantly, particularly among boys.

**Cultural Shifts:** Students demonstrated greater respect, allyship, and self-expression. Teachers observed improved inclusivity, especially among LGBTQ+ students.

## Significance and Sustainability

The Pilot was valued for fostering collaboration among school, students, and community partners.

Sustainability challenges include reliance on external facilitators and the transition of students to secondary schools. Recommendations emphasize embedding the program earlier and equipping teachers to lead future initiatives.

## Implications for Future Projects

The findings from the data collection present some interesting learnings that are helpful to consider for the implementation of the Pilot model in other school settings or for similar projects aiming to activate student voice around gender equality. These include:

- Establishing the level of school readiness of participating schools helps to determine the level of support required
- Cohort models can create inclusive classroom and school cultures
- Support teachers with upskilling in gender equality concepts so they can lead facilitation and co-design
- Building on bystander action content could enhance student leadership in gender equality.
- Student need specific and scaffolded supports for project identification and planning
- Starting with earlier years could lead to greater and sustained impact.

## Recommendations

For Refinement of the Program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a set of 'readiness' criteria to understand and assess the implementation environment.</li><li>• Review and refine workshop content to focus more on practical skill-building around bystander action and leadership, interactivity and exploring ways to offer depth of learning where students are already familiar with key concepts.</li><li>• Develop an implementation toolkit of resources for teachers, including lesson plans, templates and a list of skills not taught in the program but that may be needed when it comes to implementing student projects.</li></ul>

- Work with participating schools to:
  - Set parameters around student projects to limit their scope in line with time and resourcing available for implementation
  - Incorporate more intentional opportunities for experiential learning in the program
  - Explore opportunities for aligning complementary curriculum and resources (e.g. skills, tools) to the program to enhance student readiness for project co-design and implementation
  - Explore opportunities for using the learnings or outputs of student projects to inform next steps for school-based gender equality initiatives that reflect student voice
  - Map the workshop content to topics 7 and 8 of RRRR, as well as other domains of professional development, school leadership and community partnerships to strengthen alignment of the Pilot model with the RR whole school approach.

#### **For Organisations and Schools Wanting to Support Student-led Gender Equality**

- Encourage schools to deliver the program to an entire year level of students to benefit from the cohort-model.
- Focus on upskilling teachers in the program content with professional learning and resources so they can lead facilitation.
- Allocate the appropriate time and resources to support iterations and tailoring to diverse student learning needs and preferences.
- Plan for ethics approvals when evaluating pilots or consider whether it's better to test the approach before evaluating.
- Conduct longitudinal studies of program participants to understand if and how outcomes are sustained over time.
- Adapt the lessons for younger cohorts so the program can be introduced earlier.
- Adapt and test the model in a secondary school environment.

## **Conclusion**

The Pilot demonstrated significant promise as a student-centred model for fostering gender equality and preventing gender-based violence in schools. By empowering students to lead, the Pilot highlighted the potential for meaningful cultural change within educational settings. The findings and recommendations provide a strong foundation for refining and scaling this approach to benefit broader school communities.

# Background

## Building a Respectful Community (BRC) Partnership

The Student-Led Gender Equality Pilot ('the Pilot') is a collective action of the Building a Respectful Community (BRC) partnership. Led by Women's Health In the North (WHIN), the BRC is an alliance of 28 organisations with the shared mission of working together across the northern metropolitan region (NMR)<sup>1</sup> of Melbourne to prevent gender-based violence.

*The Building a Respectful Community Strategy 2022–2026* is the third regional strategy for the primary prevention of gender-based violence and applies a regional, collective impact informed approach to prevention with the aim of coordinating mutually reinforcing strategies and actions across settings and sectors in the NMR.

In April 2022, a planning workshop was conducted with BRC partner organisation to determine priority areas for collective action under the BRC Strategy. The BRC partners collectively generated five priority areas for collective actions, which included '*Population groups experiencing multiple forms of discrimination*'. After consultation with the BRC Strategic Advisory Group and follow-up with BRC partners this priority area was refined to the collective action 'Student-led gender equality action group(s)', described as:

Establish a student-led gender equality action group(s) and identify suitable schools to pilot or upscale previous approaches. Align with established work or initiatives in community health and with the Respectful Relationships Education program at Department of Education (DE), NEMA Division.<sup>2</sup>

This report summarises the evaluation processes and findings of the implemented pilot project.

## What is Primary Prevention?

International and Australian research clearly demonstrates that violence against women is driven by gender inequality (Our Watch, 2021). Gender inequality is where women and men do not have equal social status, power, resources or opportunities, and their voices, ideas and work are not valued equally by society. Having a low level of support for gender equality is the strongest predictor of

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<sup>1</sup> The NMR includes the local government areas of Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Merri-bek, Nillumbik, Whittlesea and Yarra.

<sup>2</sup> Building a Respectful Community Action Plan 2022–2024, available at [BRC Action Plan \[DRAFT\] Version 3](#)



attitudes supporting gender-based violence or violence against women (Our Watch, 2021).

Primary prevention of gender-based violence (PGBV) aims to stop violence before it starts by addressing the underlying drivers of violence. Australia's national framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children, [\*Change the Story\*](#), identifies four gendered drivers of violence that operate in an environment of gender inequality (Our Watch, 2021).

These gendered drivers of violence against women are:

1. Condoning of violence against women.
2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.
3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.

*Change the Story* also recognises that gender inequality cannot be disentangled from other social conditions and injustices. Many other forms of structural and systemic discrimination and inequality influence the prevalence and dynamics of violence against women.

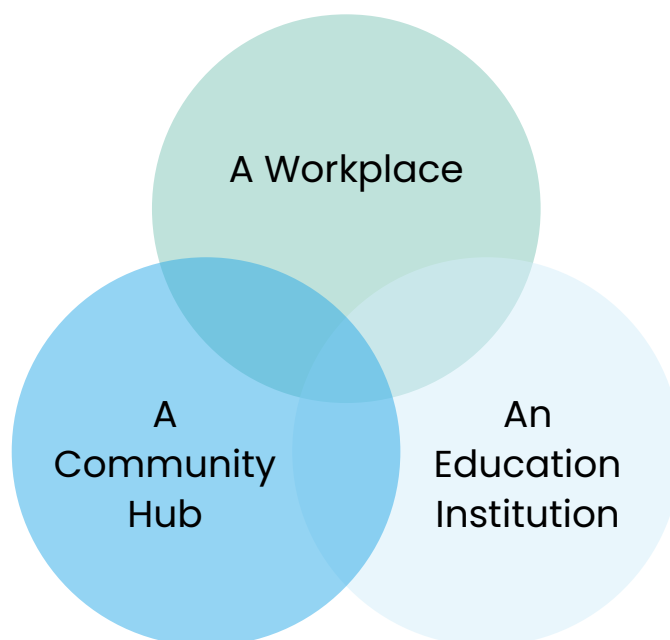
These gendered drivers of violence against women permeate all levels of society; therefore, solutions across all levels are required to challenge the social conditions that allow disrespect and gender inequality to exist. Responses are required across all sectors and social settings, from education and health to law, politics and business. All sectors have a role to play in understanding what the drivers of violence are, how they relate to their workplace settings, and what individuals and organisations can do to stop violence before it starts.

## Rationale for Schools as a Setting for Primary Prevention

Early childhood education, primary and secondary education are identified as key settings for primary prevention work, with strong evidence base and potential for widespread impact on social norms. *Change the Story* emphasises the need for a whole-of-setting approach for success of these initiatives.

The Respectful Relationships Initiative (RRI) is a whole-school framework to support schools and early childhood education settings to prevent gendered violence and promote respect and equality from Foundation to Year 12 (Our Watch, 2022). It is implemented across all Victorian government schools, and some Catholic and independent schools. RRI as a whole-school approach recognises that schools are workplaces, education institutions and community

hubs (see Figure 1), locations where the gendered-drivers of violence can be addressed at a practical as well as at a systems level.



*Figure 1. A Whole of School Approach.*

There are six elements to a whole school approach, as shown in the diagram below (see Figure 2). They include leadership and commitment, school culture and environment, professional learning, teaching and learning, support for students and staff and families and communities. The families and communities element suggests that in addition to working internally with staff and students, schools should be working actively with external stakeholders including parents and families, local specialist family violence and sexual assault services, and local agencies with gender equality and prevention of violence against women expertise. Partnerships can take various forms, such as staff professional development, 'critical friend' networks for school's RRI implementation and engaging with parents and carers (Safe and Equal, 2024).



Figure 2. Six Elements of a Whole School Approach.  
Adapted from *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit* (Our Watch, 2022)

The Pilot was a community partnership, with the Pilot working group comprised of local agencies with gender equality and PGBV expertise who worked with the chosen primary school to engage the whole-of-school community.

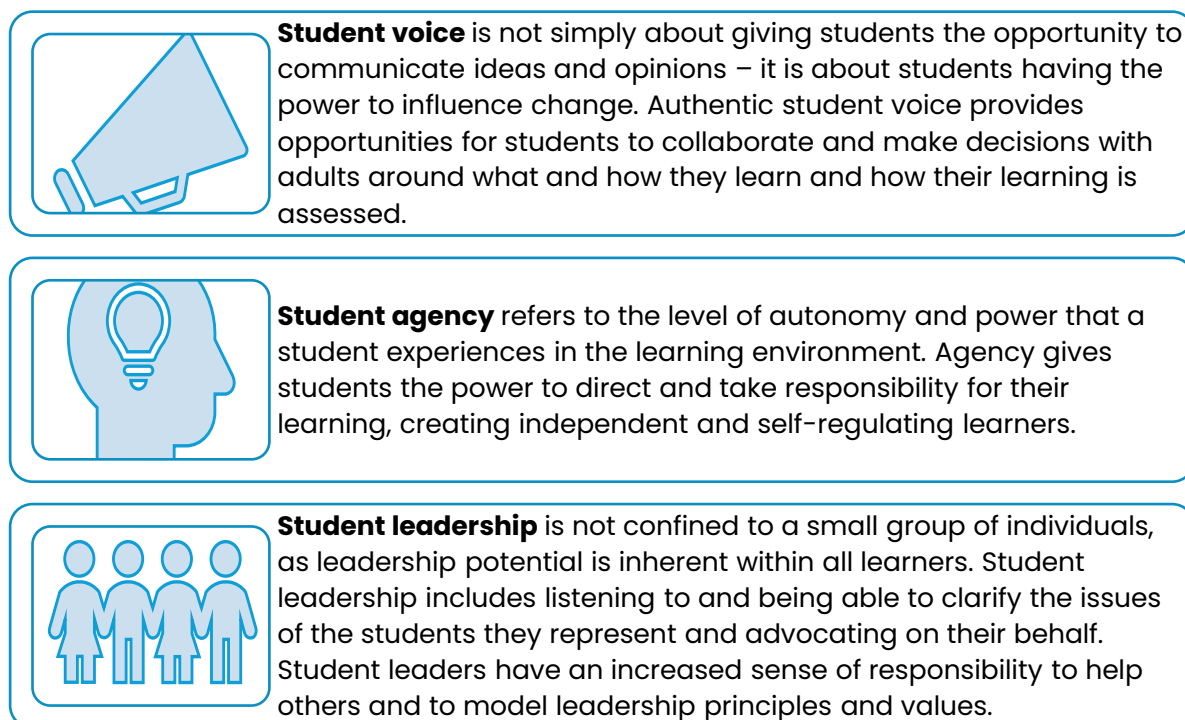
## Student-led and Co-design Approaches

The Pilot utilised student-led and co-design approaches which aim to centre the voices, preferences and decisions of students.

Children have unique and diverse experiences of the gendered drivers of violence against women and gender inequality. One of the four essential actions to address the gendered drivers of violence against women is to ‘build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes’ (Our Watch, 2021:60). *Change the Story* outlines specific actions to build the capacity of young people to reject rigid gender roles, norms and stereotypes and enable them to develop personal identities not constrained by them (Our Watch, 2022: 63).

In an education context, when students are empowered to build their knowledge, skills, and voice in a supportive environment there are positive impacts on their self-worth, engagement, purpose and academic motivation (Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016). *Amplify: Empowering students through voice, agency and leadership* (State of Victoria, 2019) is the Victorian Department of Education’s guide for school leaders and teachers on how to promote student voice, agency and leadership (see Figure 3). It explains how to create the

conditions and implement practices that can help to drive student voice, agency and leadership.



*Figure 3: Definitions of student voice, agency and leadership (State of Victoria, 2019).*

The Pilot used a co-design approach which entails ‘collaborating, including and designing with people that will use, deliver or engage with a service or product’ (Burkett, 2015). A co-design approach in this context recognises that children are experts of their own lives and by sharing this expertise to inform the design of initiatives, assets or resources they are able to share in the ownership.

## Pilot Overview

### Aims and Objectives

The Pilot focused on empowering young students to understand, identify and act on gender inequality issues present in their environment. It is a primary prevention of gender-based violence project that aims to complement and strengthen the implementation of the respectful relationships whole school approach, with a focus on student voice and agency.

The Pilot aimed to build student capability to take action to progress gender equality through a series of capability building workshops and the opportunity to co-design and deliver their own student project.

The Pilot objectives were to:

- Increase student and teacher understanding of the impacts of gender inequality, and the link to gender-based violence.
- Build the capability of student action group(s) to take action to progress gender equality in schools
- Strengthen the leadership of students (and/or teachers) to sustain actions that support gender equality in schools
- Encourage deeper engagement with the Respectful Relationships Initiative, across the whole-of-school community.

## Design and Development

The Pilot was delivered in collaboration with WHIN, the Victorian Department of Education Respectful Relationships NEMA (DE RR NEMA) team, cohealth, and Neighbourhood Justice Centre. Banksia Gardens Community Services and healthAbility joined the Pilot working group in the development phase of the Pilot but could not continue to support implementation. The Pilot working group met regularly from November 2022 to plan, implement and evaluate the project.

The Pilot was originally aiming to target high school students, however due to limited take-up, the Pilot working group shifted focus to upper primary school students. Following an expression of interest (EOI) process and ethics approval, Fitzroy North Primary School (FNPS) was formally selected as the Pilot site due to being a lead RR school in their region, having high levels of senior leadership buy-in, having a supportive school community and their manageable size (i.e. two grade six classes).

## Implementation

The Pilot was implemented across terms one, two and three of the 2024 school year. The Pilot was offered to all grade six students. A total of 48 grade six students opted in to participate, while four students opted out for various reasons. The Pilot model was delivered in four stages – project set up, student capability building, student project co-design and implementation, and handover to school. The fourth component (handover to the school) falls outside the scope of this evaluation.

### **Project set up – school engagement and governance**

After onboarding the school principal and key school staff to the Pilot, the DE RR NEMA and WHIN held a half day professional learning session for all Fitzroy North Primary School staff on a curriculum day at the beginning of Term 1. The session focused on the Respectful Relationships Initiative, an introduction to prevention of gender-based violence with an overview of the Pilot.

Following this, an online information session was held for parents and carers before the workshops began. WHIN provided an overview of the Pilot, evaluation and support required from parents and carers. There was a Q&A from which a FAQ resource was developed and circulated after.

The first lesson with students was spent introducing the Pilot, its purpose and activities, and obtaining their consent to collect data from them for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation.

To support project governance, WHIN chaired monthly meetings with school staff (classroom teachers, wellbeing staff, principal), and the Pilot working group. These meetings supported project management, to ensure that activities were on track, support student project implementation and troubleshoot any arising issues.

### **Student capability-building**

The primary Pilot facilitators were from WHIN and cohealth, with some interim support from Neighbourhood Justice Centre. Across terms one and two, the Pilot facilitators delivered seven one-hour workshops to two grade six cohorts (consecutively). The workshops aimed to establish a baseline of understanding of gender equality as it applies in the life of students and develop the skills for creating their own student projects focusing on one or more gender-based issue in their school. The topics covered included:

1. Respectful Relationships
2. Gender Stereotypes
3. Gender Equality 101
4. Bystander Action
5. Restorative Processes
6. Youth Leadership and Advocacy
7. Project Planning Skills

Through the weeks of workshop delivery, students were introduced to the idea of creating their own projects to address a gender inequality issue of their choosing. They were encouraged to start thinking about and sharing ideas that could turn into projects, which they would start to implement in small groups in term two.

After the workshops, Pilot facilitators and classroom teachers held a debrief as a checkpoint for student wellbeing, reflecting on workshop content and delivery, and sharing learnings to support continuous improvement and tailoring of lessons. Pilot facilitators then met separately to review workshop plans and adjust content and delivery based on teacher feedback, as well as adapt activities to support content and classroom behaviours.

## Student project co-design and implementation

The co-design process comprised project generation, project selection, project planning, and project implementation. Each class was split into two groups to form their project working group, each class selecting a communication project and a sport project. Student project groups were supported by a facilitator to help bring their project concept to life with consideration of resourcing constraints and effectiveness.

A whole-of-school assembly was held at the end of term three, where students had the opportunity to present a summary of their group project to other students, school staff, parents, carers and the Pilot working group. This was an important step to showcase the students' projects and communicate their incredible efforts and learnings to the wider school community.

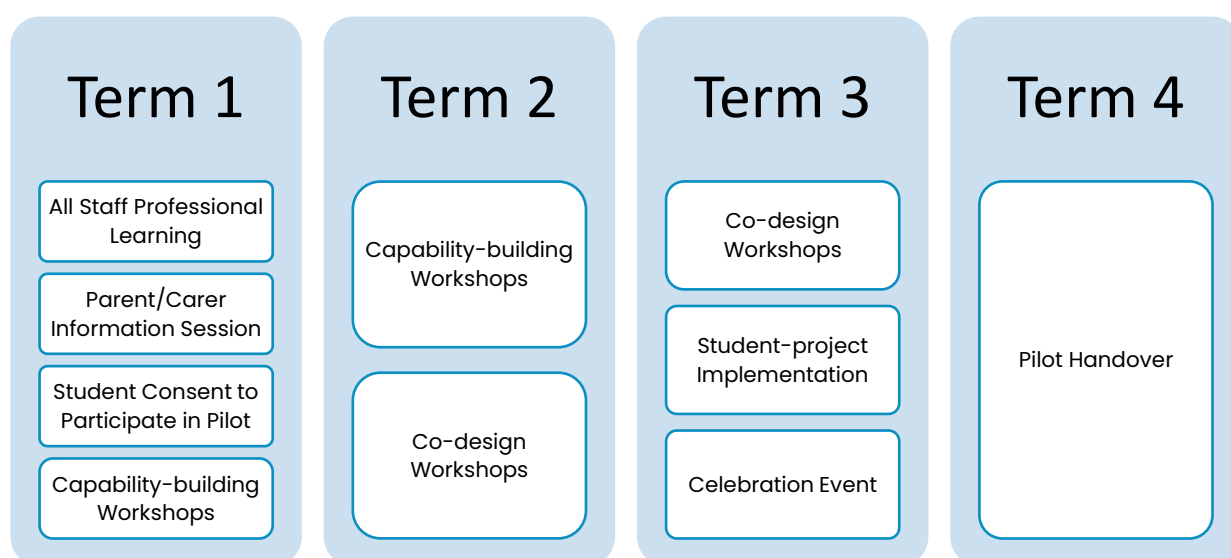


Figure 4. Pilot timeline

## Handover

In the final term, the Pilot working group liaised with school staff regarding efforts to support embedding learnings from the Pilot, including the dissemination or implementation of student projects. There was also a focus on supporting the grade six students to share their learnings and reinforce the value of the Pilot with the grade five students, who would have the opportunity to participate in the program the following year. This phase of the project was outside the scope of evaluation.

# Evaluation Methodology

## Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the impact of the project on students' ability to develop the skills and knowledge needed to take action and advance gender equality in their school environment. It was also considered important to assess implementation effectiveness, and explore the value and sustainability of the Pilot.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Determine the value of the Pilot to Fitzroy North Primary School staff and students
- Identify the extent to which the Pilot model represents promising practice in working with young people in schools to address gender inequality and prevent gender-based violence – and use this to support decisions about whether it could and should be replicated or scaled
- Capture learnings that can be shared and may inform other school-based gender equality initiatives
- Contribute to the Victorian and national evidence base on primary prevention efforts to engage young people in schools, including learnings about suitable approaches, methods and ways of working.

## Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs)

1. What aspects of the implemented model represent promising practice when working in a school setting to address gender inequality and prevent gender-based violence?
  - 1.1 What worked well in implementation? What were the key challenges?
  - 1.2 What were the key learnings that are relevant for future projects aimed at activating student leadership around gender equality?
2. What short-term outcomes has the Pilot achieved (intended and unintended)? For whom?
  - 2.1 How, if at all, did the Pilot impact student and teacher understanding of gender inequality, and the link to gender-based violence?
  - 2.2 How, if at all, did the Pilot build the capability of the student action groups (and/or teachers) to take action to progress gender equality in schools?
  - 2.3 How, if at all, has the Pilot encouraged deeper engagement with Respectful Relationships concepts and principles among participating classes?



3. What is the Pilot's significance to Pilot partners?
4. To what extent are the Pilot benefits likely to be sustained?
  - 4.1 How, if at all, did the Pilot strengthen the leadership of students (and/or teachers) in order to sustain actions that support gender equality in their school?
  - 4.2 What would it take to replicate the model?

## Evaluation Activities

The Pilot evaluation activities began in February 2022, with the development of a theory of change. Following this, activities included establishing monitoring and evaluation systems, developing data collection tools, administering surveys, facilitating focus groups, reviewing project documentation and analysing quantitative and qualitative data.

The theory of change describes the project's overarching goals, the key strategies through which to achieve this, and the anticipated short, medium, and long-term outcomes anticipated. This along with the project plans informed the development of the key evaluation questions, relevant methods, data collection and indicators for addressing the evaluation aims. The evaluation consisted of both process and impact evaluation components to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the initiative.

## Data Collection

This was a mixed methods evaluation which was undertaken by Pilot working group members with support from an independent consultant. The evaluation follows an explanatory sequential design, where quantitative data is collected first, and then qualitative data is used to explain quantitative survey results and capture richer perspectives and voices. Triangulation was used to offset bias and increase the credibility of evaluation findings, including short-term outcomes.

## Methods

### Surveys

- **Student baseline and endline surveys:** Baseline and endline surveys were administered to grade six Pilot participants to measure any change in the group's understanding of gender-based violence and gender equality and their confidence to take action to progress gender equality at school. The baseline survey was administered in the first workshop (beginning of Term 1) and the endline survey was administered in the fourth co-design workshop (end of Term 2). Identifier numbers were not used so the results have been interpreted at the aggregate level and disaggregated by gender.

- **Workshop surveys:** A workshop survey was administered to students at the end of each capability-building workshop. The purpose of the survey was to identify key themes of what was working well with delivery to support continuous improvement.

### **Focus groups**

- **Student focus groups:** Two rounds of focus groups were held with a sample of Grade six students. Separate sessions were held for male-identifying and female-identifying students, which intended to provide a safe environment for students to reflect on the Pilot in their peer groups. Gender-diverse students were given the choice to join the group they felt most comfortable in. The first round focused on the implementation of the Pilot and impressions following the capability building workshops, and the second round focused on the outcomes of the Pilot for students, its value and perceptions of sustainability.
- **School staff focus group:** A focus group was held with participating school staff members after student projects had been implemented. The purpose was to explore school staff perspectives on Pilot implementation, outcomes, significance and sustainability.
- **Pilot working group focus group:** A focus group was held with members of the Pilot working group, representing WHIN, DE RR NEMA, cohealth and NJC, to gather their perspectives on Pilot implementation, key learnings for future models and significance of the Pilot to project partners.
- **Pilot facilitators focus group:** Pilot facilitators (staff from the partner organisations) participated in a focus group at the completion of student projects. The purpose of this session was to contextualise workshop debrief forms and capture deeper learnings about the implemented model, and reflect on the Pilot's outcomes and sustainability once student projects had been completed.

### **Student observations**

At the celebration assembly two WHIN staff members recorded observations of student presentations on their group projects. An observation protocol was used to promote agreed and consistent data collection via this method. The observation protocol was used for each of the four student projects and for the assembly overall. The purpose of this method was to triangulate students' survey results regarding any change in understanding, capability and leadership; and determine the extent to which gains have been maintained through term three.

### **Document review**

The evaluation team reviewed relevant literature on gender equality work in school settings and reviewed Pilot documentation including workshop debrief

forms with school staff and student feedback forms from individual workshops. This review helped to answer key evaluation questions about the Pilot's implementation, its alignment with current literature and learnings about activating student leadership.

## Recruitment

Recruitment for evaluation activities was purposeful and targeted to those with direct involvement in the Pilot. Paper-based baseline and endline surveys were administered to students upon the commencement and completion of the capability building workshops. Informed consent was provided by students when completing the surveys.

Student focus groups were held with a sample of grade six students from each class at the end of term two, and again upon the completion of student projects at the end of term three. Through teacher consultation an EOI was circulated for the focus groups to identify interested students, however other students were selected in addition to those with interest to ensure diverse representation from students, including those who were less engaged in the Pilot. The same group of students were invited to participate in both focus groups. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to recording focus groups.

The staff focus group was held with the key school staff participating in the Pilot, including the principal and grade six teachers. The Pilot working group focus groups was held with all six members of the Pilot working group.

All focus groups were facilitated by an external consultant, who conducted thematic analysis which was later refined by the Pilot Working Group.

## Participation

Pilot participants, including students, staff and parents and carers on behalf of students, were asked to provide informed consent to both participate in Pilot activities and evaluation activities. From the student group, 48 consented to participate in the Pilot and 47 consented to participate in the evaluation. From the staff group, five people consented to participate in the Pilot and the evaluation activities.

Participants across all evaluation activities were directly involved with the Pilot either as project staff, student participants or school staff supporting coordination and delivery of the Pilot.

A total of 42 students completed the baseline survey, consisting of 14 males, 27 females, and 1 gender-diverse student. The endline was also completed by 42 students, including 16 males, 24 females and 2 gender-diverse students. These surveys were administered during class time on a specific day to those students in

attendance, which meant the 42 students who completed the baseline survey was not the exact same group of 42 students who completed the endline survey.

Seven feedback surveys were administered to students over weeks 2–8 of workshops, and an average of 39 students completed each one across the two classrooms.

For student focus groups, there were eight female and gender-diverse students and five male students in the first round, and three female and gender-diverse students and four male students in the second round. Three people participated in the school staff focus group, six people participated in the Pilot working group focus group and three people participated in the Pilot facilitators interview.

## Ethics

As the Pilot evaluation activities involved school students and staff, the evaluation team required Research in Schools and Early Childhood Settings (RISEC) approval. Additionally, as the evaluation topics included gender-based violence the evaluation was deemed as higher risk and required a Tier Two application.

RISEC approval was required for researchers to approach schools and early childhood settings to request participation in research. It is a process that is managed by the Victorian Department of Education.

In line with ethics standards, all participants were provided with plain language statements and asked to provide informed consent at the initiation of the Pilot and before each evaluation activity.

## Limitations

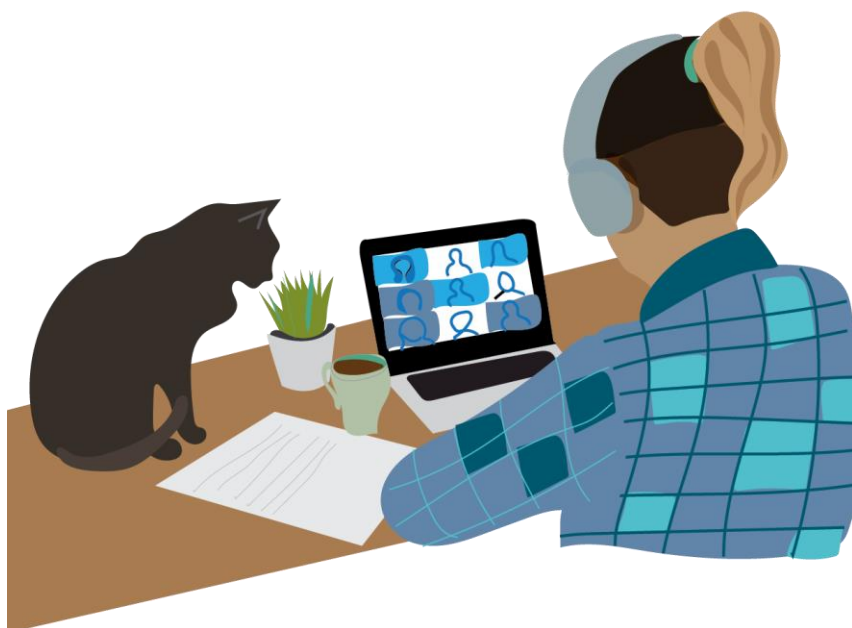
Given the requirement of RISEC to submit evaluation plans and tools before engaging with the school, the overall evaluation approach had to make assumptions about the timeline of Pilot delivery and optimum moments for assessing outcomes on participants. While knowledge could be assessed in a pre/post survey with students, student/staff capability to take action to progress gender equality was more complicated using the existing tools and plans. Furthermore, the student co-design projects took longer to complete than anticipated and while the Pilot was extended for an additional term it meant that evaluation activities could only be extended up until the student presentations of their projects.

As a result, the evaluation team were not able to thoroughly assess individual student capability in terms of competency in the subject matter. The evaluation primarily relies on the perspectives and observations of the teachers, Pilot working

group members and the small sample of students who participated in the focus group discussions.

It was envisaged that a pre- and post-implementation survey would be completed by participating school staff as part of the evaluation process. However, as there were only very few school staff involved (five in total) and only three completed the baseline survey, it was decided that any results from an endline survey would not be statistically relevant. As a result, any assessment to evaluate changes in school staff knowledge, skills or confidence in gender equality were limited to their own self-reflections shared in the focus group. Subsequently the evaluation shows limited findings of impact on this cohort.

While non-binary gender-based data was collected from students, given the limited number of students falling in this category the findings have limited power to be generalised. Some effort is made to highlight differences between different genders in the survey responses, but there is an emphasis on binary data. Similarly, students focus groups were gender-disaggregated, however given the small number of students in each group it is difficult to generalise some findings on the basis of gender. Other identity-based data was collected in the student survey (e.g. Indigenous status, cultural background) however the evaluation team did not have capacity to analyse intersectional data.



## Evaluation Findings

The evaluation findings are structured around key evaluation questions outlined in the above section. The key findings represent the themes that emerged through the focus group discussions, student surveys, Pilot working group interviews and document review, which were validated through a sense making workshop with the Pilot working group.

### Key Findings about Implementation (KEQ 1)

Findings from the focus groups, interviews and document review suggest that all project activities were successfully delivered and that while the Pilot was resource intensive and required an extension of timelines, the Pilot quality was of a high standard. The selection of school, strong school engagement approach, and the iterative planning approach to ensure a student-led and co-designed approach were key enablers for successful Pilot implementation. The design and delivery of workshops which enabled content and activities to be tailored to their context and for the establishment of a safe and inclusive learning environment was also a strength, especially in terms of engaging boys in the program. Ethical research requirements, the resource intensive nature of the model, converting student ideas into gender equalit actions and maintaining engagement with all students were identified as challenges to implementation.

### Factors that Supported Project Implementation

#### **Primary school setting and choice of school**

The structure of primary school classrooms having a single classroom teacher (or up to two in the case of a job-share) who teaches the vast majority of lessons across the year was a key enabler for the success of the Pilot. A primary school setting contributed to a whole-year-level shared experience, frequent blocks of RR education, and protected time with classroom teachers who were able to reinforce lessons between workshops. Students were provided with informed consent about the nature of the project (and the evaluation) and were given the choice to opt-out. An opt-out rather than an opt-in model helped to set up the expectation that the project was intended for all grade six students, that activities would be happening during class time and that everyone would benefit from getting involved. These factors made it viable for most students to choose to participate. As a result, the Pilot was able to reach students who were not immediately engaged or interested in the topic and, through participating, help to develop their understanding and enthusiasm alongside their peers.

Working in a primary school also made it possible to roll out elements of student projects to other students in the school, leading to potentially wider impact.

Requests from students to engage with other year levels could be handled in a centralised way, facilitated by school leadership and the grade six teachers. This also meant that the students' preferences to engage the younger year levels in their projects could be honoured, supporting a student-led approach.

The chosen school represented a readiness for supporting student leadership around gender equality which facilitated implementation and Pilot outcomes. School selection was directed by the DE RR NEMA team based on their knowledge of schools in the region. The host school was accepted as the Pilot site because the school staff and leadership were known to be committed to gender equality and excel in the RR initiative. Furthermore, the school community is progressive and was supportive of the program. Both these factors created an exceptionally enabling environment, ensuring there was alignment in values and vision for the Pilot between the delivery partners and the school community. It also made it easier to deliver a Pilot model so as not to be derailed by resistance and backlash.

In addition, teachers' commitment to the delivery of the Pilot, including supporting students to deliver their projects, was reported by the Pilot working group members as significant. Teachers showed high levels of commitment, spending many lunch times and additional hours on project activities, liaising with partners and supporting students. For example, for most of term three one of the grade six teachers was on sick leave and the casual relief teacher (CRT) didn't have the knowledge of the Pilot so the other grade six teacher took on the role of sole liaison for two classrooms. This extension of effort was testament to the perceived value of the Pilot and their commitment to helping it succeed.

*We saw that commitment in things that were happening behind the scenes in the school while we weren't there, to ensure that decisions were made when they needed to be ... checking emails while on leave, picking up [teacher's] load when she was off, supporting activities that needed to be finished before the next session, allocating class time for that to happen, especially the co-design projects. (Facilitator Interview)*

### **Strong school engagement**

The Pilot had a focus on building school engagement early with key groups such as leadership, school staff and parents/carers, which also created an enabling environment for maximum support and minimal resistance.

Delivery partners led a professional learning session for all school staff which aimed to inform them about the Pilot, provide a rationale for school participation and increase staff awareness of the role of schools in promoting gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. This inclusive information session

made it easier for school leadership and the grade six teachers to promote the Pilot through the course of implementation.

*...and then all teachers, even those that aren't necessarily dealing with the project, but yeah, especially our specialists and things like that, that work with the Sixers, were all on the same page with what was [happening] going forward. (School staff focus group)*

Delivery partners also delivered an online information session for parents and carers at the beginning of the Pilot, to provide an overview of the project and an opportunity for questions or concerns to be raised by families of participating students. While only a small group of parents attended this session, it brought to light some key concerns such as how masculinities was going to be addressed in workshop content and the need for creating inclusive environments for male students when discussing the nature of gender inequality. The key points from the discussion were compiled in a frequently asked questions document and circulated to all parents/carers and school staff. One of the parents subsequently opted their child out of the Pilot, otherwise these issues were not raised again suggesting that concerns had been resolved. At the finalisation of the Pilot, a school assembly was held inviting all students and parents/carers to hear from the grade six students about their projects. There was a notably high representation of parents/carers (of all genders) in attendance, particularly those of grade six students, indicating sustained support for the initiative.

A governance structure was established early where key school staff and delivery partners would meet monthly to monitor implementation, troubleshoot issues and forward plan. These spaces supported clarity and transparency around roles and responsibilities and allowed adjustments to be made to the implementation plan as needed. They were also critical in transitioning between key milestones such as school terms and the co-design and implementation phases of student projects.

### **Student-led approach supported by iterative processes**

Findings from focus groups with students and school staff indicate that the student-led and student-centred approach of the Pilot clearly supported student engagement and agency in the Pilot. The additional time, resources and review processes embedded into implementation were key to making this possible.

Students were excited by the opportunity to affect change at their school and have choice in how they did this using a co-design approach. Students and school staff reported that the student leadership emphasis was enjoyable and motivating for students.

*...the majority of the projects are actually, they're outstanding, they're fantastic. And the way that it was fully student guided. So the student*



*agency and the student voice that was reflected from those projects is really strong. (School staff focus group)*

Mechanisms for collecting student feedback were built into workshop delivery to ensure accountability to a student-led approach and support process improvement. This included a weekly anonymous survey and a “question box” where students could insert anonymous questions which were answered by Pilot facilitators the following week. For instance, in week one some students expressed a desire for more information about the content of the workshops, so a summary of all session topics was provided to help them gain a clearer understanding of the project’s scope and aims.

*I also think WHIN, cohealth and the Department's openness to pivoting when we gave them feedback, if things didn't land, or if the children felt, you know, overwhelmed by something that was happening, their openness to just saying, 'yeah, we can do that again', or, 'yeah, we'll change that for next time', has been really, really wonderful. (School staff focus group)*

Post-workshop weekly debriefing sessions were another important mechanism for collecting feedback and advice from classroom teachers. These meetings, while an additional commitment of time from school staff, represented a pivotal touchpoint for strengthening collaboration between teachers and Pilot facilitators and an opportunity to share respective expertise. These meetings supported process improvement such as adaptation of classroom management techniques, improved scaffolding of learning to support student project planning and adjustment of project timelines to ensure more time for co-design and to enable student agency and decision making. This feedback loop enhanced planning and communication which was particularly valued by the school staff.

*I think that the process of evaluation at the end of every workshop and then monthly has also been successful in making sure that we were catering to the needs of our students every week, that we came back together, because obviously some of the external services didn't have the same level of knowledge around how a school works or how a classroom might look, or about our particular learners. So we've needed that open communication to make sure that the workshops were targeted to what our kids needed. (School staff focus group)*

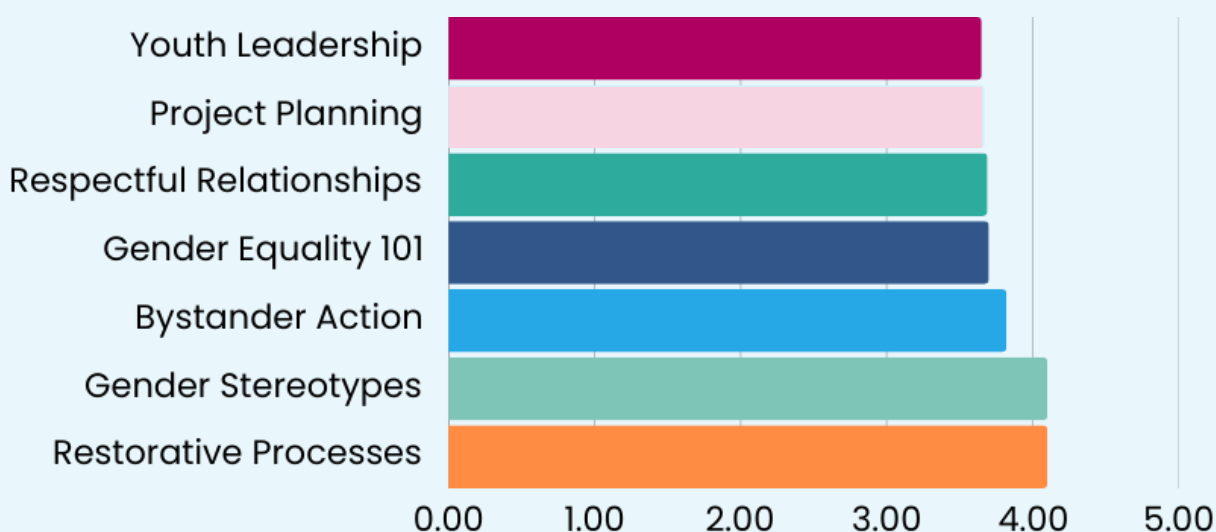
The Pilot working group initially planned project activities and student workshops from the outset, but significant time was also spent between workshops reviewing plans and incorporating feedback from students and teachers. This approach allowed Pilot facilitators to better understand and address students' needs, leading to increased student interest and engagement.

### **Inclusive and adaptive facilitation**

The facilitators used a range of techniques to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students, and also adapted their facilitation to increase student engagement and learning.

The sessions on gender stereotypes and restorative processes emerged as student favourites, scoring an average of 4.10 each. Youth leadership and project planning sessions scored lowest, an average of 3.65 and 3.67 respectively. Feedback from both cohorts indicated strong agreement that the presenters performed well across all sessions, with ratings consistently above 4 out of 5 on the evaluation scale.

**Graph 1: Student workshop feedback – agreement with the statement ‘This session was good’**



The workshops were intentionally designed to foster an inclusive environment where all students felt heard and involved, avoiding any content or language that might cause them to feel blamed or singled out. Pilot facilitators took care to create a space that was welcoming to participants of all genders, ensuring discussions were constructive and supportive. They were also mindful of sharing airtime with students which encouraged quieter students to participate, modelled inclusive environments and fostered equitable participation.

Pilot facilitators experimented with gender dynamics in group work to identify the best approach for maintaining student focus while creating a safe space for discussing challenging topics. When allowed to form their own groups, students typically chose to work with friends of the same gender. However, when facilitators intentionally mixed genders in groups, these dynamics helped improve classroom behaviour. This approach reduced the disruptions caused by small groups of male students who were not taking the project seriously in the early weeks. As students were required to work cooperatively with peers from different gender groups, the disruptions decreased over time. Additionally, clear efforts to establish boundaries and manage classroom dynamics likely helped foster greater respect for the learning environment.

By the end of the project, students had developed a greater appreciation for the benefits of working in mixed-gender groups themselves, particularly after designing their own initiative for younger students that encouraged them to play in mixed-gender groups also. This process highlighted the value of experiential learning, as students learned directly from their interactions and experiences within the group. Teachers played a crucial role by setting clear expectations for behaviour and being mindful of individual learning needs and capabilities, guiding students to navigate group dynamics effectively.

## Factors that Were a Challenge to Project Implementation

### **RISEC requirements affected co-design**

To undertake evaluation activities within the school, the Pilot working group had to apply for Research in Schools and Early Childhood Settings (RISEC) approval through the Department of Education. This process involved submitting information about project and evaluation aims, evaluation tools and risk management plans months prior to agreements being made with the chosen school to undertake the Pilot. As a result, certain elements of the model had to be designed without school or student input, which was not in line with the Pilot's intended student-led approach.

Workshop content and data collection tools had to be designed from the outset without the opportunity to establish an understanding of the school context in relation to their RR initiative, project resourcing, timetabling, and school policies. Nor was there the opportunity to gauge the student's baseline level of understanding of key concepts or general interest in the subject matter.

*In the nature of ethics processes ... they're obviously necessary but they also become a bit of a barrier to being as adaptable as you could be, taking the kind of action learning approach and the kind of iterative sort of approach that probably works best for a project like this. If you are saying*

*the students are leading you need to be able to be shifting and changing in line with what the students want but that can be hard when you've got the [evaluation] frame that you need to sit within. (Pilot working group focus group)*

Fortunately, there were other mechanisms in place to collect student feedback and input along the way to support adaptations and process improvements, as described above. However, this was an additional time burden and required additional support from teachers through the weekly debrief sessions.

The amount of paperwork required by RISEC that needed to be shared with all participating groups – staff, parents/carers and students – meant that additional time was needed to ensure everyone was appropriately oriented to the implications of participating in the Pilot and were able to provide their informed consent. Alternative methods for disseminating this information and obtaining consent from participants outside of workshop times should be explored.

### **Supporting students to identify and plan actions**

A co-design methodology was developed through workshop design, aiming to help students identify gender issues in their school environment that could then be developed into project ideas for implementation. An activity from Topic 7 of the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) learning material<sup>3</sup> was adapted, using the image of a kookaburra. In this activity, students would identify gender inequality issues in their school, symbolised as “rocks,” and then proposed actions to address those issues, symbolised as “feathers.” These “rocks” and “feathers” would then be added to a mural of the kookaburra, representing a move toward a gender-equitable, safe, and respectful school environment. This framework was intended to be introduced in the first workshop, with new “rocks” and “feathers” added each week based on student discussions, allowing them to see problems and solutions within their school while refining their ‘gender lens’.

However, in practice the kookaburra concept was not introduced until workshop four due to evaluation activities taking up lesson time in the first workshop which led to a process of “catching up” each week on the content missed from the week before. And when it was introduced, and the rocks and feathers were added to the kookaburra, it still wasn’t clear to students how these ideas converted into projects.

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<sup>3</sup> From the 2018 edition of RRRR Level 5–6, Topic 7, Activity 2: *From words to actions*. This activity was updated in the 2024 edition of RRR Level 5–6, Topic 7, Activity 1: *Talking about gender – from inclusive language to inclusive actions*.

Students generally needed more support to identify and scope potential project ideas while still being student-led. Given the vast array of gender equality issues that exist – from unequal pay, to representation in media, to health inequity and violence – it was difficult to get students to see the range of possibilities for their projects without influencing.

*.. there was a big focus on it being student-led projects and that was a really important part of the project, but it would have been really great for the kids to see a whole array of examples of what that could look like, because they're still only little. So thinking broadly about, 'well, what could my action look like?', was really tricky for some. (School staff focus group)*

It was also difficult to help students scope and plan their projects because they were given few parameters, such as time, budget, size of target audience etc. This was discussed with school staff in the lead up to the co-design process, but it was difficult to materialise what the process would look like and how to set limits for students to work within. The school staff wanted to be led by the students and were open to adapting plans to accommodate students' ideas.

Staff also reported that the students needed more time and pedagogical supports, such as scaffolding of the project planning steps, in order to be able to grasp the task of planning for their projects.

*We needed to do a lot of additional scaffolding for the students to be able to access some of the steps that they needed to take for these projects to come to fruition, so that took a lot of time outside of the project, in class time. So maybe next time there would be greater level of scaffold so that the students had the supports that they needed to do the steps. (School staff focus group)*

Staff also reported that there are potentially other skills students would benefit from learning in order to prepare for their project work, outside of the content and resources presented in the workshops. According to the grade six teachers, the students hadn't necessarily developed all the group work skills required for their student projects (e.g. making decisions as a group, managing disagreement, self-managing). School staff reflected that next time they would include these skills via general curriculum earlier in the year so that students are already introduced to some of the skills and dispositions they can draw on for their projects.

*We've taken what we learned in the first two terms and we've been looking at how they're self-managing in groups. So that's part of our inquiry focus for this [third] term because of what we saw in the first two terms. So teaching those, like we said, dispositions, but next time we would probably do it earlier. (School staff focus group)*

## **Project timelines and resourcing**

The project's time constraints and the resource-intensive approach which was required for successful co-design emerged as another key theme that affected implementation.

The nature of this Pilot was time and resource intensive for schools and Pilot facilitators. Resourcing constraints made it difficult to onboard part time school staff and manage information flow across job sharing roles, in the case of one of the grade six classrooms.

As mentioned earlier, the co-design process took longer than expected due to several factors, including challenges in helping students turn their ideas into project plans, the decision to support rather than restrict their project ideas, and limited consultation with the school and students during the planning phase. As a result, the school and the Pilot working group agreed to extend the Pilot to a third term to give students time to implement and showcase their projects. This flexibility was crucial, as without it, the student projects may have remained in the planning phase, highlighting the importance of being adaptable to students' learning needs.

## **Challenges engaging diverse student readiness/interest**

Focus groups highlighted challenges of engaging diverse cohorts on the subject matter of gender equality. School staff and students reported that many students were familiar with the concepts and content of the workshops because they had been exposed to gender equality ideas in their home and family environment. Those students tended to be more interested and engaged in the lessons and learning opportunities that the Pilot provided. However, the students who were not so familiar or interested appeared to be less engaged and sometimes disruptive during workshops.

*The children's immaturity, and not their lack of willingness, more their immaturity and their readiness, particularly for those children who aren't from the families that are already having these conversations at home and working from a really progressive base, some of the immaturity made it hard for the delivery of the content because it is heavy. ... and I think sometimes when something is coming at you that's quite heavy you can tend to sort of make jokes about it, get a little bit silly and that's, you know, age-based and completely age-appropriate for the children. (School staff focus group)*

Students in the focus groups also suggested that the Pilot would be more engaging if it was responsive to a diversity of learning styles, needs and preferences, noting that most students in the focus groups indicated they were

already familiar with gender equality. For instance, some students expressed that they were less engaged by presentations and lecture-style sessions, and preferred hands-on activities like games and drawing. In terms of content, some students wanted more in-depth discussion on topics like how to speak up about gender inequality and how to talk to friends about it, while feeling that foundational topics such as the importance of gender equality and respect were already familiar to them, likely as it was part of their respectful relationships education to date.

*I did learn a couple of things, what norms and stereotypes are, and a couple of the language names. But I knew heaps of this stuff. If they did harder topics, it might have been more helpful to me. (Student focus group)*

## Pilot Outcomes (KEQ 2)

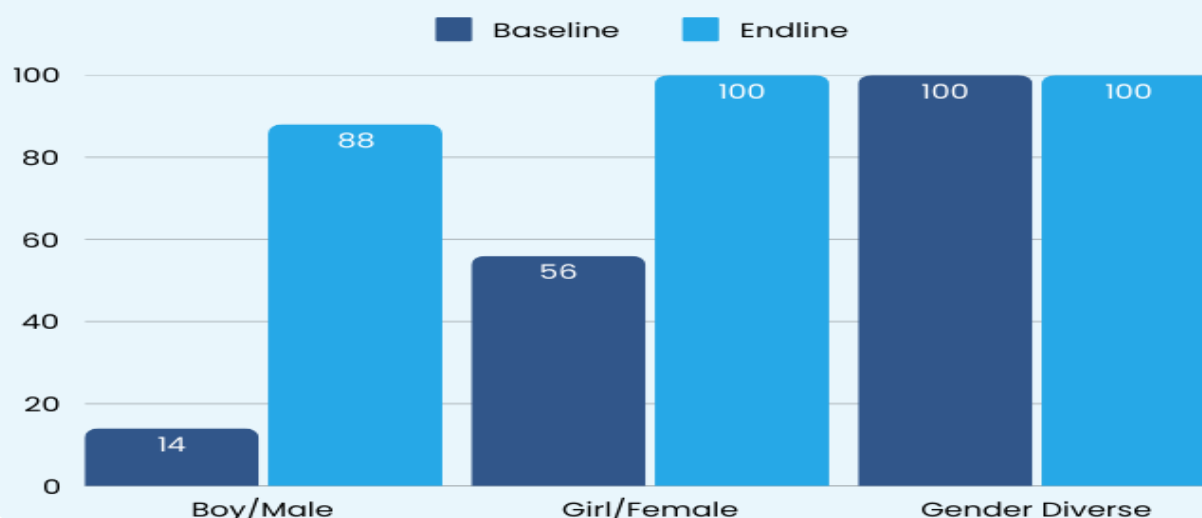
The findings from the Pilot reveal significant progress in increasing students' understanding of gender stereotypes, fostering greater awareness of gender inequality, and enhancing student leadership and capability in promoting gender equality. While students demonstrated substantial knowledge gains, particularly around gender stereotypes, there were gaps in understanding the links to gender-based violence. The program also led to notable shifts in behaviour, such as increased acceptance of mixed-gender group work and proactive identification of inequities. These lessons point to opportunities for refining the session plans, expanding experiential learning, and targeting early intervention to maximise the program's impact.

### Increased Student Understanding of Gender Equality

Comparative analysis of the student baseline and endline survey results shows that there was an increase across 12 out of 14 metrics following the delivery of capability building workshops and co-design of student projects. However, these changes were not seen consistently across genders.

The most significant increase in knowledge was found in relation to gender stereotypes, with an increase from 43% to 95% agreeing with the statement 'I know what gender stereotypes are'. When disaggregated by gender, the proportion of female students who agreed increased from 56% to 100% while the proportion of male students increased from 14% to 88%, the latter indicating a significant change of 74 basis points.

**Graph 2. Student baseline/endline survey responses – agreement with the statement ‘I know what gender stereotypes are’ (percentage)**



Students also demonstrated an important increase in understanding what gender-based violence is. In the endline survey, 88% of boys agreed they understood the meaning of gender-based violence, compared to 57% in the baseline. The proportion of girls who agreed increased even more, from 48% to 88%. However, when comparing quantitative data with qualitative responses to similar questions, we can see differences in students' ability to explain their understanding as opposed to just state agreement.

Qualitatively, students demonstrated the highest increase in understanding when asked to describe in their own words the impacts of gender stereotypes. There was an increase in satisfactory responses from 43% to 64%. In another question asking students to complete the sentence, "Gender equality is when ...", satisfactory responses increased from 71% to 83%. And although 88% of students agreed in the baseline that they know what gender-based violence is, no change was seen between baseline and endline surveys when students were asked to describe the causes of gender-based violence.

The change in student knowledge correlates with the workshop content that was taught to students, which had a greater emphasis on gender equality and gender stereotypes than linking gender equality to the causes of gender-based violence.

Students from the focus groups highlighted how the Pilot has improved their gender lens and their ability to identify inequality.

*The project made me become more aware of how to spot gender inequality. (Student focus group)*



Others reported that their own learning was minimal but have noticed that it has become more front-of-mind among their peers.

*I don't think I learned much but my friendship group has been thinking about [gender inequality] a lot more and calling it out is a bit easier.*

(Student focus group)

Teachers also observed how the Pilot increased student understanding and awareness. Even the students who displayed disinterest in the topic demonstrated positive change in knowledge and behaviour. Towards the end of the Pilot they were still able to provide an accurate answer to a question about gender equality and were not actively trying to derail the sessions the way they did at the beginning.

*At the very, very beginning there was that snickering. And you know, I'm not going to buy in, but just over time, you know, with that added kind of focus and continual sort of sharing of information, the children that were probably thinking 'can't believe my mum signed me up to this,' may still think what they think, but they're actually not actively trying to derail the [other] students' thinking anymore.* (School staff focus group)

School staff and students noted there's still a small cohort of grade six students who deny gender inequality or are acting inappropriately in the schoolyard. The example below describes the behaviour of two students, one who participated in the Pilot and one who opted out, indicating the challenge of sustaining classroom learnings which may not be supported by peers.

*At the time like we were both girls and we were approaching a group of boys playing basketball and we asked if we could play it and they said no and then they were saying stuff like, 'do you even know how to play?' and stuff like that. That was kind of like referring to like them being sexist and stuff... these two people, one of them being really involved, the other one hasn't yet, and they were both saying this stuff.* (Student focus group)

## Increased Student Capability around Gender Equality

In response to statements reflecting perceptions of capability, there was more variation from students in the baseline and endline surveys. Highest agreement with capability was reported in the areas of supporting friends who experience disrespect, talking about inequality with peers, and the ability to identify examples of gender equality and inequality at school.

Students reported a significant increase in confidence to plan and implement gender equality actions, from 31% of students to 55% of students agreeing. When disaggregating responses by gender, 62% of male students agreed in the endline

that they know how to plan and implement actions compared to 46% of female students, noting that the survey was administered before students completed their projects.

Confidence to restore friendships affected by disrespect also saw significant increase from baseline to endline, from 38% to 60% of students agreeing. When disaggregating responses, female students reported a significant increase of agreement from 26% to 58%, compared to a slight decline for male students, from 64% to 63%.

The greatest change, however, was seen in the areas of bystander action, with student confidence to act when seeing examples of gender inequality increasing from 41% to 67%. Female students increased their confidence from 41% to 62% while male students increased their confidence more substantially from 38% to 69%.

School staff agreed that the active bystander workshop was particularly helpful because it enabled students to act on what they were learning. Staff reported that students came to be more frequently speaking directly with their teachers about issues they could identify. Frequency of Pilot sessions meant the content was raised regularly through the school week in the classroom and teachers were able to reinforce key messages.

*At the start of the year, we used to get anonymous notes. Whereas now they will speak themselves, they will come and say [something is wrong].*  
(School staff focus group)

Depending on the focus of the student project, some students seemed to consolidate and deepen their learning more than others.

*I think depending on the groups like I think for everybody, the workshops I think were really beneficial just in terms of the learning, and then like in my class the film group in particular have really taken that learning and been able to turn it into something that they're really passionate and proud of, whereas the Sports Group I think they got a bit lost in terms of what they were trying to achieve.* (School staff focus group)

Students were also able to reflect on this change and identify how the project has given them more confidence to share their concerns with teachers.

*Before, we wouldn't have told a teacher when the boys wouldn't let us play basketball but we did [this time], and that's because of the project. Things like that happened quite a bit so it didn't matter as much before, but now they're getting us to talk about it more... It's easier to talk to the teachers now.* (Student focus group)

However, in both July and September discussions, students reported understanding the importance of speaking up and feeling confident to do so with

younger students, but not knowing how to do so with a peer or teacher, without being called a snitch or getting in trouble. This contrasts with the survey results and school staff observations that students have increased their ability to take bystander action.

Pilot facilitators also observed changes in student capability over the weeks and months of the Pilot. Students became more aware of gender issues in the school and were able to observe inequities, even if they weren't sure how to take action. Their language evolved from using "equality" to "equity," reflecting an emerging understanding of these concepts. The Pilot also enhanced students' "gender lens" as grade six students began noticing issues among younger students and advocated for targeted interventions towards earlier grades.

*[The Pilot has] expanded my gender lens. It used to be a really tiny monocle but now it's really, really big glasses. (Student focus group)*

## Increased Sense of Safety and Respect at School

School staff referred to an increased sense of allyship across students and teachers resulting from the Pilot.

School staff reported significant change for some LGBTIQ+ students who have become more confident in themselves and feel the school environment is more respectful and accepting due to the Pilot's discussions around challenging gender stereotypes.

Students in focus groups had mixed views on the level of change to date, but most stated they were really pleased the school undertook the Pilot. Those that reported positive outcomes for themselves or their classmates stated that the Pilot had made grade six students more respectful of each other.

*People in my grade respect and care for other people in the grade just a bit more. There used to be groups of girls and boys and they found each other weird and annoying and different, but now they kinda don't hate each other as much. They've become more respectful. (Student focus group)*

In particular, students were able to see how the project supported respectful behaviours that went beyond the gender binary, and encouraged inclusion and respect for diverse genders and sexualities also. This is particularly interesting since there was limited content speaking to gender and sexual diversity, nonetheless the students picked up quickly on the inclusive aspects of the discussion, such as sharing pronouns and promoting queer-friendly spaces.

*My classmates have become a lot more conscious of pronouns and people's identities. People ask for each other's pronouns a lot more frequently than they did before.” (Student focus group)*

*It changed my perspective on the LGBTIQ+ community... We celebrate IDAHOBIT DAY [at school] now. (Student focus group)*

## Changes in Staff Awareness, Capability and Respectful Relationships Implementation

The school staff who participated in the Pilot began with a high level of knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm around delivering gender equity content, particularly Respectful Relationships (RR) education. For them the Pilot has helped to deepen their awareness around everyday practices, increase their mindfulness of how they communicate inclusively with children and has bolstered their capability for implementing a whole-school approach.

One school staff member reflected they had changed the language they use to address students – no longer “hello gentlemen” or “thanks ladies”. Another teacher reflected they were inadvertently separating girls and boys in class for no good reason. They were able to recognise these learned behaviours in themselves as a result of the weekly interactions with gender equity teaching and learning materials.

*...that mindfulness in those micro moments and actually creating some new stored responses because we do those things as stored responses and actually being aware of the stored responses we hold and what we need to, you know, recreate and reimagine in a way that still makes the children feel included and you know, part of that community. (School staff focus group)*

One school staff member commented that they know their students better because of the pilot.

*Without the Pilot I don't think [my students] would have expressed themselves to me as confidently. (School staff focus group)*

In terms of deepening engagement with Respectful Relationships (RR) education and the whole school approach, school staff noted that the workshop content was very complementary to the teaching and learning component, specifically the RRRR topics 7 and 8. These topics are often confronting for teachers to deliver as they discuss gender-based and sexual violence. While the grade six teachers at FNPS felt quite competent in this area, they recognised that the program offers benefits to teachers who feel less comfortable with those content and activities.

*I could see the immense benefit of that for some other teachers that find that uncomfortable because it's a really great pre-planned way for you to deliver those modules in a way that sort of doesn't leave you thinking, 'well, how am I going to broach this with the children?' So, I think it has real potential in the delivery of modules 7 and 8 for those teachers that aren't necessarily as experienced in that delivery. (School staff focus group)*

The Pilot also offered insights into understanding how to deepen implementation of RR beyond teaching and learning, to include other elements of a whole-school approach (see Figure 2).

*[We're] always looking for ways to move respectful relationships outside the RRRR curriculum so having an ongoing project that the kids are passionate about has opened doors to me about what respectful relationships [education] can look like in a school. (School staff focus group)*

Teachers also reported applying the learning from their experience of implementing the Pilot, seeing opportunities to incorporate complementary skills and dispositions that supported student-led gender equality projects.

*We've taken what we learned in the first two terms and we've been looking at how they're self-managing in a group. This, that's part of our inquiry focus for this term because of what we saw in the first two terms. So teaching those like we said, dispositions, but next time we would probably do it earlier. (School staff focus group)*

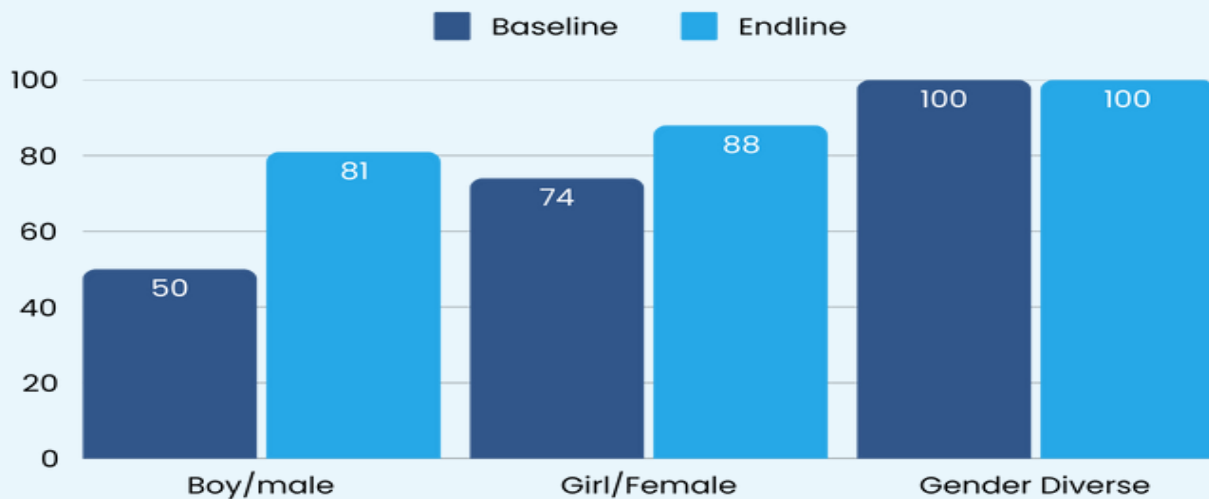
However, because the Pilot was extended into term three it replaced some time normally dedicated to RR lessons. Students who opted out of the Pilot then also missed out on some parts of RR education for part of the year.

## **Increase in Student Leadership around Gender Equality**

Understanding and motivation to be a leader around gender equality were other metrics measured in students. In regard to understanding what it means to be a leader of gender equality, students demonstrated significant increase, from 44% agreeing in the baseline to 66% in the endline. The proportion of female students agreeing increased from 46% to 75%, while the proportion of male students increased from 35% to 50%.

Motivation to work towards gender equality in the school saw an increase of agreement from 67% to 86%. There was a significant change for male students in this area increasing from 50% to 81% while female students increased from 74% to 88%. The motivation of the small number of gender diverse students stayed the same.

**Graph 3. Student baseline/endline survey responses – agreement with the statement ‘I feel motivated to work towards gender equality in my school’**



This indicates that the Pilot model shows promise for engaging children of any gender to be leaders and champions of gender equality.

In the focus group, students also reported feeling more confident and capable to challenge gender inequality in the school, and identified how this reflects a newfound leadership around the issue in the school environment. Students explained that this was due to both the opportunity to learn additional material about gender equality and learn as a cohort, making them feel more comfortable to step out of their comfort zone.

*I feel like, yeah, I'm. I'm more confident to, like stand up. It's like I am the leader of the respectful relationships team in this school, so like it's helped a lot like my understanding and stuff and this makes me feel more confident to do more stuff for the team and stuff and you know, and I feel like I could like stand up out of school as well. (Student focus group)*

## Pilot's Significance (KEQ3)

The Pilot demonstrated significant value by fostering cross-sector collaboration, enhancing school-wide awareness, and empowering students to advocate for themselves. Stakeholders from various disciplines gained new insights, while the school community saw increased inclusivity and acceptance, particularly among LGBTIQ+ students. The initiative highlighted opportunities to adapt respectful relationships education, tailor content to different learning levels, and deepen student leadership. These findings underscore the Pilot's potential to influence broader educational practices and long-term cultural change within schools.

For the Pilot working group members, the Pilot has offered special value by enabling representatives to gain new experience and information beyond their sector and discipline. For example, community health service staff have benefited through facilitated access to a school ready for community engagement; women's health promotion agency has gained direct service delivery experience and benefited from being able to tailor gender equality content to specific cohorts on behalf of their partners; and government has gained prevention resources and learnings that they can promote with other schools.

The school benefited from access to validated tools and resources contextualised to their school setting, as well as the outputs of the student projects which present opportunities for informing future action around gender equality that is reflective of students' voice.

For school staff, the special value of the Pilot has been increased awareness across the grade six cohort of gender equality and witnessing individual students feeling more accepted or safer at school.

*One of [our LGBTIQ+] learners didn't [previously] share when things were happening in the yard. Now, they have stood up for themselves, told us when they're disrespected, they're embracing their long hair and wearing makeup, they've shared their pronouns with their peers, and in exhibition of learning they have written stories about being openly gay and decorated ...with the LGBTIQA+ flag... I don't think it would have happened this year for this child without the project. (School staff focus group)*

The school's Respectful Relationships lead reported it had been helpful to see how Respectful Relationships education could be done differently beyond just the teaching and learning focus.

While several students reported they were already familiar with the Pilot content, they overwhelmingly agreed the Pilot was valuable for their year level and the school. Interestingly, students were able to see beyond the individual benefit of the Pilot and how more broadly it signified the school's commitment to gender equality. They also thought that it was important for the adults in their lives, parents and teachers, to know that they value learning about gender equality.

*I know most of the content but the topic is really important to me and that [the school] is teaching it to others...It showed that they cared. It was something I looked forward to every Monday. (Student focus group)*

*I think it's good for the [school] community, for parents to know what we're learning about respect. Also for teachers to understand that we know about [gender equality]. (Student focus group)*

This indicates that while some content may need to be more advanced for certain students, the initiative's visibility and focus remain crucial for fostering a sense of inclusivity and shared learning in the school community.

## Sustainability of the Pilot (KEQ4)

Sustainability is something that needs to be further explored through ongoing research and evaluation, as the scope of this evaluation was just until students completed their projects.

There was a general sense among school staff and students that ongoing work is needed to strengthen student leadership to sustain actions that support gender equality in school.

*And even now putting their learning into action is still something that we're gonna be working on for a while. Like you know that while they're aware and they understand what gender equity and gender-based violence is, they can't then, you know, change that and put into action in the yard.*  
(School staff focus group)

Both teachers and students reflected that there's still examples of student behaviour undermining gender equality at school. In the September focus groups, students noted some improvements in student behaviour were shifting back to the status quo.

*We're learning about gender equality, but out the window, I see a guy not letting a girl play foursquare because he's sexist.* (Student focus group)

*I think teachers are just looking around for students who are injured or upset, when they need to spot gender inequality a lot more. That'd be a good change.* (Student focus group)

Students reflected that it's easier to take action when their peers have participated in the Pilot and harder to take action against older students or peers they don't know well. Similarly, school staff expressed concern about grade six students' capacity to sustain learnings as they move into new high school environments.

*What will happen is these children will go off to a smattering of different schools. So they're not going together as a cohort where these wonderful self-advocators can all come together to make a school leadership group and say, 'We just learnt about this. We want to continue it.' They become these tiny little fish in a great big sea.* (School staff focus group)

School staff suggested some ways to address this shift in the environment would be to give students the opportunity to present their projects to students at the local high schools where many of them will be attending. Staff also reflected on



the role of families in sustaining the learnings, and how the school can support this, for example by sharing the outcomes of the Pilot and student projects with them and engaging parents and carers in key messages around gender equality while the students are doing their projects.

It was also suggested that starting the program earlier than grade six, for example in grade four or five, would mean that students would get more exposure to the enabling environment for gender equitable attitudes and behaviours, and be socialised more deeply around the gender equal norms that the program aims to promote.

*I guess my real worry is that these children will move into high school and then it's not there next year for them. And they've done so much work. I mean, we can hold on to it, and whether or not that means we start doing it a little bit earlier. So with our grade fours and fives and sixes to make sure that, you know, we get that full three years of learning around it. (School staff focus group)*

In terms of the resource intensive nature of the Pilot including all the school staff meetings and in-class time for delivery, which may not be sustainable in the future, it was suggested that a more efficient method may be to provide professional learning and teaching resources to teachers so that they can lead the delivery of lessons with the support of templates and tools drawn from the project. It was emphasised that teachers are well placed to contextualise lessons to their own learners, but should also be given permission to trial different approaches and get things wrong.

*What we've done is we've got a lesson plan, but you know, it's quite fluid. If it doesn't work, we do it again. So for other schools and other people to know it's OK for things not to land, it's OK to repeat lessons and all of those sorts of things. And for it to be planned but not scripted ... So they know they've got that flexibility around understanding their own cohort and their own level of understanding at any given moment in time. (School staff focus group)*

For FNPS and cohealth, the benefits at the organisational level are hoping to be reinforced as they continue the partnership to deliver the program to the next cohort of grade six students in 2025.

## Implications for Future Projects

The findings from the data collection present some interesting learnings that are helpful to consider for the implementation of the Pilot model in other school settings or for similar projects aiming to activate student voice around gender equality.

### Understanding the Level of School Readiness

It's important to understand the implementation environment and review the school context against a set of "readiness" criteria. Enabling factors identified through this evaluation include:

- Leadership on gender equality, including strategic prioritisation and cultural readiness at the organisation level
- A collaborative and supportive school culture, with minimal resistance from students and families
- Classroom teachers who valued the program and believed in its worth, who were also willing to be flexible with class planning, resource management and learn along the way
- Community partners who were also committed to seeing the success of the Pilot and able to adjust resourcing and plans to accommodate changes
- Student familiarity with respectful relationships concepts meant there was a lot of initial enthusiasm for the program, and made it easier for Pilot facilitators to explore some of the complexity of developing a 'gender lens'.

The school's philosophy and commitment to promoting student voice was key to an authentic student-led approach. The school allowed the students to deliver the projects in the way that they desired, even when that required extending the Pilot for a term to complete student projects and communicating across year levels to schedule in lesson time with the younger grades. This effort to engage across year levels had support from school leadership and all grade teachers, allowing students to materialise their gender equality projects as they envisioned.

### Cohort Models Create Inclusive Cultures

Embedding the program within class times across the whole grade level, with support from teachers, means that students become absorbed in the lessons, learn from each other and understand the value that gender equality has in lives beyond their own. The findings show that children developed empathy for people and groups with a different lived experience to them, which is a benefit of this cohort model.

Furthermore, findings show that opt-out rather than opt-in models will reach as many students as possible, especially those less familiar with or interested in gender equality concepts. This results in more even participation of students from different genders, and thus reaches beyond the “usual suspects” who tend to be the most passionate and aligned. Peer group exposure to the same values-based messaging can gradually influence attitudes and behaviours, helping to change unequal and harmful gender norms over time (Our watch, 2021).

The Pilot broadly increased awareness of gender equality across the entire grade six cohort, showing the potential for student-led initiatives to successfully engage a whole school community. School staff observed meaningful changes in students' behaviour, such as greater self-expression and a sense of safety among LGBTIQ+ students. This suggests that empowering students to take the lead in gender equality projects can foster a more inclusive school culture.

The project led to personal growth among students, especially those from marginalised groups. The transformation of an LGBTIQ+ student who began embracing their identity and advocating for themselves indicates the importance of such programs in creating supportive environments where students feel safe to express themselves.

## Teachers Can be Supported to Lead this Work

High levels of communication and collaboration were valuable to the project, allowing content and activities to be tailored to students' needs. However, this required significant resources, which may not be feasible in all school settings. Teacher enthusiasm and commitment played a key role in enabling this collaboration. However, even if other aspects of a whole-school approach are in place, not all teachers will have the capacity or willingness to dedicate the same level of resources to future projects.

This level of collaboration was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, because it was a Pilot and there was a commitment from the Pilot working group to understand what worked and what didn't and test different approaches along the way, an appropriate level of consultation and feedback from school staff and students was necessary. Secondly, because the Pilot facilitators, while competent in the content of the workshops, didn't have the knowledge of the student cohorts, school environment and age-appropriate pedagogical approaches to be able to contextualise the learning to students on their own, they needed this input from classroom teachers.

The RR whole-school approach acknowledges that teachers are uniquely positioned to adapt content and lessons to meet the needs of their students. Therefore, the focus is on equipping teachers with skills and knowledge in gender

equality and respectful relationships (Our Watch, 2022) rather than relying on external facilitators. While community partnerships remain important, having teachers lead the educational component with support from community partners can be a more efficient and equally effective way to enhance students' capabilities.

By partnering with community, schools can enhance their in-house skills and knowledge in gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. At the same time, community partners can leverage teachers' deep understanding of school policies, culture, and students' needs to ensure the program aligns with the school's practices. This approach helps maximise student engagement while minimising disruptions.

## Iteration and Flexibility Help to Meet Students' Needs

To be genuinely student-led and committed to authentic co-design processes, students need time and support. This will look different for every student cohort, depending on their age and prior knowledge of gender equality concepts. Regardless of how “ready” students are to tackle their projects, the program will always need a level of tailoring so that the program responds to the diverse learning needs of students, including students with disability, students who do not speak English as a first language, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and LGBTIQ+ students.

In creating a reflective learning environment for and with students, it also creates opportunities for experiential learning where the lessons can be reinforced, highlighted or bolstered through practices that bring to light our gender biases or assumptions. Many rigid gender norms and practices happen in micro-moments as we go about “swimming in the soup” of our gender inequitable society. Experiential learning is an excellent tool for uncovering these micro moments, in a way that supports accountability rather than imposing blame or guilt.

Notwithstanding the above, students also need boundaries and parameters, especially when it comes to scoping and defining their student projects. Therefore, it is prudent to set some parameters around cost, duration, scope and size of target audience, so that students have some limits to help narrow their focus, and so that big ideas don't require so much time and resourcing to shape them into more concrete proposals.

## More Content to Build Student Confidence to Lead

Although students reported higher confidence in identifying and addressing inequality, many still struggled to take action, especially in peer or teacher

interactions, underscoring the importance of practical skill-building in bystander action.

Bystander action is influenced by a range of factors including knowledge, confidence, power dynamics, perceptions of safety and perceptions of effectiveness. It is not hard to believe that some students might find it easier to raise an issue with a teacher than a peer, or perceive some situations as safer or more effective than others for taking action. More practical information and tools for assessing situations and choosing options that suit different contexts (based on safety, perceived effectiveness and power dynamics) would be beneficial to the program content.

Students increasingly identified examples of inequality and reflected on them, with even initially disengaged students showing knowledge and behaviour improvements. However, there is still a small group resistant to the concept of gender inequality, indicating a need for targeted interventions. It is also important to ensure that students who opt out of the program for whatever reason are still receiving RR education in other lessons.

## Scaffolding Student Support for Project Planning

Students need more support in identifying, scoping and planning their gender equality actions. Without clear guidance, they may find it difficult to break down the process, understand the purpose of each stage, and stay focused on their goals. Providing further scaffolding helps them navigate these challenges by offering step-by-step support and structured frameworks. Additionally, setting clear parameters around time, budget, and available resources ensures that students develop realistic projects that are manageable within their school context. Without these boundaries, students may struggle to keep their projects feasible and achievable.

Moreover, students benefit from seeing real-world examples of how others have successfully addressed gender inequality in school environments. Exposure to case studies or past student-led projects can inspire creative solutions and provide concrete models to follow.

There is also potential to identify the skills and dispositions that are currently part of the general curriculum that are also useful for students to apply when undertaking their projects. Through identification of these skills, there may be the opportunity to sequence them in a way that would be complementary to the co-design and implementation phase of student projects.

However, even with these tools and approaches, students often need more time to refine their plans, explore potential obstacles, and make necessary adjustments before or during implementation. Extending the planning phase allows them to

fully develop their ideas, anticipate challenges, and create more impactful and sustainable gender equality initiatives. By enhancing support in these areas, students will be better equipped to drive meaningful change in their school communities.

## Earlier Years May be the Better Place to Start

Although some the learnings or experience will stay with Grade 6 students longer term, it is likely that much of the benefit of the Pilot will be lost as these students move away from the supportive primary school environment. They will go on to attend different secondary schools, which will comprise a different cohorts of students with a range of attitudes and skills that may or may not align with the gender equality values and learnings of the Pilot.

Once the program is established in a school with an enabling environment and relevant wrap around support, student learning, confidence and leadership will be sustained the longer the student spends in the same school environment. There is an opportunity to introduce the program at younger year levels such as grade four or five, and embed it over multiple years of education. If this were the case some of the workshop content would need to be adapted to be age-appropriate and accommodate younger learners.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to strengthen the implementation and outcomes of gender equality initiatives to activate student voice in school settings. Grounded in feedback from students, teachers, and community partners, these recommendations aim to build on the successes of the Pilot while addressing areas for improvement. By focusing on strategies that are practical, sustainable, and responsive to the unique needs of schools, these recommendations seek to promote meaningful, long-term change in attitudes and behaviours related to gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence.

### For Pilot Working Group to Refine the Program

- Develop a set of 'readiness' criteria to understand and assess the implementation environment.
- Review and refine workshop content to focus more on practical skill-building around bystander action and leadership, interactivity and exploring ways to offer depth of learning where students are already familiar with key concepts.
- Develop an implementation toolkit of resources for teachers, including lesson plans, templates and a list of skills not taught in the program but that may be needed when it comes to implementing student projects.
- Work with participating schools to:
  - Set parameters around student projects to limit their scope in line with time and resourcing available for implementation
  - Incorporate more intentional opportunities for experiential learning in the program
  - Explore opportunities for aligning complementary curriculum and resources (e.g. skills, tools) to the program to enhance student readiness for project co-design and implementation
  - Explore opportunities for using the learnings or outputs of student projects to inform next steps for school-based gender equality initiatives that reflect student voice
  - Map the workshop content to topics 7 and 8 of RRRR, as well as other domains of professional development, school leadership and community partnerships to strengthen alignment of the Pilot model with the RR whole school approach.

## For Organisations and Schools Wanting to Support Student-led Gender Equality

- Encourage schools to deliver the program to an entire year level of students to benefit from the cohort-model.
  - Focus on upskilling teachers in the program content with professional learning and resources so they can lead facilitation.
  - Allocate the appropriate time and resources to support iterations and tailoring to diverse student learning needs and preferences.
  - Plan for ethics approvals when evaluating pilots or consider whether it's better to test the approach before evaluating.
  - Conduct longitudinal studies of program participants to understand if and how outcomes are sustained over time.
  - Adapt the lessons for younger cohorts so the program can be introduced earlier.
- Adapt and test the model in a secondary school environment.

## Conclusion

The Student-Led Gender Equality Pilot has proven to be an effective approach for engaging students in meaningful conversations and actions toward gender equality in school settings. The evaluation highlights the Pilot's success in fostering knowledge, confidence, and cultural shifts among students while also identifying key challenges, such as resource constraints and the need for more structured student support. The strong leadership support, inclusive facilitation, and student-led co-design process contributed to the Pilot's impact, demonstrating the potential of this model to drive positive change in schools.

To ensure the sustainability and broader application of the Pilot, future iterations should focus on embedding gender equality education earlier, equipping teachers to lead facilitation, and refining program content to enhance skill development. Additionally, structured support for student-led projects and alignment with existing curriculum frameworks will strengthen the Pilot's effectiveness. By implementing these recommendations, schools and partner organisations can build on the Pilot's success, creating more inclusive learning environments that empower students to challenge gender inequality and promote respectful relationships.



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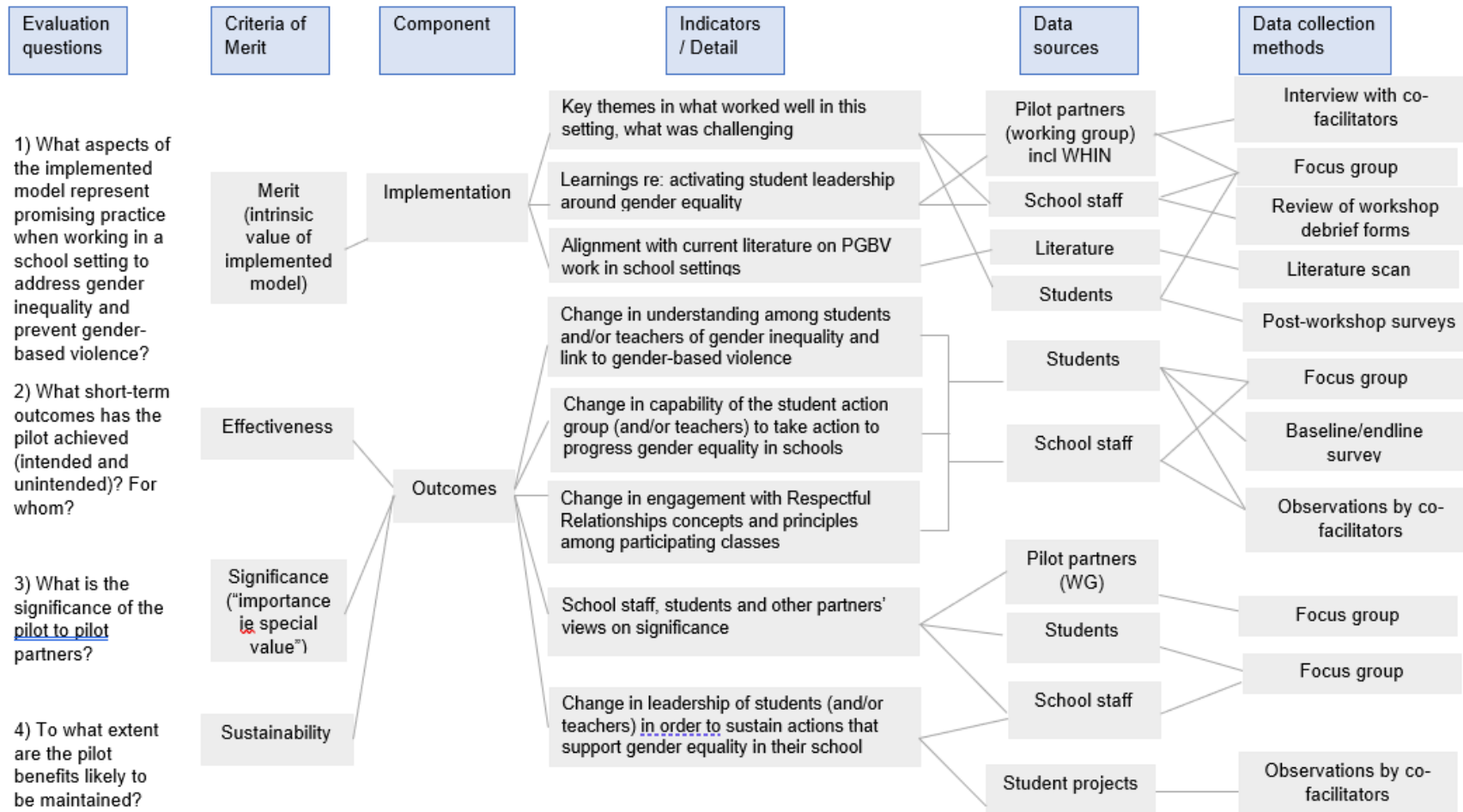
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## Appendix 1: Evaluation Map



## Appendix 2: Student survey – Baseline

**What is your gender identity? Tick one.**

- ☐ Girl/female
- ☐ Boy/male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Not listed – please describe \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Prefer not to say


**Do you identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? Tick one.**


- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, Aboriginal
- ☐ Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- ☐ Prefer not to say


**What is your cultural background?**
















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**Please answer the following questions by ticking the smiling face of your choice.**

 = I agree

 = Sometimes I agree  
or I'm not sure

 = I disagree

1	I know what gender equality is.			
2	I know what gender-based violence is.			
4	I know what gender stereotypes are.			
5	I understand why it's important to show respect towards all people, regardless of their gender.			
6	I can identify examples of gender equality and inequality at my school.			

7	I think gender equality is important.			
8	I know how to plan and implement actions to address gender inequality at my school.			
9	I know how to support a friend or classmate who is experiencing disrespect.			
10	I know how to restore friendships and other relationships in order to address disrespect.			
11	I know what it means to be a leader of gender equality in my school.			
12	I feel confident to talk about gender equality and inequality with my friends and/or classmates.			
13	I feel confident to act when I see examples of gender inequality in my school.			
14	I feel motivated to work towards gender equality in my school.			
15	I feel confident to suggest to my school things that it can do to support gender equality.			



**Write your answer in the box provided.**

16	Gender equality is when...	
17	What are the main causes of gender-based violence?	
18	Describe the impacts of harmful gender stereotypes.	

## Appendix 3: Student workshop evaluation survey



**Instructions:** Please circle the number that shows how strongly you agree with each statement below.

1) This session was good.

 1      2      3      4      5      



What is one thing you liked about the session?

2) I learned something new from this session.

 1      2      3      4      5      



What is one thing you learned in this session?

3) The presenter/s did a good job.

 1      2      3      4      5      

What is one thing you liked about how the presenter/s ran the session?

4) I would not change anything about this session.

 1      2      3      4      5      

What is one thing we could do to make this session better? How could we improve the session?

## Appendix 4: Grade 6 students focus group questions (July 2024)

1. Thinking about the SLGE pilot:
  - a. What did you like the most?
  - b. What didn't you like?
2. Has the project changed anything at school?
  - a. If yes: What has changed? Who for?
  - b. If no: Why do you think that is?
3. What would help you speak up about gender inequality
  - a. to another student?
  - b. to the teachers or the school?
4. How significant or valuable is this program to you?
  - a. Ask students to stand in a position from A to E, A meaning very significant and E meaning not at all significant.
  - b. Ask student to explain their choice.

## Appendix 5: Grade 6 students focus group questions (September 2024)

1. Thinking about the SLGE pilot:
  - what worked well in the student projects?
  - what was the hardest part of the student projects?
2. Did the student project help you learn how to take action on gender equality?
  - If YES: How?
  - If NO: Why do you think that is?
3. Now that the student projects are completed, has the SLGE pilot increased your skills or confidence to be a leader on gender equality?
  - If YES: Has it increased your skills, confidence, or both? How?
  - If NO: Why do you think that is?
4. Now that the student projects are completed, do you think the SLGE pilot has changed anything at school?
  - If YES:
    - What has it changed? (*Prompts: Understanding of gender equality; willingness to speak up about gender inequality; confidence to take action on gender equality*)
    - Who for? (*e.g. you, your classmates, other students or teachers*)
  - If NO: Why do you think that is?
5. Now that the student projects are completed, how important was the SLGE pilot:
  - To you?
  - To Grade 6?
  - To your school?
6. What would help you and/or your classmates to maintain what you've learned through the SLGE pilot?
7. If the SLGE pilot was offered again, how should it be changed or improved?

## Appendix 6: Staff focus group questions (September 2024)

### **Implementation**

1. What was your involvement in the SLGE pilot?
2. What worked well in the pilot's implementation? What were the key drivers of success?
3. What was challenging in implementation? How were these challenges addressed?

### **Outcomes**

4. What have you learned from the SLGE pilot about progressing gender equality in a school setting?
5. What (if any) intended and unintended outcomes has the pilot achieved to date? How do you know?
  - a. Who benefited from these outcomes / changes?
  - b. Were there any negative outcomes (for staff, students or the school) of participating in the pilot?
6. Which elements of the pilot had the most impact?

### **Significance and sustainability**

7. How (if at all) did the pilot strengthen student and/or teacher leadership to sustain actions that support gender equality at FNPS?
  - a. To what extent do you think the outcomes would be sustained if the program was not continued?
8. How significant do you think the pilot outcomes are to:
  - a. you as staff?
  - b. students?
  - c. the school overall?
9. What changes / refinements to the program would you recommend for any future round of implementation at FNPS?
10. What do you think it would take to replicate the pilot at other schools?



## Appendix 7: Classroom facilitators focus group questions (September 2024)

### Implementation

1. What does school readiness look like? i.e. What are the “ducks” that need to be in order in the school for a project like this to work?
2. What capabilities do facilitators need to run the program? What supports do they need?
3. In terms of co-design, how do you get the balance of student input and tangible outcomes?
  - a. What do you think helps students to develop a gender lens and identify “projects”?
  - b. What lessons did you learn about effective co-design for this project?
  - c. What did you learn about addressing the gap between words and actions that some students displayed (eg can define “respect” but don’t always act it)
4. What did you learn about addressing the gap between words and actions that some students displayed (eg can define “respect” but don’t always act it)
5. Any other learnings about how to activate student leadership on this topic?
  - a. Any learnings about effective ways of engaging boys in the issue of gender equality?
  - b. What influence do the key adults in students’ lives (teachers, parents) have on the project?

### Effectiveness

6. What change have you observed, if any, in the students in terms of knowledge, skills or confidence in relation to gender equality (from Term 1 till now)?
  - a. Are changes more prominent in some classes/groups more than others?
7. Have you observed any change in the Grade 6 teachers or the Principal?
8. What does leadership mean or look like in this context? Do you have any examples?

### Sustainability

9. To what extent do you think project benefits would be maintained at FNPS if the pilot was not run again?
10. How could the model be strengthened to support sustainability?
11. What aspects of delivery might work in a secondary school setting?

## Appendix 8: Observation Protocol for Student Projects

### Purpose

This protocol provides a structured approach to evaluating student gender equality projects, ensuring that all relevant aspects are thoroughly considered and consistently recorded.

The observations are being used to collect data related to

- Change in understanding among students and/or teachers of gender inequality and link to gender-based violence
- Change in capability of the student action group (and/or teachers) to take action to progress gender equality in schools.
- Change in leadership of students (and/or teachers) in order to sustain actions that support gender equality in their school.

### Instructions

The role of the observer is to assess various aspects of the showcase to look for evidence of change of understanding, capability and/or leadership in students and teachers in the area of gender equality. Please follow these instructions carefully to ensure a thorough and consistent evaluation.

#### Before the Showcase

1. **Review the Protocol:** Familiarise yourself with the criteria and rating scales. Ensure you understand each category and what you are looking for.
2. **Prepare Materials:** Bring the observation protocol, a clipboard or notebook, pens, and any other necessary materials for taking notes.

#### During the Showcase

1. **Observe Discreetly:** Position yourself where you can see and hear clearly without being obtrusive. Your presence should not interfere with the showcase.
2. **Take Detailed Notes:** Record your observations in real-time, noting specific examples and behaviours. Be as detailed as possible, especially in the "Notes" sections.
3. **Use the Rating Scales:** Apply the rating scales objectively based on your observations. Consider each criterion independently and avoid letting one aspect influence your ratings of others.
4. **Look for Patterns:** Pay attention to recurring themes or behaviours, such as frequent use of inclusive or non-inclusive language, assumptions or stereotypes in the content discussed, or common types of audience reactions.

#### After the Showcase

1. **Review and Reflect:** Take a few minutes to review your notes and ratings. Ensure they accurately reflect your observations.
2. **Complete General Notes and Suggestions:** Summarise your overall impressions, noting any additional observations.

<b>Name of Observer:</b>		
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating scale</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Active Participation of Grade 6:</b> Observe the level of engagement from both Grade 6 students and teachers, by gender and cultural background. Look for verbal and non-verbal signs of enthusiasm, active involvement or disengagement, and interaction.	1 (Disengaged) to 5 (Highly Engaged)	Note specific instances of positive or negative engagement.
<b>Attendance:</b> Record who attends the showcase, noting any patterns in attendance (e.g., gender, age, teachers, parents).		<b>Notes:</b> List any noticeable absences or particularly strong attendance from specific groups.
<b>Audience participation:</b> Observe the nature and frequency of audience questions, noting patterns of gender, age, cultural background and role (parent, teacher, student). Consider whether questions indicate understanding, curiosity, or confusion that might suggest support for or against the projects. Pay attention to the audience's visible reactions such as nodding, smiling, frowning, or disengagement.	1 (No Questions / participation) to 5 (Many Insightful Questions participation)	Record notable questions and the responses they elicited. Record any signs of support or resistance to the student projects or the broader initiative.
<b>Commitment to Future Work:</b> Look for references to ongoing or future initiatives related to gender equality and/or prevention of gender-based violence.	1 (No References) to 5 (Strong Commitment)	Note any specific plans or commitments mentioned and by who.
<b>Overall Impressions:</b> Provide a summary of overall impressions and any additional observations that do not fit into the above categories		

## Student Showcase Event

## Focus and Content of the Student Projects

<b>Observer:</b>		
<b>Project:</b>		
<b>Observation Context:</b>		<b>Date:</b>
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Rating scale</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Understanding of Concepts:</b> Assess the depth of understanding demonstrated by students and teachers regarding concepts such as gender, sex, equality, equity, stereotypes and gender-based violence.	1 (Poor Understanding) to 5 (Excellent Understanding)	Note any misconceptions about gender equality or particularly insightful comments or ideas expressed.
<b>Problem definition:</b> Assess how clearly the project conveys the specific gender equality issue it is trying to address.	1 (Poorly defined) to 5 (Clearly defined)	Note how implicit or explicit the issue is and whether it is supported by any evidence.
<b>Strategy:</b> Assess how clearly the project conveys the action it is taking and how it align with the strategies for gender equality and PGBV, e.g. challenging gender stereotypes, inclusive leadership and respect of diverse views.	1 (Not Relevant) to 5 (Highly Relevant)	Describe the focus of each project and its relevance to the topics.
<b>Student and staff leadership:</b> Record any other observations that indicate skills that students and teachers demonstrate to lead gender equality in the schools e.g. inclusive language, communicating GE, taking bystander action, collaborative practice, meeting groups where they are at etc.		
<b>Overall Impressions:</b> Provide a summary of overall impressions and any additional observations that do not fit into the above categories		

## Appendix 9: Summaries of Student Projects

### *Joey and Jessica, the Different Dinosaurs* Picture Book (6HK)

The student's goal was to create a school free of gender stereotypes where people of all genders can do what they want. Building on the gender stereotypes workshop, the students created the '*Joey and Jessica the Different Dinosaurs*' picture book for students in Grade 1-4. The idea was to show young dinosaurs not conforming to rigid gender stereotypes (e.g Joey likes to cook and Jessica likes to go fishing) and teaching their parents the joy of this. The students used dinosaurs as 'they are old and stuck in their ways'<sup>4</sup>, and to show that older generations can learn from younger ones.

The group was split into three sub-groups, each with a director to oversee work and provide feedback. The illustrators designed the characters, backgrounds and student portraits. The authors created the story arc and wrote the story. The workshop group planned an interactive workshop for Grade 1-4 students. All group members presented two sessions to Grade 1-4 students where they read the book and used age-appropriate activities to see the change in students' knowledge of gender equality and gender stereotypes before and after the reading. The picture book is available to buy from Fitzroy North Primary School or borrow from the North Fitzroy Library.

### Sports Spaces Audit and Student Survey (6HK)

After participating in the workshops, students felt uncertain about discussing inequalities in sports with different year levels, particularly younger students. They wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the issues to make informed decisions and take meaningful action to promote gender equality in sports and physical activity at school. Additionally, they were interested in identifying and amplifying positive experiences of gender equality.

To achieve this, this student group designed and conducted a survey for students in Grades 3-6. They also implemented the "Spaces and Play" audit tool, developed by HealthAbility, to assess gender equality in school sports and physical activity spaces. This process provided valuable data, allowing students to triangulate findings on gender equality experiences. After analysing the data, they developed recommendations for the school, which they presented at a whole-school assembly.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://newsletters.naavi.com/i/MLrx8GN/term-3-week-10/page/4>

## Superhero Video (6BA)

After developing their gender lens through the pilot workshops, students identified disrespectful language and behaviour around gender stereotypes in younger grades as an issue. To address this, they created a video showcasing respectful language and behaviours with superhero characters based on school values (Respect, Resilience, and Kindness). The students wanted to present what others *could* do to be respectful, rather than what not to do. The video features three scenarios of students being excluded by other students from everyday activities due to their gender. The superheroes Respect, Resilience, Kindness intervene and educate the students that people can do any activity, regardless of their gender.

The students created the story arc, wrote the script, animated the superheroes, acted and filmed in the video. A professional videographer was engaged to film and edit the video, which all group members featured in. The video was shown to all grades to teach them about gender equality in a fun and engaging way.

The students were realistic in their aim, noting ‘it’s not going to fix everything... we hope it can teach the FNPS community about gender equality and kindness’<sup>5</sup> and that the video will encourage more respectful and inclusive behaviours.

## Inclusive Sports Workshops for Grades 1 & 2 (6BA)

Students in this group observed challenges in sports participation and believed they could positively influence Grade 1 and 2 students by modelling respectful, inclusive behaviour and promoting shared use of play spaces. To achieve this, they planned to design sports activities for the Grade 1 and 2 classes, incorporating lessons on gender equality. These activities encouraged students to plan and play games fairly and respectfully with peers of the opposite gender.

Working in small groups, the project team collaborated to develop age-appropriate session plans with guidance from classroom teachers and project facilitators. They practiced delivering key messages about gender equality and provided feedback to one another to refine their plans. With enthusiasm, they implemented their sessions to approximately 100 younger students and conducted a mini-survey with participants afterward to assess the impact of their activities.

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<sup>5</sup> See above