

**Final Evaluation Report**

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Issued February 2016

# **Respectful Relationships Education In Schools: The Beginnings of Change**



## **Final Evaluation Report**

Prepared for Department of Premier and Cabinet and  
Department of Education and Training, Victoria

**Our  
WATCH**  
End violence against  
Women And Their Children



Our Watch commits to conducting evaluations that use contemporary approaches and are ethical, participatory and robust.

Our values of respect, passion, openness and collaboration, evidence and accountability inform all areas of work at Our Watch, including evaluation. These values are reflected in the following principles which underpin all evaluation activity undertaken by, and on behalf of, Our Watch. This means:

- meeting ethical standards and requirements
- communicating in an open and responsive manner
- valuing diverse input and perspectives
- respecting the evidence base
- working in partnership with stakeholders
- using participatory approaches
- being transparent and robust in the analysis of data.

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**Acknowledgement of Country:** *Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge.*

# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>4</b>
	1.1 What sets RREiS apart from other school based prevention programs?.....	4
	1.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the RREiS pilot.....	6
	1.3 Achievements of the RREiS pilot Background and context .....	6
	1.4 Recommendations for mainstreaming and scaling up RREiS .....	8
	1.5 Conclusion .....	16
<b>2</b>	<b>Background to the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) pilot .....</b>	<b>18</b>
	2.1 What is primary prevention? .....	18
	2.2 What is Respectful Relationships Education? .....	19
	2.3 Evolution of Respectful Relationships Education in Victoria.....	20
	2.4 Concurrent activity and announcements.....	21
	2.5 RREiS pilot announcement, approach and aims.....	22
	2.6 Pilot structure and recruitment .....	23
	2.7 Pilot timelines .....	29
	2.8 Pilot adjustments.....	29
	2.9 Pilot closure and sustainability.....	30
	2.10 Pilot strengths and weaknesses .....	31
<b>3</b>	<b>Evaluation.....</b>	<b>34</b>
	3.1 Evaluation aims .....	34
	3.2 A ‘realist’ and reflective approach .....	34
	3.3 Evaluation design.....	35
	3.4 Evaluation team.....	38
	3.5 Evaluation scope and limitations .....	38
<b>4</b>	<b>Evaluation findings .....</b>	<b>39</b>
	4.1 School leadership and commitment .....	39
	4.2 School culture and environment.....	47
	4.3 Support for staff and students and responding to disclosures .....	54
	4.4 Community partnerships .....	60
	4.5 Teaching and learning .....	65
	4.6 Professional learning strategy .....	74
	4.7 Suggested mechanisms for statewide rollout .....	82
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion of findings .....</b>	<b>87</b>
	5.1 Value of the whole school model.....	87
	5.2 Systematising via integrated Department of Education and Training coordinated support ....	90
	5.3 The need for community organisation support .....	92
<b>6</b>	<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Glossary and abbreviations .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Alternative text for figures.....</b>	<b>108</b>

# 1 Executive Summary and Recommendations

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Children and young people have become one of the most important populations for the prevention of gender-based violence. The unacceptably high rates of gender-based violence, in particular, violence against women and their children, are well established and there is a clear opportunity to change the story for future generations via the education system. There is no single cause of gender-based violence, however, the latest international evidence shows that it is primarily driven by a range of social norms, institutional structures, and organisational or community practices relating to gender inequality. Gender inequality manifests in every aspect of life, from our relationships through to our institutions, including schools. Shifting the pattern of violence will require cultural transformation- and new research shows that this change is possible. Governments have seized this opportunity, and through the Australian Curriculum, schools have been directed to consider their role in the prevention of gender-based violence through the incorporation of Respectful Relationships Education.

Schools play a central role in the intellectual, social and emotional development of children and young people. The education system sets the foundation for creating future generations of successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.<sup>1</sup> Recent international evidence shows that the impact of school based Respectful Relationships Education – if implemented according to good practice standards – can be profound. Schools are ‘mini communities’ where respect and equality can be modelled to help shape positive attitudes and behaviours at an early stage of life. As workplaces and community hubs, schools have spheres of influence which extend to a workforce of over 40,000 teaching and non-teaching staff in Victorian schools, and into every Victorian community. As such, their reach and potential to drive cultural change to prevent gender-based violence is significant.

Our Watch is proud to present the findings of the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) pilot as one of the first evaluations in Australia to examine the impact of Respectful Relationships Education across the whole school – from the classroom, through to the staffroom and broader school culture and ethos.

## 1.1 What sets RREiS apart from other school based prevention programs?

### **Department of education support, building on community work**

RREiS is Victoria’s largest Department of Education and Training supported approach to Respectful Relationships Education. The pilot was implemented with funding from the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training.

Our Watch delivered the RREiS pilot in 19 diverse Victorian schools (20 campuses) in 2015, reaching:

- 1,700 school staff, supporting their workplace to examine, assess and respond to how the school is promoting respect and gender equality
- 4000 school students, receiving respectful relationships curriculum using [Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence](#) resource in the context of a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.

The pilot would not have been possible without the previous programs and advocacy of other organisations that have pioneered Respectful Relationships Education in Australia. The pilot was developed in the historical context of several previous initiatives in Victoria, which laid the foundation for this work.

### **‘Systematisation’ into curriculum and associated professional development**

What distinguishes the RREiS pilot was that Respectful Relationships Education was concerned with building the capacity of the education system as opposed to other approaches, traditionally delivered by external agencies. The mechanisms for ‘systematisation’ included:

- The delivery of curriculum guidance, developed and tested by the Department of Education and Training, and associated professional development.
- Coordination and support to schools via Project Implementation Leaders – primary prevention and gender equality experts employed by Our Watch and working from Department of Education and Training regional offices, to embed a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.
- Guidance from the deputy regional directors at three regional Department of Education Offices.
- Coordination and oversight of the Department of Education and Training central offices via regular communication with Our Watch and the project advisory committee.

### **Beyond curriculum delivery – a whole school approach**

Building gender equality into the cultural makeup of a school means looking beyond the curriculum and taking a whole school approach. Best practice literature maintains that the whole school approach is *the single most important criterion for effective violence prevention and respectful relationships education in schools.*<sup>2</sup> The whole school approach recognises that in order to achieve sustainable change, shifts are needed at a policy, structural, process, system and institutional level. Lessons about respectful and equitable relationships are reinforced by what is modelled to students by their wider school community including their teachers, school staff and school leadership team. The whole school approach aims for change at different levels, changing the structures, norms, and practices within our education system. RREiS took an evidence-based, comprehensive approach to Respectful Relationships Education in secondary schools, including a rigorous approach to action research and evaluation aiming to measure different dimensions of change, at these different levels.

## 1.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the RREiS pilot

A growing international and national evidence base tells us that effective Respectful Relationship Education must include the following core elements:

- 1) Addressing the drivers of gender-based violence
- 2) Taking a whole school approach (see explanation above)
- 3) Integrating evaluation and continual improvement
- 4) Providing resources and support for teachers
- 5) Utilising age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum (for Years 8 and 9)
- 6) Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort
- 7) Have a long-term vision, approach and funding.<sup>3</sup>

When measured against such standards, the RREiS pilot had many strengths, fulfilling the first five of the seven core elements listed above. The RREiS pilot also partially fulfilled element number six, *Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort*. The pilot was specifically designed to establish a mechanism for collaboration, with Project Implementation Leaders (Our Watch staff) being strategically based in the Department of Education and Training's regional offices. Highly collaborative relationships between Project Implementation Leaders and schools staff were established, however, limited progress was made towards strengthening relationships with the wider school community and community based organisations (see detail below).

The most significant weakness of the pilot was in the area of *long term vision, approach and funding*. While pilots are by definition fixed-term, the 12 month implementation period for this pilot limited the possible outcomes of the project in several ways. Project timelines prevented:

- engagement with the broader school community, including parents and community clubs (such as sporting groups) associated with the school;
- pre-planning and consultation with community organisations, in particular the integrated family violence (response) system and organisations with primary prevention and gender equality expertise;
- evaluation of the impacts of the program towards long-term behaviour change as longitudinal evaluation would be required to assess the benefits to students in their future relationships and safety; and
- adequate maturation towards cultural change in schools.

## 1.3 Achievements of the RREiS pilot

The following results draw on a substantial number of surveys, interviews and focus groups to understand what happened in the 19 participating schools in the context of their broader education department setting. The pilot evaluation measured change against a range of indicators, using qualitative and quantitative methods, and two main levels: impact on students, and impact on the school as a whole.

Overall, the RREiS pilot had clear, consistent and positive impacts on student's attitudes, knowledge and skills and showed the beginnings of change in school policies, culture and ethos.

### Students attitudes, knowledge and skills

- As a direct result of RREiS, students' knowledge about the key concepts of gender, gender inequality and violence increased. During focus groups, students were able to articulate sophisticated understandings of these complex and connected issues. Students' knowledge of, attitudes towards, and confidence in discussing issues of domestic violence, gender equality and respectful relationships improved across *all 24* survey questions. For example, the proportion of students who felt that *'slapping or pushing a partner to cause harm or fear'* was a form of domestic violence increased from 70% of students in the baseline survey to 80% of students in the follow-up survey.
- Focus group sessions revealed a number of emotive examples of personal change following the RREiS pilot. Several male students reflected on and recognised the impact of their own behaviours or potential behaviours on their relationships with others. The RREiS pilot improved students' 'understanding of the links between the language the students use with each other and how that leads to situations where women are not treated equally, undervalued, or misrepresented' (quote from curriculum reflection survey, teacher). There is evidence that RREiS also enhanced students' knowledge of what constitutes violence, with some students recognising experiences, in retrospect, as abuse perpetrated against them.

### School policies, practice and culture

- Schools participating in the pilot made positive steps towards developing a culture of gender equality and respect throughout the school. Pre- and post-test survey results demonstrated improvements in awareness, attitudes, behaviour and language of both staff and students.
- Improved classroom behaviour was also observed with close to two-thirds of teachers surveyed reporting that they had observed an improvement in student classroom behaviour over the course of teaching the curriculum and close to half the teachers surveyed indicating that their teacher/student relationships had improved.
- All schools reviewed and began updating their policies and procedures to promote gender equality and respectful relationships.

These examples of attitudinal and behavioural changes at the classroom and individual level are encouraging signs of the more sustainable cultural change which could occur at the whole school level given more time and ongoing intervention. The quote below illustrates how cultural changes at the whole school level often require changes in individuals and in policies:

*There were male teachers in positions of authority [who] used aggression as their method to get what they wanted. That just became unacceptable. It took a lot of strength and persistence and self-belief to ensure that we didn't operate like that. We have a*

*policy that there is to be no raised voices, slamming things...all that rubbish. We did a lot of work around calmer classrooms [...] with a restorative frame. Everything we've done [as part of the RREiS pilot] has supported this.* Focus group session, Principal.

## 1.4 Recommendations for mainstreaming and scaling up RREiS

Based on the evaluation findings in this report and the most recent evidence-base for best practice for Respectful Relationships Education, Our Watch makes the following recommendations for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in Schools, with a specific focus on Victoria. The recommendations relate to the following three key areas:

- i. Making Respectful Relationships Education core business of the Department of Education and Training**
- ii. Building education sector capacity to promote non-violence and gender equality through a whole school approach**
- iii. Ensuring schools are supported to meet their duty of care to staff and students experiencing or perpetrating violence, and to change future trajectories.**

Each of these three areas are explained below and includes a list of 14 specific recommendations:

### **i. Making Respectful Relationships Education core business**

*Teaching healthy, respectful relationships is key to preventing violence and it deserves a place in our curriculum.* Minister for Education, James Merlino, December 2015.

Our Watch welcomes Minister Merlino's statement that clearly places Respectful Relationships Education within the core business of schools. This means prioritising and resourcing the implementation of Respectful Relationships Education in the same way that any other new curriculum would be rolled out – ensuring that teachers are prepared from pre-training, providing professional learning, having the right resources and specialist, ongoing supports and schools being clear on the standards they are working towards. A whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education will be new territory for many Victorian schools and the pilot provides a snapshot of what 12 months of intervention can achieve, and of the support and planning required.

However, for Respectful Relationships Education to reach every student in Victorian schools, further action is required to support teachers, schools, parents and community organisations to work together statewide. Our evaluation findings emphasise that pre-planning, school readiness, engagement of the whole school community, and capacity building and planning prior to implementation are essential considerations for statewide delivery. The following recommendations provide guidance for government on what is required to embed Respectful Relationships Education as part of core business throughout the education system.

## MAKING RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION CORE BUSINESS:

### 1. Plan for a staged statewide rollout, through an opt-in model

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education should be staggered over several years (minimum five years) to allow time for workforce capacity building – in schools and community organisations – for further system and policy development, and to ensure that a whole school approach is integrated systematically into all Victorian schools.

#### a. Commence rollout with opt-in schools

School readiness and support from appointed school leaders was essential for uptake of the RREiS pilot. It is recommended that statewide rollout includes an 'opt-in model' for school participation in the initial years of implementation.

#### b. Give schools time to prepare

All schools will require time to prepare for implementation of a whole school approach. It is recommended that the Department of Education engages with schools for least a year prior to the start of respectful relationships curriculum in classrooms. Schools will then have adequate time to establish crucial community partnerships, prepare for and integrate Respectful Relationships Education into their school planning cycle, and allocate adequate resources.

### 2. Identify a mechanism for whole of government coordination

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education is relevant to a wide range of government departments as well as Victorian and Commonwealth plans. Education planning should be long term and link to state policy frameworks, including the forthcoming Victorian Gender Equality Strategy and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. This will require strong interdepartmental governance mechanisms, for example, an interdepartmental committee. It is therefore recommended that the Victorian Department of Education and Training should lead interdepartmental planning for RREiS roll-out in close partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Women and Royal Commission branch and the Department of Health and Human Services, and in the context of broader interdepartmental activity and policy frameworks for prevention of violence against women and their children.

### 3. Establish statewide mechanisms for consultation, planning and monitoring

Planning and delivery of rollout should be informed by an evidence informed, rights-based approach, supporting the education system to actively address the drivers of gender-based violence as an institution for education, community hub and workplace. This is a specialist and emerging field and it is therefore recommended that state planning is informed by a formal process of consultation with organisations with gender and violence prevention expertise. There is the need for further consultation via a statewide, cross-sector committee (to be

established) to identify the actions required for long-term planning and coordination across the state as well as monitoring systems. Stakeholders include the Department of Education and Training, peak bodies such as the Principals Association, Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Authority, and the gender-based violence response sector and primary prevention sector. This collaboration may be led internally by Department of Education and Training, via an external expert organisation such as Our Watch, or through a co-chair model. It is also recommended that this Victorian group consults with other Commonwealth bodies including the Commonwealth Department of Education, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Education Council.

#### 4. Ensure leadership across the work areas of the Department of Education and Training

The coordination of statewide rollout will require wide-ranging interdepartmental coordination (see recommendation 2). Currently, Respectful Relationships Education is led by the Student Wellbeing and Engagement branch. Leadership on this issue should not be restricted to this area within the Department of Education and Training and will require intradepartmental coordination across multiple groups and divisions, for example, teams with expertise relating to curriculum, strategic policy and planning and human resources.

#### 5. Ensure ongoing and longitudinal evaluation

The pilot has demonstrated that the methodology for evaluation, including feedback loops to inform project activity, has been a significant strength. However, a weakness of the pilot was the lack of longitudinal evaluation data. Longitudinal evaluations allow for follow-up interviews and surveys with those students and staff who have participated in the program, and for comparisons between their experience and that of a control group. Longitudinal evaluation is the only way we can know for certain whether a program has been successful in reducing participants' future experience or perpetration of violence. Appropriate resourcing of a longitudinal evaluation of future Respectful Relationships Education approaches is recommended to ensure:

- **continual improvement** – providing a mechanism for reflecting on practice to inform future planning and implementation, at the teacher, school, regional and state level. Aligning this with a five year staged rollout across the Victorian education system will allow for the approach and its various elements to be continually refined and adapted to the diverse needs of Victorian schools and regions.
- **strengthening the evidence base** – including longitudinal evaluation to measure the long term impacts of Respectful Relationships Education to demonstrate the long term societal and economic benefit of the government investment in Respectful Relationships Education across Victoria.

External expertise should be provided to schools to analyse, interpret and use their school data from staff and students to ensure programs are properly evaluated while at the same time maintaining school anonymity.

## 6. Employ specialist staff to inform work at a regional level

Future delivery will require the input of expert, readily available support, similar to the Project Implementation Leader, to regional offices. These workers require primary prevention, educational and systems change expertise to support regional educational offices to:

- provide specialist Respectful Relationships Education advice and direction to schools, to embed all elements of the whole school approach
- connect and support locally based community organisations and schools
- support school leaders to engage in self-assessment and planning processes.

The evaluation provided mixed recommendations on whether these experts should be directly employed by the Department of Education or externally employed but located in the Department of Education. However, there was clear consensus that their location in the regional offices was ideal. Further consultation and scoping research is required to identify the preferred model and it is recommended that this aligns with and is informed by any reforms, restructures or other system changes anticipated from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence findings and the Education State Reforms.

### ii. Building education sector capacity to deliver new curriculum resources within a school culture that promotes non-violence and gender equality

The suite of professional learning provided in RREiS was found to be the biggest change agent in the delivery of the pilot. Three tiers of professional learning were provided:

1. *Planning for RREiS*: training for school leaders to plan activities for the whole school approach
2. *Delivering RREiS*: training for teachers delivering the curriculum resource
3. *Whole of school briefing*: information for all school staff, explaining the key concepts of RREiS and responding to disclosures.

The pilot identified a number of risks where appropriate professional learning is not delivered or participation is insufficient.

The evaluation was not designed to evaluate the existing curriculum guidance for year 8 and 9, [Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence](#), but it did confirm that the guidance was engaging, age-appropriate and effective.

## BUILDING EDUCATION SECTOR CAPACITY:

### 7. Develop and provide career-long professional learning and online tools

To support statewide rollout, the Department of Education should develop and resource a professional learning strategy (aligned with the statewide professional learning strategy for the education sectors) to support *all* school staff to implement Respectful Relationships Education through a whole school approach. It is recommended that this includes:

#### a. A professional learning strategy with accredited educator trainers

A Department of Education and Training-funded professional learning strategy should include an accreditation program that allows for trainers across the state to be accredited to deliver, at minimum, the three tiers of professional learning delivered by the RREiS pilot.

#### b. Professional learning for all teachers delivering Respectful Relationships Education curriculum

All teachers involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum should undertake a separate accreditation process that includes a minimum two day face-to-face professional learning delivered by training providers whose quality is assured through the accreditation program in (a) above.

#### c. Ongoing support for curriculum teachers

In addition to the face-to-face accreditation program, the Department of Education and Training should fund opportunities for ongoing professional learning for teachers and support staff who currently teach or support Respectful Relationships Education to:

- update professional skills
- share and debrief experiences
- access additional resources to address the identified areas of need including but not limited to sexuality and gender inclusivity, transgender and backlash.

#### d. Preservice training

For Respectful Relationships Education to become 'core business' in schools, all student teachers will require introductory training on gender-based violence prevention and response in the school context. Those intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering Respectful Relationships curriculum will require more comprehensive training. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training supports universities to ensure they have the resources to adequately prepare preservice teachers, including:

- training for preservice teacher educators
- comprehensive modules for student teachers intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering Respectful Relationships Education, covering – at a minimum – the content in the two-day in-service module in (b) above

- introductory modules for all student teachers in recognizing and responding to violence, and their role in contributing to whole school cultures of non-violence and gender equality.
- updated resources. The online resource Sexuality Education Matters should be updated with the RREiS findings, new primary prevention research and an expanded emphasis on primary school and early childhood teaching.

**e. Regular briefings to all school staff**

All staff, including those not directly involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum, should undertake professional learning on Respectful Relationships Education and gender equality through their roles as teachers to students and in their workplace (the main objectives of the whole school briefings which were delivered as part of RREiS). This should align with and complement training in implementing new policies and guidance in recognizing and responding to violence recommended in 12 and 13 below).

**f. Specialised support for school leaders**

The Department of Education and Training should provide compulsory professional learning for school leadership teams including principals and assistant principals on the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in addition to providing ongoing support for school leadership teams.

**g. Online resources for school staff**

Through the pilot, Our Watch developed the *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools Toolkit* (the toolkit) which includes guides and resources to support the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education and will be made available online. The Victorian Government should fund further development, testing and consultation to refine the toolkit to align with all school levels, including primary school, and to ensure the toolkit supports the curriculum guidance for F-7 and 11-12 to be released in 2016.

**8. Integrate quality assurance mechanisms into delivery**

Schools should ensure that staff and students are aware of and competent in policy and practice on promoting gender equality and respectful relationships, and responding appropriately to disclosures, including those of past abuse and perpetration. The Department of Education and Training may consider how these measures can be integrated into existing school audits or surveys such as the student attitudes to school survey or school staff survey.

**9. Establish implementation teams within schools**

Schools should consider internal mechanisms for embedding Respectful Relationships Education within their schools, such as forming and resourcing teams consisting of teaching, wellbeing and leadership staff to plan and support implementation at the classroom level. Teams can:

- provide support to staff and students who may need additional wellbeing support
- ensure flexibility in approaches based on context
- ensure adequate time for planning and opportunities to debrief.

Teams can also consider the timing and sequencing of lessons and ensure that students have the prerequisite understanding and knowledge prior to participating in respectful relationships lessons. For example, it is critical that students completing the year 8 and 9 modules of the curriculum guidance have completed basic sexuality education.

#### **10. Regular reviews of curriculum guidance**

The Department of Education should conduct regular reviews, at a minimum of every three years, of curriculum guidance including the existing curriculum resources, to ensure age-appropriate and relevant resources, digital technology, additional audiovisual materials, updated statistics and legality issues and integration of emerging evidence. Further advice and resources will be required as part of rollout to ensure adaptability and useability for teachers and schools.

#### **iii. Ensuring schools are supported to meet their duty of care to staff and students experiencing or perpetrating violence, and to change future trajectories**

RREiS has successfully built the capacity of survivors (staff and students) to understand their experience and seek support within a safe place, their workplace or school. Many RREiS pilot schools experienced increased disclosures from students and staff experiencing, witnessing, and in some cases perpetrating, violence. A key finding was also the disclosure of other sensitive issues such as sexuality and gender diversity.

Overall, this was perceived as a success of the pilot. An increase in student and staff disclosures is a positive indicator of both increased awareness about gender-based violence as well as staff and students feeling that their schools were supportive environments where sensitive topics could be safely shared and discussed. Such disclosures also provide schools with the opportunity to identify and better deal with educational difficulties or behavioural issues that some students may have as a result of past or ongoing experiences of violence. Finally, receiving support following a disclosure of violence – especially in the context of whole-school Respectful Relationships Education – can help change trajectories for students affected by violence and help them envisage and build healthy relationships in their future lives.

While RREiS may have provide one of the most extensive approaches to equipping schools for to respond to disclosures (all staff in all 19 schools were briefed by the Project Implementation Leader and a local response service provider), feedback indicates that this still fell short of what staff require to feel confident to provide an appropriate response. This reinforces the need for further work in this area, and the danger and risk to students and staff when appropriate training and links to the integrated system responses to violence are not properly integrated into Respectful Relationships Education.

There is a need for an education system-wide strategy to build the internal capacity of schools to support and refer appropriately to increased disclosures. This increased demand for services also has implications for the resourcing and capacity of local services to meet the disclosure needs of schools and students. This will ensure that community organisations and schools have the capacity and skills needed to work together to intervene early, and provide students and staff experiencing violence with the support they need.

## MEETING DUTY OF CARE TO STAFF AND STUDENTS:

### 11. Develop comprehensive response guidelines for school

The Department of Education and Training should work closely with specialist services (including family violence, sexual assault, child protection and youth services), as well as the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet to address the gaps in guidelines for schools in responding to disclosures from staff and students including how to address student disclosures which fall outside the 'Child Protection – Mandatory reporting' section of the Victorian Government Schools Policy and Advisory Guide.

### 12. Develop comprehensive professional learning on responding to violence-related trauma

As part of the Department of Education and Training's statewide professional learning strategy for education staff should include content and assess staff capacity to:

- identify and respond to a range of disclosures (including direct and vicarious trauma) and when to make a referral to an external community organisation
- respond appropriately, in an age-appropriate way to both students and staff who are survivors and/or perpetrators of violence
- ensure staff are familiar with state mandates and their own internal processes on responding to disclosures.

### 13. Resource the integrated system response to gender-based violence, and interdepartmental collaboration, to address service gaps

The Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services should fund and facilitate closer working relationships between schools and community-based organisations to:

- ensure that schools have access to local gender-based violence response experts to play an active role in providing ongoing support and advice to schools on appropriately responding to disclosures, which may include capacity building and resourcing existing services to provide appropriate responses to younger age groups
- establish a working group of key gender-based violence (including family violence), sexual assault, child protection and youth services stakeholders to develop, implement and evaluate a strategy to ensure availability and accessibility of statewide integrated approaches that:
  - i. provide age appropriate interventions and/or responses for young people already experiencing or perpetrating violence within in their relationships
  - ii. provide appropriate supports and/or interventions for young people witnessing or living with violence at home, given strong evidence that life experience can impact long term relationships patterns.

#### 14. Fund further research into effective early interventions for young people experiencing or perpetrating gender-based violence

Research indicates that, while it is crucial that tailored *support* be offered to children and young people experiencing, living with or perpetrating violence, deficit-based *education* approaches – particularly those that isolate or differentiate children and young people who have experienced violence from their peers – have not been shown to be the most effective in reducing future perpetration or experience of violence.<sup>4</sup> Further research is required to identify the best options to support young people in such circumstances, and on the evidence for various early intervention options.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The RREiS pilot findings provide policy makers and educators with robust data that presents, for the first time, a Department of Education and Training supported and systematised whole school model, tested and evaluated in the Victorian context. The findings overwhelmingly show significant improvements in students' knowledge, attitudes and skills, as well as the beginnings of change in the culture of 19 diverse schools.

The findings are consistent with best practice literature on Respectful Relationships Education in Schools. They demonstrate that it is not enough to provide schools with a curriculum resource. In the words of the Minister for Education James Merlino, 'a curriculum is a statement of the purpose of schooling'<sup>5</sup> however, a curriculum guide in itself is not the mechanism for change. Statewide rollout of Respectful Relationships Education will only make an impact if the delivery of curriculum is contextualised as part of a broader school and education system culture that 'walks the talk' of gender equality and respect. If this rollout occurs in the absence of appropriate supports, resources and training throughout the education system, there is great risk of lost opportunity in public support and government investment and the story of gender-based violence will stay the same for future Victorian generations.

The RREiS pilot has demonstrated that Respectful Relationships Education can successfully create a safe space for staff and students to share their experiences of violence. This presents a previously untapped opportunity to intervene earlier and change the trajectory for the next generation and their families. There is the opportunity to make meaningful change to these individuals and change life trajectories if they receive timely and adequate support. Further research is required to identify what this might look like.

Based on the pilot findings, it can be anticipated that statewide rollout will generate an increase in disclosures and there is a need to work closely with response services and address likely limitations in their capacity to meet this demand. Simply strengthening relationships between schools and community-based response services is unlikely to bridge this gap. Community organisations that provide gender-based violence response services need to be resourced to provide specialist services to children and young people experiencing or living with gender-based violence. There is a risk of further harm to survivors or perpetrators if the response is inadequate.

The RREIS pilot has successfully demonstrated that schools, when provided with appropriate supports and resources, can make positive steps towards cultural transformation and shifting the drivers of gender-based violence. Through the RREIS pilot, we have observed the beginnings of change in school culture, ethos, and improvements in the attitudes and knowledge of children and young people. Changing the structures, norms, and practices within our education system is a crucial element in nation-wide efforts and is precisely what is needed to change the story and lower rates of gender-based violence nationally. We know that the education sector cannot do this alone, and schools will require whole of government support and leadership to create an enabling environment for change. The pilot has established that this is an achievable goal and that a systematised approach to Respectful Relationships Education offers a pathway towards the ultimate goal of social transformation and the elimination of gender-based violence.

# 2 Background to the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) pilot

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## 2.1 What is primary prevention?

Primary prevention is about changing the social conditions, such as gender inequality, that excuse, justify or even promote violence against women and their children. Individual behaviour is shaped by a range of factors at the relationship, community, organisation and societal levels.<sup>6</sup> While individual behavioural change may be the intended result of prevention activity, such change cannot be achieved prior to, or in isolation from, a broader change in the underlying drivers of such violence across communities, organisations and society as a whole<sup>7</sup>. Like other major social and health issues such as tobacco and alcohol use, gender-based violence can be prevented through a primary prevention approach that:

*....[changes] the social conditions, such as gender inequality, that excuse, justify or even promote violence against women their children.[...] A primary prevention approach works across the whole population to address the attitudes, practices and power differentials that drive violence against women and their children.<sup>8</sup>*

The term **gender-based violence** is used throughout this report.

In the context of Respectful Relationships Education, the term gender-based violence is often used in place of ‘violence against women’ as it is considered to better encompass the experiences of young people. Gender-based violence ensures that prevention of violence against girls and young women is included – such as dating violence, sexting and revenge porn – as well as the prevention of violence in young people’s future adult lives.

An extended definition is provided in Section 9 of this report, *Glossary and abbreviations*.

Gender-based violence can be prevented through primary prevention by integrating the following actions into the way we live, work, learn and socialise:

- promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life
- challenge condoning of gender-based violence
- promote women’s independence and decision-making
- challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships.

## 2.2 What is Respectful Relationships Education?

Respectful Relationships Education is one of the most well established examples of primary prevention interventions. A recent systematic review of approaches to prevent violence against women and girls in *The Lancet* ascribed school-based activity the highest marker of effectiveness.<sup>9</sup>

In December 2015, Our Watch conducted a rapid review of local and international research and evaluations of Respectful Relationship Education initiatives around the world and published an evidence paper on Respectful Relationships Education.<sup>10</sup> This included the development of a definition for Respectful Relationships Education (see Figure 1), based on the international evidence and consultation with experts in the field. The following background is an extract from the evidence paper.

In Australia, Respectful Relationships Education is a relatively new term which first emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. It draws on theory and practice of primary prevention of gender-based violence through strategies and approaches for children and young people. A common setting for Respectful Relationships Education is education, mainly secondary schools. The term Respectful Relationships Education is also used in broader community settings including sporting clubs and community groups. As a relatively new field, there are varying understandings of what constitutes good practice Respectful Relationships Education both in Australia and internationally.

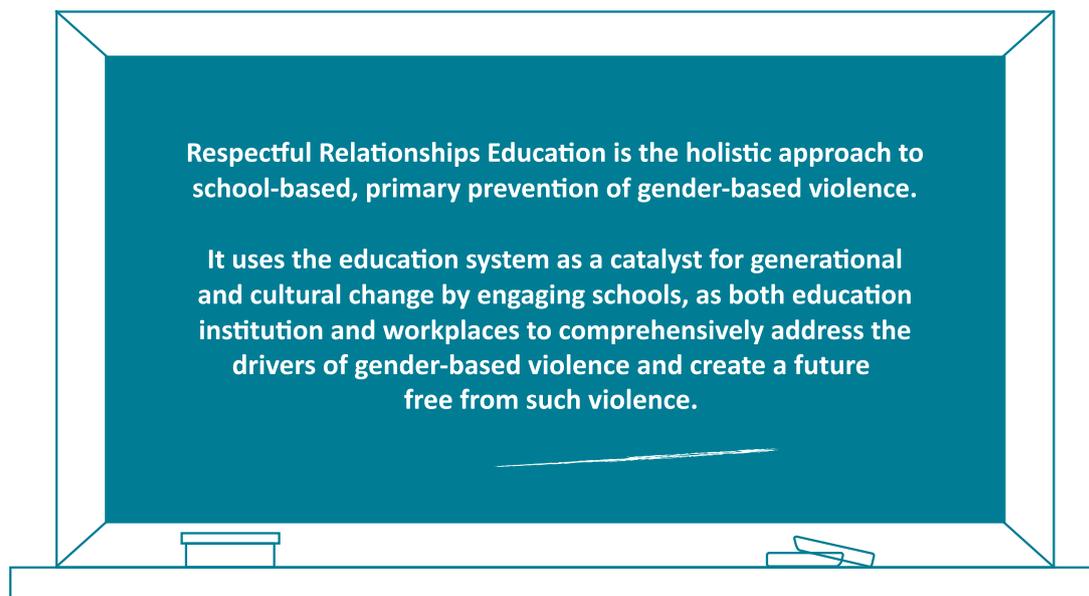
Respectful Relationships Education is often considered as only what is delivered in the classroom, however there are a number of elements necessary for effective practice:

1. Address the drivers of gender-based violence
2. Have a long term vision, approach and funding
3. Take a whole school approach
4. Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort
5. Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement
6. Provide resources and support for teachers
7. Use age-appropriate interactive and participatory curriculum.

Implementing a whole school approach to gender-based violence prevention requires bringing about change across all seven elements. This is successful only if participants are driven by the same understanding of the pilot aims and processes and are willing to collaborate to achieve shared aims.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 1: Definition of Respectful Relationships Education.

Source: Our Watch (2015) *Evidence paper: Respectful Relationships Education*



## 2.3 Evolution of Respectful Relationships Education in Victoria

In Australia and internationally, there are a number of strong examples which demonstrate how robust Respectful Relationships Education can have positive and lasting impacts on attitudes and behaviours, including the perpetration of gender-based violence.<sup>12</sup> Victoria has led a number of these initiatives. From the early 1990s, there have been examples of initiatives in Victorian schools to promote gender equality, raise awareness of gender-based violence and some examples of programs explicitly designed to prevent such violence by addressing its key drivers.

More recent programs delivered to Victorian schools have included: *Solving the Jigsaw* (Emergency Accommodations and Support Enterprise), *Sexual Assault Prevention Program in Secondary Schools* (known as SAPPSS, Centres Against Sexual Assault House<sup>13</sup>), *Girls Talk-Guys Talk project* (Women's Health West) and the *Breaking the Silence in Schools* (White Ribbon) program amongst others. The majority of these school based violence prevention programs were run by external agencies.<sup>14</sup> While these approaches have varied significantly in terms of their methods of delivery and subsequent impacts, it is important to recognise their contribution for building the foundation for systematised, state wide Respectful Relationship Education.

In 2009, the Victorian Department of Education and Training released formative research, *Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and respectful relationships in Victorian secondary schools*, which, for the first time, reviewed existing programs and established best practice criteria for Respectful Relationships Education.<sup>15</sup> The research informed a ten-year whole-of-government policy, *A Right to Respect* which included a commitment to prevention across government departments – including the Department of Education and Training – and initiated a number of funded projects, some of which carried through successive changes of government.

In 2014 the Victorian Department of Education (then the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) released [Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence](#), an eight unit curriculum guidance for Years 8 and 9. It was tested through a number of 'demonstration sites' in a project funded by the Department and led by the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA House). While this resource was made available online and is built using the whole school approach, there was no accompanying professional learning strategy, ongoing support or further resources for schools.

In late 2013, a new National Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children was announced by the Commonwealth and Victorian Government, now known as Our Watch. Our Watch was funded by the Victorian Government to commence a pilot of Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) in 2014 with implementation in schools occurring throughout 2015. The pilot coincided with a number related initiatives and announcements, listed in the following section.

## 2.4 Concurrent activity and announcements

During the implementation of the RREiS pilot, there were several announcements on primary prevention of gender-based violence and Respectful Relationships Education:

- In 2014, the recently elected Victorian Government established a Royal Commission into Family Violence.
- In mid-2015, Rosie Batty, Australian of the Year 2015 and Our Watch Ambassador, established the Luke Batty Foundation and *Never Alone* campaign. The campaign's first priority was to advocate for the inclusion of Respectful Relationships Education in the Australian Curriculum. As deputy chair for the Council of Australian Governments' Advisory Panel to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, Rosie Batty presented 13,000 signatures to the Australian Prime Minister, Premiers and First Ministers, supporting this initiative.
- State and Commonwealth Education Ministers, on 18 September 2015, strengthened the position of respectful relationships in the Australian Curriculum with specific content in the health and physical education learning areas through the personal and social capability across the learning areas.
- The Victorian Government announced, on 13 August 2015, Respectful Relationships Education will be included in the curriculum from 2016 in prep through to Year 10 as part of Victoria's Education State reforms.
- The Victorian Government released the Year 10 component of *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence* (Unit 3).
- In media releases the Victorian Government indicated that while curriculum and resources will be available in Term 1 in 2016 it will await the Royal Commission's findings and the evaluation of RREiS to inform the whole school approach needed to support the respectful relationships curriculum.

## 2.5 RREiS pilot announcement, approach and aims

In 2013, Our Watch was funded by the Victorian Government to commence planning the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) pilot, to be delivered in partnership with Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Education and Training. The aim of RREiS was to develop an evidence-based, comprehensive whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education with secondary schools in Victoria.

The main deliverable of the pilot was to support up to 30 schools to embed a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education, with a focus on their school as a workplace as well as delivering the resource *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence* to students in Years 8 and 9. A total of 19 schools were recruited to the pilot.

The specific objectives of RREiS were:

- Build a partnership approach between Department of Education and Training regional offices, community providers, local governments and secondary schools to increase the provision of primary prevention of gender-based violence activities in schools.
- Provide training and support to increase capacity of schools to develop and implement a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.
- Provide training and support to teaching staff to enable the effective delivery of the *Stepping Out* curriculum in the context of a whole school approach.
- Build school and community leadership and embed a culture of respectful relationships in Victorian schools.
- Create linkages with, support and strengthen existing efforts within schools to respond to students and teachers experiencing violence, and intervene early to provide support and referrals.

The implementation of the pilot emphasised the importance of the whole school approach, described in the Department of Education and Training's Training Resource, *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence*.

There are six elements (see Figure 2):

1. School culture and environment
2. Leadership and commitment
3. Professional learning strategy
4. Teaching and learning
5. Community partnerships
6. Support for staff and students.

Figure 2: Whole school approach



Source: Adapted from *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence*, Department of Education and Training (2014).

## 2.6 Pilot structure and recruitment

### Partners and governance

The Department of Premier and Cabinet provided funding and guidance to the pilot. Throughout establishment, implementation and reporting phases, Our Watch also worked closely with Department of Education and Training Central Office and three regional offices. The pilot structure and governance was designed in response to the complex systems that RREiS operated in, including the public service, education system and gender-based violence sector. Our Watch led the coordination and implementation, employing a fulltime Manager of Policy and Projects, Children and Young People (the manager). The manager oversaw a team of three Project Implementation Leaders who were embedded in the regional offices of the Department of Education and Training. In each of the regional offices a Deputy Regional Director was nominated as lead of the RREiS pilot in their area.

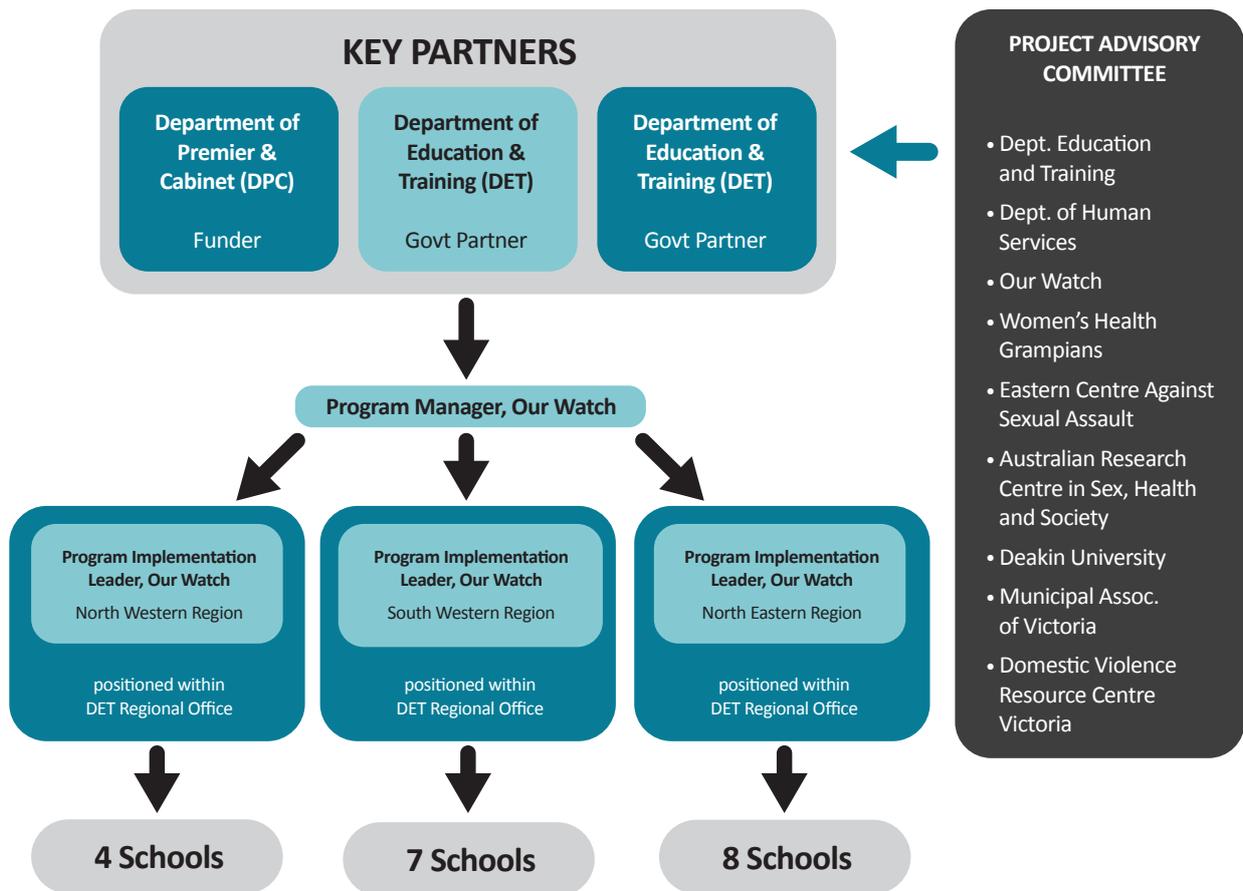
The Project Implementation Leaders were responsible for guiding the regional implementation of the pilot, supporting and building the capacity of the schools in their development of a whole school approach and regional stakeholders (including community and Department of Education and Training) to deliver on best practice Respectful Relationships Education.

The Project Advisory Committee membership consisted of the Deputy Regional Directors, key staff from Department of Education and Training, Department of Premier and Cabinet, key community and academic stakeholders and leaders and Our Watch senior staff including the Director of Practice Leadership, Evaluation and Learning Coordinator and the manager. The Project Advisory Committee met five times throughout the pilot. Their role was to:

- oversee project implementation and evaluation
- ensure the pilot was informed by current evidence
- advise on emerging or related issues for project partners
- advise on sustainability and future scaling up of school based prevention work statewide and nationally.

In addition to regular informal correspondence with government partners, in the last six months of the pilot, key staff from Our Watch, Department of Education and Training Central Office and Department of Premier and Cabinet met on a monthly basis. Figure 3 shows the structure of the RREiS pilot governance structure.

Figure 3: Key stakeholders in the RREiS pilot



## Pilot set up

Planning of the pilot commenced in mid-2014, although RREiS was not formally announced to regional stakeholders until late 2014, due to a Ministerial embargo. Schools were introduced to the pilot by the Department of Education and Training's Deputy Regional Directors, who identified and then invited schools to participate by completing an Expression of Interest letter. Our Watch contacted all schools that received the invitation from the Department of Education and Training, to answer questions about the pilot and collaboratively assess whether schools were ready to participate in either an introductory or supported model of participation. Schools were advised about the varying levels of professional learning and support included in each model and indicated their preference depending on their existing capacity and other initiatives at their school.

The RREiS pilot was conducted in three of the four regions of the Victorian Department of Education and Training. Within these regions the following local government areas defined the catchment area for the participating schools:

- North Western Region: City of Greater Bendigo, Macedon Ranges and Mount Alexander Shire
- South Western Region: Maribyrnong City Council, Wyndham City Council and Brimbank City Council
- North Eastern Region: Yarra Ranges, Maroondah City Council and City of Knox.

These areas were based on the previous Victorian Government funded initiative *Preventing Violence in Our Communities* from 2011-2014 which focused on the role of local governments in primary prevention.

School participation was devised with two different models: 'supported' and 'introductory'. The distinction was that supported schools were required to participate in intensive planning and accept implementation support from the regionally-based Project Implementation Leader, while it was anticipated that introductory schools would receive only ad hoc technical assistance from the Project Implementation Leader. Both models required participation in two tiers of professional learning: *Planning for RREiS and Delivering RREiS*, described in the following section. Supported schools were also required to complete the *Whole School Briefing*, and introductory model schools were able to decide if this was a priority. Three of the seven introductory schools opted to complete the *Whole School Briefing*. This distinction between the two models (supported versus introductory schools) was not maintained over the course of the pilot, as discussed later.

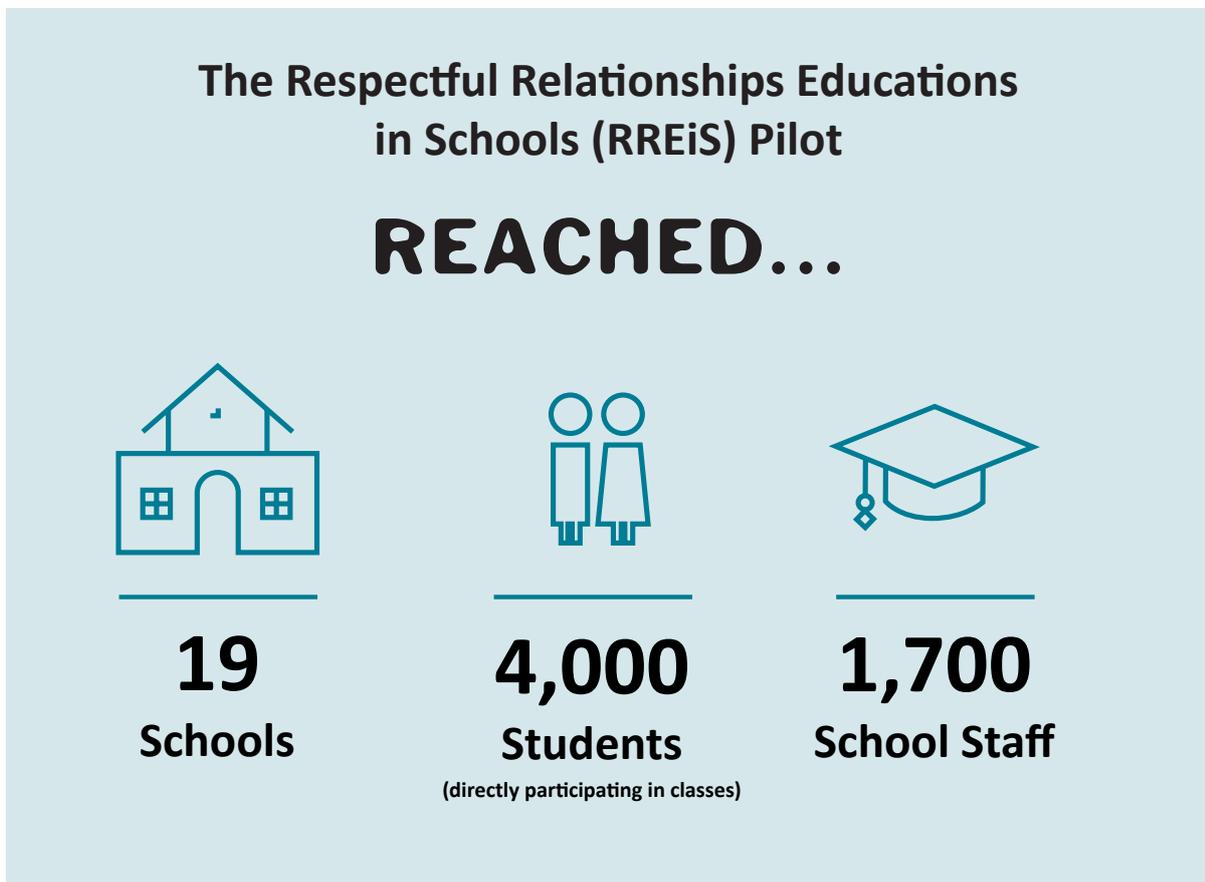
### Implementation

In total, 19 schools (20 campuses) were involved in the pilot, reaching an estimated 4,000 students participating directly in respectful relationships classes and 1,700 school staff across Victoria (see Figure 4). School based implementation ran over four school terms: Term 1, 2015 to Term 4, 2015.

The pilot was driven at the community level through partnerships within Department of Education and Training regional offices, where the Project Implementation Leaders were based. As Our Watch employees, the Project Implementation Leaders’ role was not only to build the capacity of schools to implement Respectful Relationships Education, but also to work with community-based organisations to develop community ownership and leadership and build a platform for a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education as part of a wider whole of community commitment to the primary prevention of violence against women.

A diverse range of schools participated in the pilot, including regional and metropolitan schools, 16 government schools and three Catholic schools. Participating schools included one all girls school, one all boys schools, and 17 co-educational schools. Twelve schools opted to take part in the supported model and seven in the introductory model.

Figure 4: Pilot participants



Throughout the pilot the Project Implementation Leaders met with schools on a regular basis to support progress through the following activities:

- delivery of a professional learning strategy, as shown in Table 1
- participation in the baseline and follow-up school culture survey
- completion of an audit tool, termed the *Our Watch Gender Equality Self-assessment and Planning Tool*
- identification and delivery on priority actions, developed through the above process and different for each school
- development and refinement of school policies and processes on gender equality
- delivery of the classroom activity for Year 8 and 9 students
- participation in the baseline survey and follow-up survey on students' knowledge, skills and attitudes.

A suite of professional learning was delivered to various staff in participating schools to support the whole school approach. Three tiers of professional learning sessions were run as part of the pilot:

1. *Planning for RREiS*
2. *Delivering RREiS*
3. *Whole School Briefing.*

The sequence of these sessions varied depending on availability of schools and trainers. The intended aims and participants of these sessions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: RREiS professional learning sessions

Professional learning	Aims	Duration	Attendees
1. <i>Planning for RREiS</i>	<p>Key leaders have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a deeper understanding of gender-based violence and the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education</li> <li>– the opportunity to consider policies, practices and actions they can take to promote gender equality within their school, with a focus on school culture and the school as a workplace.</li> </ul>	4 hours, off-site	Project leadership team from each school – included Principal, Assistant Principal, Leading Teachers, Wellbeing Coordinator, other key staff
2. <i>Delivering RREiS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Build the capacity of teachers to deliver <i>Stepping Out</i> curriculum and to support their school to embed a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.</li> </ul>	2 days, off-site	Teaching staff (delivering the curriculum resource) and student wellbeing staff  Note: At several schools, members of the School Leadership Team also attended
3. <i>Whole School Briefing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All staff understand the need for Respectful Relationships Education and how it will be implemented within their school</li> <li>– All staff understand how to appropriately respond to students or fellow staff members who disclose an experience of violence.</li> </ul>	1 – 1.5 hours after school, on-site	Whole staffing body (teaching and non-teaching)

### Methods of delivering curriculum

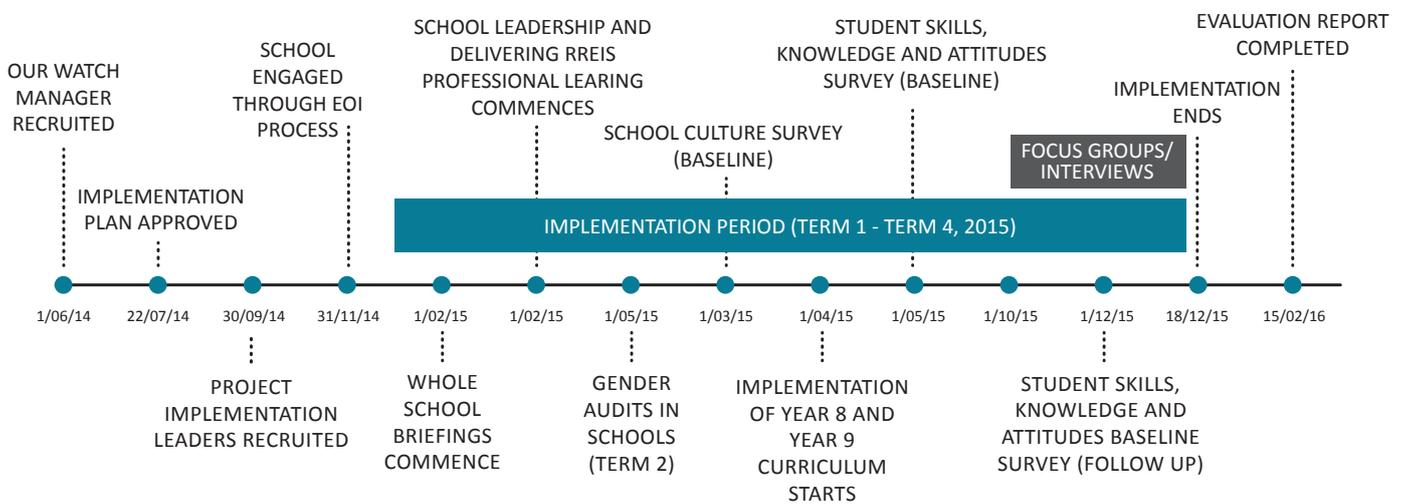
The Respectful Relationships Education Evidence Paper<sup>16</sup> highlights the importance of sensitivity to local contexts and the need to balance systematic delivery and adaptability for individual schools and their communities. The pilot recognised this need for flexibility and allowed schools to adopt a diverse range of delivery models for implementing the Year 8 and 9 respectful relationships curriculum. The approaches to delivering the *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence* resources to students ranged from the traditional model of a session per week as part of health education, delivery within pastoral care or wellbeing sessions to intensive health education delivery where students receive the eight sessions over a 1-2 week period. This report has drawn on these diverse experiences in the consideration of the findings of the evaluation.

## Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit

Alongside implementation of RREiS, Our Watch also developed a *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit* (the toolkit) to support schools and those working with them to implement a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education. As the toolkit was not developed prior to implementation of the RREiS pilot, it was not included in the evaluation but draws on many of the resources delivered and the experiences of the 19 Victorian schools that participated in the pilot. The toolkit also collates previous work in this area that has been led by many schools and women’s sector leaders. The toolkit will be available on the Our Watch website in 2016.

## 2.7 Pilot timelines

Figure 5: RREiS pilot timeline



## 2.8 Pilot adjustments

### Staffing changes

The Our Watch implementation team, made up of the manager and three Project Implementation Leaders, underwent four changes of staff over the course of the pilot. In January 2015 and June 2015 there was a change to the Project Implementation Leader based in the North Western region. When the third Project Implementation Leader for the North Western region started in July 2015, Our Watch reviewed the regional strategy and the Project Implementation Leader was relocated to the Coburg office (which was co-located with key Department of Education and Training staff) rather than the Bendigo office. The role still included frequent visits to regional schools. The manager also changed in June 2015, however, there was an opportunity for overlap and handover with the new manager which facilitated this change with minimal disruption to the pilot.

### Categorising schools: supported versus introductory model

As noted earlier, in the original design of the pilot there were two categories of schools, introductory (seven schools) and supported (12 schools). It was anticipated that the introductory schools would draw less on the expertise of the Project Implementation Leaders compared to the supported schools. However, the delineation between these two models

became less clear as schools from the supported and introductory models both requested varying levels of support, and several supported schools opted for all three tiers of professional learning including *Whole School Briefings*. Reflections from schools and the implementation team suggest that this was indicative of the level of support required for schools to implement Respectful Relationships Education.

Some introductory schools discovered through the course of the pilot that they required more support than initially anticipated. Project Implementation Leaders accommodated these requests as their support to schools was critical for effectively and safely implementing the whole school approach.

## 2.9 Pilot closure and sustainability

Throughout 2015, there were a number of announcements at a state and federal level on Respectful Relationships Education (see Section 2.4) and a high level of political support for its expansion. This period also coincided with the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, which is due to provide recommendations on 29 March 2016. It is anticipated that these recommendations may result in reforms, restructures or other system changes which will have implications for continuing Respectful Relationships Education in the 19 pilot schools as well as statewide rollout. At the time of pilot completion in December 2015 there was uncertainty about how the learnings from RREiS, in particular the operationalising of the whole school approach, would be incorporated in the statewide implementation. Throughout the final six months of the pilot, the RREiS Project Advisory Committee committed to supporting the 19 pilot schools beyond 2015 to maintain momentum in the absence of input from Our Watch. Actions to support sustainability included:

- Our Watch provided detailed post implementation school culture survey reports to schools in Term 4 2015 to inform their planning for RREiS implementation in 2016.
- Each Department of Education and Training regional office nominated a staff member to act as a point of contact for schools, once the Project Implementation Leaders' contracts were finished, until further departmental support was confirmed.
- Additional professional learning was scheduled for 2016. Two sessions of the two day *Delivering Respectful Relationships Education in Schools* were offered to schools if they had additional teachers to be trained.
- Two regions established a community of practice led by the Department of Education and Training's regional offices, to support teachers and school leaders who would continue to implement RREiS in 2016. One region ran the first successful community of practice session in late 2015. Communities of practice are a well-established model for cultivating and sharing knowledge between peers in a particular field of work. The purpose and format may vary, however, communities of practice typically involves regular, face-to-face meetings designed to support practitioners to connect with each other, share experiences, identify common challenges, generate solutions and learn from one another.

- The *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit*, an online resource for schools, will be made available on the Our Watch website in early 2016 for all schools to support planning and implementation.

## 2.10 Pilot strengths and weaknesses

The format of the RREiS pilot was developed by Our Watch in collaboration with leading Respectful Relationships Education researchers and government partners from the Department of Education and Training and Department of Premier and Cabinet. Table 2 below compares the design of the RREiS pilot to the seven core elements for good practice Respectful Relationships Education identified in the Respectful Relationships Education Evidence Paper<sup>17</sup>.

When measured against such standards, the RREiS pilot had many strengths, fulfilling the first five of the seven core elements:

1. Address drivers of gender-based violence
2. Take a whole school approach
3. Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement
4. Provide resources and support for teachers
5. Use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum (for Years 8 and 9).

The RREiS pilot also partially fulfilled element number six, *Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort*. The pilot was specifically designed to establish a mechanism for collaboration, with Project Implementation Leaders (Our Watch staff) being strategically based in the Department of Education and Training's regional offices. Highly collaborative relationships between Project Implementation Leaders and school staff were established, however, limited progress was made towards strengthening relationships with the wider school community and community-based organisations (see detail below).

The most significant weakness of the pilot was in the recommended element *Have a long term vision, approach and funding*. It was acknowledged that the 12 month implementation period for the pilot would not allow maturation towards cultural change in schools. Limited timelines prevented:

- engagement with the broader school community, including parents and community clubs (such as sporting groups) associated with the school
- planning and consultation with community organisations, in particular the integrated family violence (response) system and organisations with primary prevention and gender equality expertise, as due to embargos on the announcement of the pilot, these organisations were not consulted prior to implementation, which precluded more in-depth collaboration throughout the pilot
- evaluation of the impacts of the program towards long term behaviour change. Evaluation limitations are described in further detail in Section 3.5.

Table 2: RREiS pilot and best practice

Core elements identified by Evidence paper	Did the RREiS pilot fulfil this element?	Comments
1. Address drivers of gender-based violence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The pilot design explicitly targeted the primary, underlying drivers of violence.</li> <li>– Within the implementation period, it was envisaged that schools would be made aware of these drivers and begin to take initial steps towards addressing these drivers.</li> <li>– The pilot was focused on the school as a setting, but did not seek to engage the whole school community. Future implementation, beyond the first year of implementation, would aim to include parents and other affiliated community groups (for example, sporting clubs).</li> </ul>
2. Take a whole school approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– This was a distinguishing feature of the RREiS pilot, compared to many other school based primary prevention initiatives. The Project Implementation Leaders provided ongoing support to schools to plan for all six components of the whole school approach (see Section 2.6 for further details), integrated into Department of Education and Training systems and structures.</li> <li>– While a whole school approach was taken, all six components were not addressed within the timeframe of the project. The ‘entry point’ and focus for most schools, at least initially, were the curriculum resources. Progress on each component of the whole school model is discussed under Section 4 Evaluation Findings.</li> </ul>
3. Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The evaluation was designed both for impact measures and continual improvement. Refer to Section 3 for further details of the evaluation approach.</li> <li>– The main limitation of the evaluation was the lack of longitudinal data. Refer to Section 3.5 for further details.</li> </ul>
4. Provide resources and support for teachers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The curriculum resource <i>Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence</i> (available online on the Department of Education and Training website) was complemented by a suite of professional learning activities and ongoing support from Our Watch throughout the 12 month pilot.</li> </ul>
5. Use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, for Years 8 and 9 students only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The two units of curriculum delivered as part of the pilot were developed and tested by CASA House and Deakin University in 2010<sup>18</sup> to ensure that material was engaging and age-appropriate.</li> </ul>

Core elements identified by Evidence paper	Did the RREiS pilot fulfil this element?	Comments
<p>6. Establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/>                      Partially                 </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The pilot was specifically designed to establish a mechanism for collaboration, with the Project Implementation Leaders being strategically based in the Department of Education and Training’s regional offices. The pilot was successful in developing highly collaborative relationships between Project Implementation Leaders and school staff. There was also evidence of improved engagement from Department staff throughout.</li> <li>– Throughout the pilot, attempts were made to involve community organisations (including those with gender-based violence response and primary prevention expertise), including capacity building sessions, however, limited progress was made towards strengthening their relationships with schools beyond those that already existed.</li> <li>– There was inadequate time for relationship development and planning prior to pilot implementation which impacted wider relationships and mechanisms for collaboration.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Have a long term vision, approach and funding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Not achieved, due to the 12 month implementation period.</li> <li>– It was extremely encouraging that the Victorian Government recently committed to supporting every school to incorporate Respectful Relationships Education. The need for long term planning and resources will be a consideration for future rollout.</li> </ul>

# 3 Evaluation

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The evidence for Respectful Relationships Education as an effective form of primary prevention is growing and this evaluation of the RREiS pilot contributes to that evidence base. The development of the evaluation design and methodology was led by the Our Watch policy and evaluation team in consultation with the Our Watch implementation team (the manager and Project Implementation Leaders) and experts from Deakin and Swinburne Universities. The evaluation methods were informed by the Our Watch Evaluation Policy, which emphasises processes that are ethical, participatory and robust.

## 3.1 Evaluation aims

A key consideration of this targeted and time limited pilot was to embed respectful relationships and gender equality within the school setting and to measure the impacts of these efforts on the school culture, staff and students. The original government brief also sought an evaluation report that would provide advice about sustaining and mainstreaming RREiS in schools across Victoria. Following discussions with the implementation team, funders and the Department of Education and Training, two evaluation aims were identified:

1. Ascertain the efficacy, implementation and impact of the project in relation to the six components of a whole school approach to violence prevention in schools:
  - School leadership and commitment
  - School culture and environment
  - Support for staff and students
  - Community partnerships
  - Teaching and learning
  - Professional learning strategy.
2. Explore the systematisation of the RREiS pilot into secondary schools and the value of the supported model of implementation, in particular, demonstrating the processes and key enablers for implementing a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education for future transferability.

## 3.2 A 'realist' and reflective approach

Schools are highly complex environments, existing within varied political, cultural and demographic contexts. In developing the evaluation approach, the Our Watch implementation team was aware that the impacts of RREiS would depend on a wide range of mediating factors. In designing this evaluation, the team recognised that the unique context of each of the 19 participating schools would influence their response to RREiS. A realist evaluation approach was used to describe the extenuating or mediating factors that influenced the uptake and impact of the

RREiS pilot.<sup>19</sup> A realist approach seeks to identify ‘what works, in which circumstances, and for whom’, rather than simply ‘does it work?’ and was therefore consistent with the overarching evaluation aims.

Another distinguishing feature of the evaluation design was the emphasis on evaluation as a tool to inform and improve the pilot, in addition to measuring its processes and impacts. The evaluation approach included ‘feedback’ loops where evaluation data was provided to participants, as it became available. For example, the leaders of each participating school were provided with a summary of their own school culture survey results (within a month of completing the survey) to help inform their activities. Project Implementation Leaders met with schools to discuss their findings, highlighting areas of strength and well as opportunities for improvement. It was envisaged that providing schools with their own baseline data would allow them to reflect on what their staff reported was working and where they needed to focus their efforts to embed gender equality into their policies, procedures and practices.

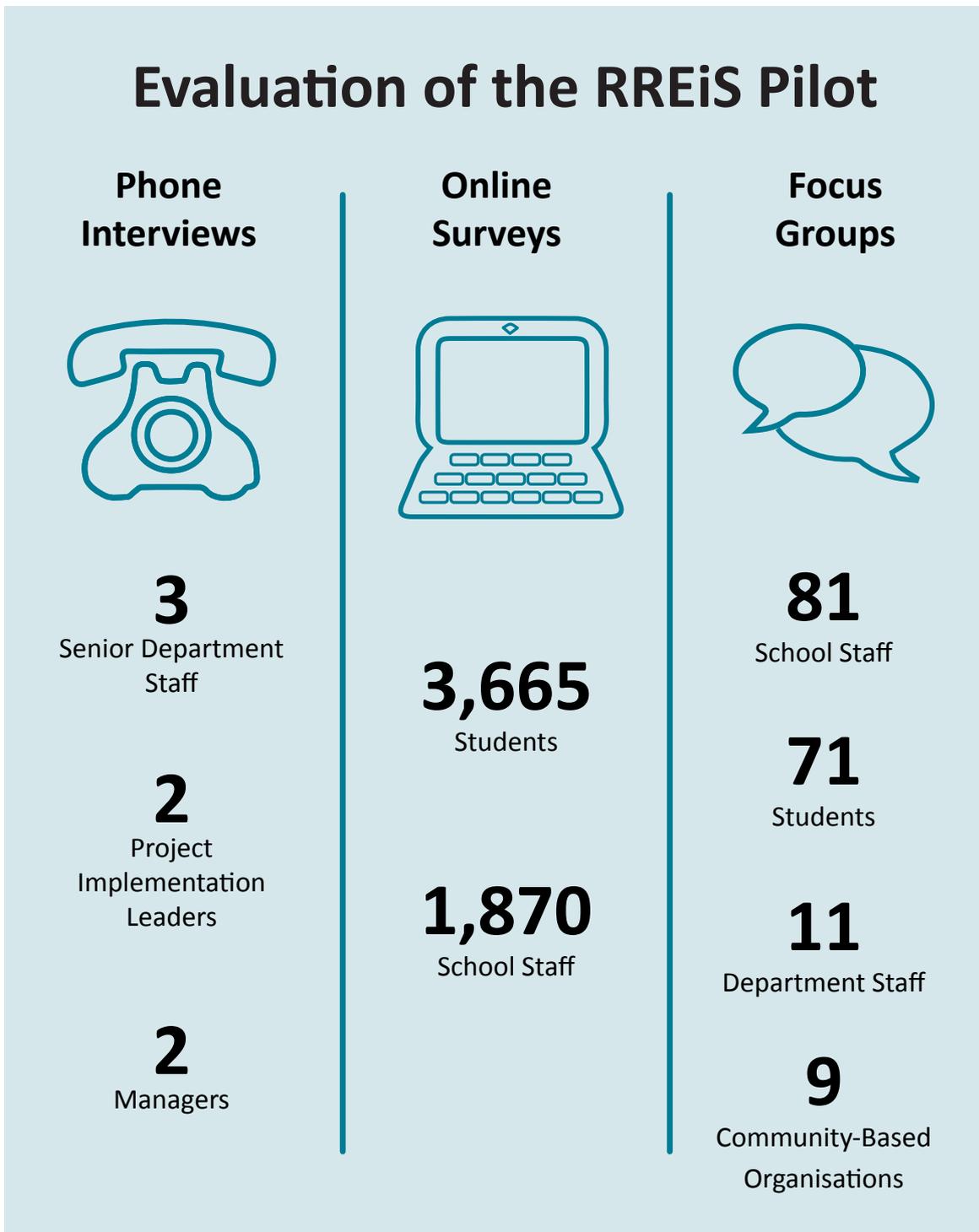
The Project Implementation Leaders themselves also engaged in regular data collection and reflective practice. At three points throughout the pilot, the Project Implementation Leaders completed a reflection tool (for each of their schools) as well as taking part in a debriefing interview with an external evaluator from Swinburne University. A continuous quality improvement approach is recommended for complex intervention settings, such as schools, where implementation can vary according to context and there is a need for practitioners to reflect on and refine their work.<sup>20</sup> In this way, the evaluation of RREiS was a critical component of the implementation of the pilot that helped shape the approach through data feedback loops and reflective practice for ongoing, continuous improvement.

### 3.3 Evaluation design

A program logic was used to focus the evaluation and provide a summary of how the pilot activities would contribute to the intended short and medium term impacts of the RREiS pilot (see Appendix A1). In keeping with the realist evaluation approach, the evaluation methods included both qualitative and quantitative data collection, drawing on a variety of data sources including surveys, monitoring records, stakeholder interviews and focus groups. The purpose, method, sample size, target population and timing for each data collection tool are detailed in Appendix A2. Surveys and interview questions are attached in Appendix A4 to A11.

The reach of the evaluation is summarised in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: RREiS evaluation participants



The Our Watch review of the literature on Respectful Relationships Education<sup>21</sup> confirmed earlier findings that most school based programs are not assessed via structured evaluation, and those that are, often lack methodological rigour.<sup>22</sup> While the evidence base for Respectful Relationships Education is still emerging, the literature does provide clear guidelines for how these evaluations should be conducted. Recommended standards for evaluation of violence prevention interventions within schools are listed in this extract from the Department of Education and Training's paper *Respectful Relationships Education: Violence prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in Victorian secondary schools* below:<sup>23</sup>

#### Programs should:

- involve a comprehensive process of evaluation that, at a minimum:
  - reflects the program framework and logic
  - includes evaluation of impact or outcomes through:
    - » pre- and post-test intervention assessment
    - » long term follow up
    - » use of standard measures or portions of them
    - » measures of both attitudes and behaviours
  - includes a process for dissemination of program findings in the violence prevention field
- ideally include:
  - longitudinal evaluation, including lengthy follow up at six months or longer
  - examination of processes of change and their mediators
  - process evaluation of program implementation and fidelity
  - measures of school culture and context
  - experimental or quasi-experimental design incorporating control or comparison schools, students or groups.

The evaluation methods developed by Our Watch to assess the RREiS pilot were consistent with these best practice recommendations, with two exceptions. Given the timelines and recruitment process for the RREiS pilot, the evaluation design did not include an experimental or quasi-experimental design and did not include longitudinal assessment. These limitations are discussed further in Section 3.5 below.

### 3.4 Evaluation team

In addition to the evaluation budget provided by the Victorian Government, Our Watch contributed funding to commission additional research by external experts to extend the evaluation. Deakin University and the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University were contracted to conduct focus groups with stakeholders (Appendix A2, A4, A5 and A6), to ensure a range of perspectives were captured via a transparent and rigorous academic process. The engagement of universities meant the evaluation was approved by relevant human research ethics committees and ensured the pilot and data collection was conducted safely and ethically. For details of the ethics approval process, please refer to Appendix A3.

### 3.5 Evaluation scope and limitations

The evaluation aligned to RREiS implementation timelines, and concluded with the completion of the project in December 2015. The evaluation did not monitor students or teachers beyond the implementation period and therefore did not seek to measure subsequent behaviour change such as reduced perpetration and/or victimisation. Longitudinal studies, which follow up participants in the months and years beyond the pilot phase, would be necessary to identify whether immediate benefits are maintained and to demonstrate the impacts of the approach on future perpetration and victimisation.

It should also be noted that, while the follow-up school culture and student surveys were disseminated to the same cohorts who undertook the baseline surveys, respondents were guaranteed anonymity (to elicit honest feedback and adhere to ethical principles) which means that it cannot be confirmed if follow-up responses were from the same individuals as the baseline participants. Thus, comparisons between baseline and follow-up survey data must take into account that there may be some follow-up survey respondents who did not also participate in the baseline survey and vice versa.

It is also acknowledged that the evaluation did not collect data on parents. As shown in Figure 6, focus groups were conducted with over 170 pilot participants and stakeholders, however, it was beyond the scope of the project resources and ethics approval to include students' parents in focus groups. This is an opportunity for further research.

An experimental design was not possible as schools self-selected to participate in the pilot and also nominated whether they would prefer the introductory model with minimal support from the Our Watch Project Implementation Leaders or the supported model with greater input. A quasi-experimental evaluation design was originally planned, comparing schools from each of these models, however the distinction between the introductory and supported schools was not maintained in practice due to requests from introductory schools for additional support.

# 4 Evaluation findings

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Evaluation findings are reported in eight areas. Firstly, evaluation findings are reported against each of the six components of the whole school approach described in Section 2:

1. School leadership and commitment
2. School culture and environment
3. Support for staff and students
4. Community partnerships
5. Teaching and learning

Professional learning strategy.

For each of the six components, there is a definition of the component, measures of impact observed as part of the RREiS pilot and the enabling factors and barriers that influenced these impacts.

The seventh area of evaluation findings relates to the specific request from government partners for data to inform advice about sustaining and mainstreaming RREiS within schools across Victoria and reports on structures for statewide delivery. The implications of these findings are explored in the final section on discussion of findings.

## 4.1 School leadership and commitment

### Introduction

This component of the whole school approach relates to the role school leadership teams play in driving school-wide commitment to Respectful Relationships Education. The whole school approach to RREiS recognises the role of both formally appointed school leaders (principals, assistant principals and other leadership team members) as well as leadership from other staff members and students in driving change.

In most instances, the school leadership team was responsible for initiating and continuing the school based activity in this pilot and worked closely with the Project Implementation Leaders. Every school principal was required to sign an expression of interest form to demonstrate their school's commitment to participating in the RREiS pilot.

While there was some anecdotal evidence of students demonstrating leadership in promoting respectful relationships and gender equality, within the one year timeline of the pilot it was anticipated that RREiS would be largely led by school staff. This section outlines the evaluation findings on how the RREiS pilot developed the capacity of school leadership teams to drive school-wide commitment to Respectful Relationships Education.

## Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

### Leadership team understanding and commitment to RREiS was varied

At the completion of the RREiS pilot it was apparent that, overall, school leaders’ understanding of respectful relationships, gender equality and gender-based violence had increased as a result of the pilot. At the start of the pilot, the leadership teams were provided with a half-day workshop examining policy and practice in the prevention of gender-based violence and developing a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education. The aim was to provide leaders with a deeper understanding of gender-based violence, Respectful Relationships Education and an opportunity to consider how policies, practices and actions promote gender equality within their school. There was particular focus on school culture and the school as a workplace. A summary of this survey is available in Appendix A8. Feedback forms from the professional learning session suggest that participants from these sessions were confident in their ability to explain key concepts relating to RREiS (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Feedback following planning for RREiS training session



Focus groups were held at the end of the RREiS pilot with 38 school leaders across nine participating schools to explore their understanding of these key concepts in more depth. Compared to the self-reported data in Figure 7, the focus group session transcripts demonstrate much more variation in the depth of understanding by the school leaders. Analysis of this focus group data revealed that school leaders could be categorised into three main groups:

- those with a clear understanding of the aims of Respectful Relationships Education
- those with an emerging understanding of these aims
- those with a limited understanding of Respectful Relationships Education.

As these three groups were identified thematically via focus groups with 38 school leadership team members from nine schools, it is not possible to quantify the percentage of leaders across all 19 participating schools in each category. Based on this sample, it appears that the vast majority had a clear or emerging understanding of the RREiS aims, with very few (5-10%) having a limited understanding by the conclusion of the pilot.

### School leaders with a clear understanding of the RREiS aims

At the conclusion of the pilot, a number of school leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of the need for culture change around gender and could explain the link between Respectful Relationships Education and gender-based violence. These school leaders were able to express the gendered nature of gender-based violence and recognised that the key aim of RREiS was to address the underlying drivers of gender-based violence:

*I think it's a range of things and it's a deeply entrenched cultural problem that needs to be addressed. It would [come] down to the objectification of women, through the media, through history, through just the culture. [...] It happens because of these cultural mores that have developed over centuries and have probably been exacerbated with media and so on. Focus group session, Principal.*

*We call it family violence. We call it domestic violence. We call it all these things – it's a euphemism actually. It's male violence. Yet it doesn't get labelled that. Focus group session, Principal.*

### School leaders with an emerging understanding of RREiS aims

For several school leadership groups, involvement in the RREiS pilot was a catalyst for a new understanding of gender-based violence, its underlying drivers and the role of the school in addressing these drivers. Several schools commenced the pilot without a full appreciation of these issues. Instead, these schools joined the pilot due to incidents of male violence in the school or in anticipation of future directives from the Department of Education and Training that would eventually require schools to provide Respectful Relationships Education:

*For me it was a perfect match for our school, the respectful relationships was what we promote anyway and quite frankly I probably said 'yes' to it prior to knowing it had the violence against women approach. Focus group session, School leadership team member.*

Despite some principals' initial misunderstanding about the aims of the pilot, there were reports of a number of examples where knowledge, confidence and capacity within school leadership teams was increased. One principal who was initially reluctant to get involved in the pilot and did not appreciate the value of the whole school approach early in the year was highly positive about the impacts of the RREiS by the end of the year:

*[The principal] said that this year, they've done it before, but they celebrated National Diversity Day where everybody wears purple, and he said this year he has never seen the students so engaged and their level of understanding was completely different. He also*

*was asking [us] if he could have curriculum or support for further whole of school learning for all of the staff on this issue. Interview, Project Implementation Leader.*

There is evidence that these school leaders not only changed their thinking, but that this shaped their leadership. For example, a Project Implementation Leader received this piece of feedback from another school:

*[The principal] said there was an email sent [from a staff member] that was sexist and he said in the past he would have let it go. He said he and his leadership team decided to call it out because of the program [RREiS] and he said the program gave him both the skills but also made him feel empowered to actually call out that sexism. Interview, Project Implementation Leader.*

### **School leaders with limited understanding of RREiS**

At the conclusion of the pilot, a small number of school leaders continued to focus on one aspect of the whole school model, teaching the curriculum resources to students, but did not appear to recognise the value of the other components:

*I just wonder where all those workforce elements came from and why they were in there because they just didn't seem applicable to a school-based environment. Focus group session, Principal.*

However, school leaders with limited understanding of RREiS were the minority. The vast majority of interviewees were able to clearly articulate their leadership role and the value of addressing gender equality within the workplace culture as essential components of the RREiS approach:

*“I think the principal and the leadership team within the school have to be saying the right things and doing the right things and modelling it in everything they do, but then right up to the premier, the message has to be the same.”*

Focus group session,  
Leadership team member.

## Enablers and barriers to building capacity of school leadership

### Voluntary participation

That all schools voluntarily 'opted in' to the pilot was clearly an enabling factor. While schools were not formally assessed in terms of their 'readiness' to participate, the regional offices of the Department of Education and Training were able to identify those schools that were most likely to be motivated to participate. School leaders were asked via focus groups how and why they got involved. The overarching theme was they wanted to have respectful schools and the aims of the pilot were generally consistent with school core values.

### Deputy Regional Directors' role in engagement

An enabling factor that engaged principals and other school leaders in the pilot was that initial invitations to participate were distributed via the Deputy Regional Directors from the Department of Education and Training. This was considered essential in connecting with principals:

*Schools don't necessarily interact readily with external agencies. So certainly in getting the project off the ground, having the expression of interest sent from the Deputy Regional Director meant, and people told me this, they then read what the email was. Had it come from someone else they would have just deleted it.* Project Implementation Leader.

The three regional offices of the Department of Education and Training played different roles in engaging a number of key stakeholders in the pilot. Their role in supporting schools is discussed in more detail under 4.4, the community partnerships component.

### Professional learning

The main professional learning provided to school leadership teams was a half-day session called *Planning for RREiS*. Groups of up to five school leadership team members were invited to attend and it was compulsory that this included the school principal. On reflection, school leadership teams reported that this session had a significant impact on their knowledge and confidence to lead implementation of the pilot. For many school leaders, this training was a catalyst for change:

*I remember going to the first respectful relationships meeting and coming back and thinking totally different and thinking there were things that we needed to change, that we hadn't thought about.* Focus group session, Assistant Principal.

Leadership teams had a positive view of the workshop and felt that it provided a sense that they had a responsibility to 'then spread it to the rest of the school'. There were also a number of examples of principals referring to the importance of the professional development in understanding that changing school culture was as important as teaching a curriculum to students:

*“You can’t be running a school that has inequitable relationships [while at the same time] running [the RREiS pilot].*

Focus group session, Principal.

### **Importance of champions and expertise (internal and external to the school)**

Having internal and external champions to drive the project was an essential element to support school leadership teams. Within some schools, RREiS was driven by members of the school leadership team, for example the principal or assistant principal, while in others schools, commitment to the project was supported by a wellbeing or curriculum leader. Schools with leaders at multiple levels throughout the school staff reported that this was extremely beneficial.

The most used and highly valued external supports to the leadership team were the Project Implementation Leaders. School leadership teams and curriculum teachers both noted the value of the Project Implementation Leaders’ expertise, having a person to debrief with and someone to ‘keep them on track’. While the *Planning for RREiS* training had a positive impact on the knowledge of school leaders, the presence of the Project Implementation Leaders allowed for ongoing exploration of the whole school approach. There is evidence that the broader components of the whole school approach would not have been addressed if the Project Implementation Leaders had not been available to check in with schools, explain these concepts and develop strategies to address them.

Notably, the school leaders did not report that they sought ongoing advice or input from community-based organisations, such as the women’s health sector, despite their expertise in this area. The relationship between schools and community-based organisations is discussed in section 4.4, the *community partnerships* component.

### **The curriculum as an ‘entry point’ for the school leadership team**

There is evidence that, on the whole, the initial commitment from school principals was often related to the professional learning around the curriculum resource and recognition that this would benefit their students.

*The chance to have a structured program where everything is supplied for us and that we can actually use to teach those behaviours, is for us, really important... It’s complex and difficult in knowing the right things to do and say. That’s something we need support with. We need to have expert advice on how to do that. So for us, it’s been really great, because it’s like a package coming in [to the pilot].* Focus group session, Assistant Principal.

*Just that anything to do with respectful relationships I thought having a curriculum base would be a great thing for us to be involved in.* Focus group session, Teacher.

### External support and interest

Focus group participants noted that increased community interest and support for the prevention of gender-based violence, including family violence, had created an enabling environment for the RREiS pilot:

*I've spoken to parents – they were very much on board and felt that there was a need to [do] something [within the] school environment. As well as members on staff and people at school being on board with gender equality, it was also something that was fed in from the community and from our students' families as well.* Focus group session, Principal.

*We've got a bank of community organisations that are really supportive because... we're part of a bigger vision... There are other organisations that we have a lot of contact with and are really supportive, because they understand how important we are in the lives of these students.* Focus group session, Principal.

*I think if you don't [become involved in prevention] as a principal, you are out of step with community at the moment because you've got [Rotary Clubs] sending the message at the footy, you've got the hashtag, say no to family violence. It's everywhere anyway.* Focus group session, Teacher.

### Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings in this section, Our Watch recommends the following for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools, with a specific focus on Victoria.

#### **Commence rollout with opt-in schools (Recommendation 1a)**

School readiness and support from appointed school leaders was essential for uptake of the RREiS pilot. It is recommended that statewide rollout includes an 'opt-in model' for school participation in the initial years of implementation.

**Provide specialised support for school leaders (Recommendation 7f)**

The Department of Education and Training should provide accessible, ongoing professional learning for school leadership teams including principals and assistant principals on the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education. Offering schools incentives to participate and providing ongoing support for school leadership teams may help maximise participation and leaders' capability.

**Establish implementation teams within schools (Recommendation 8)**

Schools should consider internal mechanisms for embedding Respectful Relationships Education within their schools, such as forming and resourcing teams consisting of teaching, wellbeing and leadership staff to plan and support implementation at the classroom level. Teams can:

- provide support to staff and students who may need additional wellbeing support
- ensure flexibility in approaches based on context
- ensure adequate time for planning and opportunities to debrief.

Teams can also consider the timing and sequencing of lessons and ensure that students have the prerequisite understanding and knowledge prior to participating in respectful relationships lessons. For example, it is critical that students completing the Year 8 and 9 modules of the curriculum guidance have completed basic sexuality education.

## 4.2 School culture and environment

### Introduction

This component of the whole school model relates to schools' structures, policies, procedures and ethos which promote respectful relationships and gender equality. Evidence suggests that Respectful Relationships Education approaches are most successful where there is a focus on the broader ethos and culture of the school alongside the delivery of curriculum to students.<sup>24</sup> The RREiS pilot had a strong emphasis on building the understanding of school staff and their capacity to improve school culture and environment recognising the school as both a workplace and an education institution.

This section outlines the evaluation findings on RREiS pilot schools' structures, policies, procedures, and ethos which promote respectful relationships and gender equality.

### Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

Baseline and follow-up school culture surveys were a key element of the RREiS pilot evaluation. Drawing on existing measure of organisation culture, Our Watch developed a school-specific tool, with a particular focus on respectful relationships, gender equality and work/life balance. Response levels to both surveys were high, with 980 staff members from 18 schools completing the baseline survey, and 740 staff members from 16 schools completing the follow-up survey.

Cultural change in any organisation or setting takes time. Schools and Project Implementation Leaders were advised that the seven month period between the baseline and follow-up surveys would not be sufficient time to observe quantifiable cultural shifts in schools. Weighted average scores (ranging from 0 to 10) calculated from survey responses for each of the survey questions revealed little or no change across all 16 measures over the course of the pilot. In fact, survey responses appear remarkably consistent over the seven month period, both at a school level and collated across the 19 schools. It is also worth noting that the baseline results showed staff commenced the pilot with fairly positive sentiments regarding their school culture – a weighted average score of 7 (out of 10) was the lowest score recorded – so it is possible that the lack of significant improvement was not only the result of the brief pilot period but also due to the challenge of improving staff sentiment from a high starting point.

An analysis of survey results showed no significant difference between introductory school and supported schools. There was also no variation found in staff sentiment regarding school culture across the three regions. For more detail on the school culture survey findings, see Appendix B2 and B3.

While it was difficult for the evaluation to quantify the extent to which schools improved their culture on gender equality and respectful relationships, many examples of cultural and institutional changes were captured by qualitative analysis of data from surveys, interviews and focus group sessions.

## High level of engagement from all schools

Qualitative data revealed that many schools had commenced making some changes, although small, towards embedding a culture of gender equality and respect. This is demonstrated by all 19 schools completing the RREIS pilot despite turnover in key staff in most schools, including in principals. Through the audit and planning process and the high level engagement with the school culture survey, schools demonstrated they were committed to examining their school culture. Project Implementation Leaders met with each school leadership team to conduct an audit to inform the activities they would undertake to build an equitable and inclusive school culture. The tool provided a systematic checklist for the school leadership team to audit current activity, identifying gaps in the school's approach to gender equality and respectful relationships. As mentioned earlier, response levels to both surveys were high and it was extremely encouraging to receive voluntary feedback from significant numbers of staff.

Project Implementation Leaders reflected that the high level of engagement from schools was an indicator of rapid adoption of the issue:

*I think the other critical part is that we have to look at it within the timeframe. [...] it really is the beginning rather than: 'This is it. This is what we've achieved.' I think we've achieved people being open to change and willing to develop and adopt the things that we've put forward. [...] That's fantastic.* Interview, Project Implementation Leader.

## Initiating change: The role of the audit tool and school culture surveys

The audit tool (also called the *Gender Equality Self-assessment and Planning Tool*) and the school culture surveys were identified as crucial in facilitating discussion on gender equality and providing greater clarity and transparency to relevant policies. Results from the baseline survey of school culture revealed that just over a quarter (27%) of all staff surveyed were aware of policies and procedures which contribute to respectful relationships and/or gender equality in their schools. This finding highlighted the need for greater policy transparency and awareness in schools. While this proportion remained constant in the follow-up survey results, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that the audit tool and culture survey results helped initiate some important changes:

*One of the big shifts is that things are a bit more open in terms of policies. [...] They've put all their documents in a really accessible place. It shifted that culture from '[one person who holds the documents has] got the power' to 'we all know what's going on'.* Focus group session, School staff.

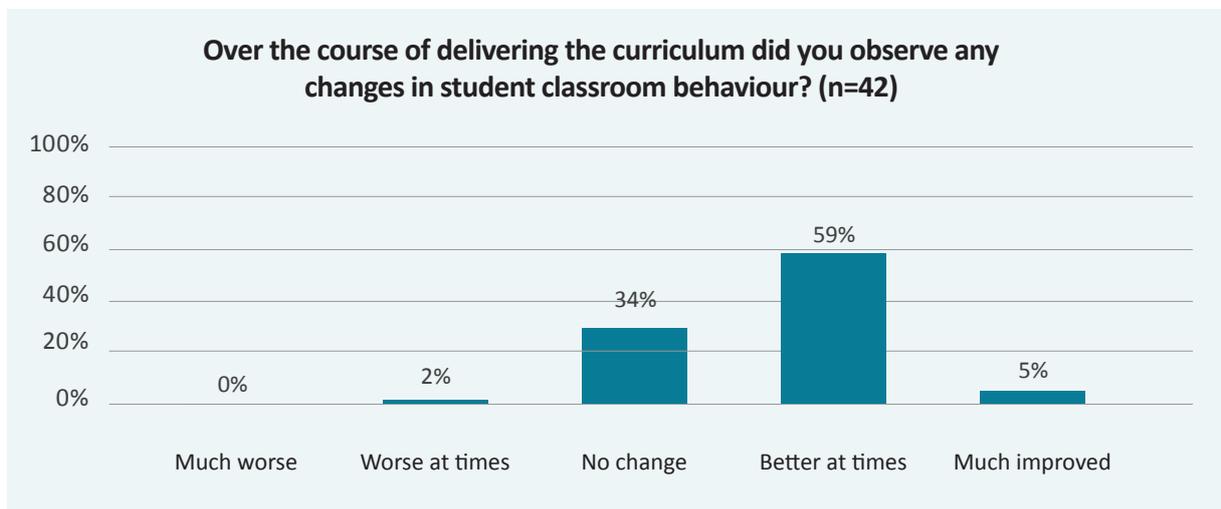
*We now have developed a Gender Equality Policy and we have made subtle changes to some documents within the school to reflect a lack of gender bias [a preference, conscious or subconscious, for one gender over another] or inequality. We have also begun to have it as an agenda item at key college staff meetings.* Follow-up school culture survey, Teacher.

As the above comments demonstrate, the audit tool and school culture survey helped facilitate a number of changes in school policies, including revising school policies to include respectful relationship concepts and making policies more accessible to staff.

### Positive changes in the classroom

While cultural change at the whole school level was difficult to quantify, students, staff and the Project Implementation Leaders identified many examples of changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours at the classroom and individual level. Close to two-thirds of teachers (27 of 42) reported that they had observed improvement in student classroom behaviour over the course of teaching the curriculum (Figure 8). Detailed findings of the curriculum reflection surveys including findings regarding changes in classroom behaviour are outlined in Appendix B6.

Figure 8: Curriculum reflection survey – changes in student classroom behaviour



Close to half the teachers (47%) indicated their teacher/student relationships had improved as part of the positive impacts brought about by the RREIS pilot. Comments from teachers who participated in the curriculum reflection survey further expanded on these improvements:

*“Students [are now] more respectful of each other and to the teacher I team teach with.”*

Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

Students and teachers also identified an increased respect shown among students as a result of the RREiS pilot:

*It has definitely showed that the boys are a lot more careful with what they say. Say [for example] some boys making sexist jokes [...] I've seen a definite change in that at our school.* Focus group session, Student.

*[Students are now] better at listening to the opinions of others or at listening to alternative interpretations.* Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

### Changes in awareness, attitudes, behaviour and language

Individual staff also identified improvements in their own attitudes and behaviour as well as greater awareness around using respectful language:

*[The RREiS pilot] has put it on the agenda. It's made me aware of minor things... it's made me doubly aware of making cups of tea... or cleaning up or those types of things, [and] the language. I'm really trying to be conscious of it – and I listen more closely to what other people are saying and how it's being said.* Focus group session, Principal.

*[The RREiS pilot improved] understanding of the links between the language the students use with each other and how that leads to situations where women are not treated equally, undervalued or misrepresented.* Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

### The potential for school-wide culture change

The above examples of small attitudinal and behavioural changes at the classroom and individual level are incremental steps towards sustainable cultural change which would occur at the whole school level with further time and resources. The quote below illustrates how cultural changes at the whole school level often require changes in individuals and in policies:

*There were male teachers in positions of authority [who] used aggression as their method to get what they wanted. That just became unacceptable. It took a lot of strength and persistence and self-belief to ensure that we didn't operate like that. We have a policy that there is to be no raised voices, slamming things... all that rubbish. We did a lot of work around calmer classrooms [...] with a restorative frame.* Everything we've done has supported this. Focus group session, Principal.

### Enablers and barriers to cultural change

Barriers and facilitators to change were consistent with other whole school approaches.<sup>25</sup> Characteristics of highly engaged schools included:

- prior experience of Respectful Relationships Education or similar approach
- principal and staff who understood the importance of the topic
- strong health and wellbeing teams and programs at the school
- timely and comprehensive sexuality education.

Where these factors were not in place, school engagement was lower. Competing priorities and limited time were noted as a common barrier across all schools.

## Lack of long term approach and timing of the pilot

One of the challenges identified in engaging schools was timing and where the pilot commenced in the school planning cycle. In Term 4, 2014 as participating schools came on board, key tools such as the *Gender Equality Self-assessment and Planning Tool* were still in development and not available immediately. Schools had already completed much of their planning for the following year (2015) before Term 4 limiting the ability for integration of this new focus. Project Implementation Leaders reported that competing priorities which commonly arose at the end of the school year meant that staff were less engaged in planning for RREiS and more occupied by other end of year commitments.

## Audit tool and school culture survey

Both the school culture survey and the audit tool were viewed as important in engaging and informing the school about the structures that shape their culture. This suggests that this feedback loop which ensured evaluation data was provided back to schools to inform their work was a significant strength of the pilot. The school culture survey in particular was seen as an important source of information by the principals:

*All of the principals [...] that I met with [...] said the results that they got from their staff gender survey was far more useful than the staff survey that they did every year. There [were some] critical questions in the gender survey that should be embedded in the staff survey so it does then become a workplace question, not just a workplace issue.* Interview, Project Implementation Leader.

Having the Project Implementation Leader present while schools underwent the audit was often considered a way to support reflection and enhance accountability.

*Without doubt the school audit tool that we used was really the backbone of all our work. [...] I don't believe that I would have achieved any of the things that we did, had we not had that audit tool.* Interview, Project Implementation Leader.

## The Project Implementation Leader

The schools also commented on the importance of the Project Implementation Leaders in maintaining momentum on the pilot:

*The fact that there was [the Project Implementation Leader] driving it was good. [The Project Implementation Leader] was a great support.* Focus group session, School staff.

*The support from [the Project Implementation Leader] was amazing throughout the year as well. To have someone else driving it from that perspective to ensure that it was delivered.* Focus group session, School staff.

There was agreement that the Project Implementation Leaders met a need within the Department of Education and Training for expertise in gender equality and primary prevention techniques to support systematised cultural change. In terms of future and wider rollout, while it was agreed that specialist staff (like the Project Implementation Leaders) would be ideally located within regional offices, there was not consistent advice if these experts should be Department of Education and Training

employees or externally employed (as in the RREiS pilot). Reflecting on the pilot, some Department of Education and Training staff felt that having Our Watch staff embedded in their regional offices for the pilot potentially undermined capacity to sustain the project, as these roles ended with the pilot in December 2015. On the other hand, it was noted that the RREiS pilot's autonomy from the Department of Education and Training gave schools more confidence that data collection, such as the school culture survey, would remain confidential.

In one case where there were changes in staff in the Project Implementation Leader role, as discussed in Section 2.8, the lack of continuity was noted as a barrier to making progress and created some challenges for schools.

### **Professional learning strategy as a contributor to school culture change**

The professional learning provided by Our Watch and curriculum resource were also considered very valuable in informing school culture. The two-day workshop, *Delivering RREiS*, was specifically cited by some staff as the catalyst and motivating factor for teachers to help build a whole school approach to respectful relationships.

### **Curriculum guidance informing cultural change**

The curriculum helped to create a better classroom culture according to half the teachers surveyed (Figure 8) and can also be seen as a key facilitator for positive cultural change. This alongside other strategies helped to create a strong willingness to engage in the topic and was evident in the willingness of many schools to commence making changes to improve gender equality and promote respectful relationships.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch recommends the following for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools:

#### **Give schools time to prepare (Recommendation 1b)**

All schools will require time to prepare for implementation of a whole school approach. It is recommended that the Department of Education of Training engages with schools as soon as possible in 2016 to begin preparation for implementing respectful relationships curriculum in classrooms. Schools will require adequate time to establish crucial community partnerships, prepare for and integrate Respectful Relationships Education into their school planning cycle, and allocate adequate resources.

### Ensure ongoing and longitudinal evaluation (Recommendation 5)

The pilot has demonstrated that the methodology for evaluation, including feedback loops to inform project activity, has been a significant strength. However, a weakness of the pilot was the lack of longitudinal evaluation data. Longitudinal evaluations allow for follow-up interviews and surveys with students and staff who have participated in the program, and for comparisons between their experience and that of a control group. Longitudinal evaluation is the only way we can know for certain whether a program has been successful in reducing participants' future experience or perpetration of violence. Appropriate resourcing of a longitudinal evaluation of future Respectful Relationships Education approaches is recommended to ensure:

- **continual improvement** – providing a mechanism for reflecting on practice to inform future planning and implementation, at the teacher, school, regional and state level. Aligning this with a five year staged rollout across the Victorian education system will allow for the approach and its various elements to be continually refined and adapted to the diverse needs of Victorian schools and regions.
- **strengthening the evidence base** – including longitudinal evaluation to measure the long term impacts of Respectful Relationships Education to demonstrate the long term societal and economic benefit of the government investment in Respectful Relationships Education across Victoria.

External expertise should be provided to schools to analyse, interpret and use data from their staff and students to ensure programs are properly evaluated while at the same time maintaining school anonymity.

### Employ specialist staff to inform work at a regional level (Recommendation 6)

Future delivery will require the input of expert, readily available support, similar to the Project Implementation Leader, to regional offices. These workers require primary prevention, educational and systems change expertise to support regional educational offices to:

- provide specialist Respectful Relationships Education advice and direction to schools, to embed all elements of the whole school approach
- connect and support locally based community organisations and schools
- support school leaders to engage in self-assessment and planning processes.

The evaluation provided mixed recommendations on whether these experts should be directly employed by the Department of Education and Training or externally employed but located in the Department of Education and Training. However, there was clear consensus that their location in the regional offices was ideal. Further consultation and scoping research is required to identify the preferred model and it is recommended that this aligns with and is informed by any reforms, restructures or other system changes anticipated from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence findings and the Education State Reforms.

### Integrate quality assurance mechanisms into delivery (Recommendation 7h)

Schools should ensure that staff, students and the broader school community are aware of and competent in policy and practice on promoting gender equality and respectful relationships, and responding appropriately to disclosures (including those of past abuse and perpetration) and that staff are supported and competent in the implementation of these. The Department of Education and Training may consider how these measures can be integrated into existing school audits or surveys such as the student attitudes to school survey or school staff survey.

## 4.3 Support for staff and students and responding to disclosures

### Introduction

This component of the whole school model relates to schools' ability to provide survivors and perpetrators of violence with appropriate responses, support and referrals. The latest research on effective primary prevention shows that interventions which aim to prevent gender-based violence commonly result in participants identifying and disclosing their own personal experiences of violence.<sup>26</sup> In the RREiS pilot, it was anticipated that the delivery of the curriculum in schools would generate discussions in classrooms and staff rooms about gender-based violence, and that the heightened awareness around this issue would be accompanied by an increase in the number of staff and students disclosing their direct experience of or witnessing violence. Schools undertaking the whole school approach to Respectful Relationship Education therefore need to be committed and equipped to respond appropriately to staff and students who disclose their own past or current violence in their family, dating relationships or elsewhere in their lives.

Evidence-based Respectful Relationships Education indicates that pre-planning, resources and time are required *'to set up the systems and structures that will enable the sustainability of initiatives and their adoption across the whole school culture'*.<sup>27</sup> Key criteria that should be met before implementation of Respectful Relationships Education in a school include:

- an established process for responding to disclosures of violence and risks of safety by students and staff including for those who are outside the scope of any mandatory reporting requirements<sup>28</sup>
- consultation with local family violence and sexual assault response services in preparation for a potential increase of disclosures.

This section outlines the progress schools made towards these two criteria and explores the enabling factors and barriers schools experienced in providing survivors and perpetrators of violence with appropriate responses, support and referrals.

### Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

#### Schools experienced an increase in disclosures as a result of the RREiS pilot

For many schools, participation in the RREiS pilot resulted in increased disclosures from staff and students. Disclosures covered a range of sensitive topics including experiences of violence, perpetration of violence, experiences of sex and sexuality and gender diversity. Overall, schools perceived the disclosures as a positive indicator of both increased awareness among students about gender-based-violence as well as students feeling that their classrooms were supportive and safe environments where sensitive topics could be safely shared and discussed:

*A student did disclose some personal information [about what] was happening at home. Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.*

*The workload has increased due to reporting and following up on student behaviour issues. Students are taking advantage of the safe environment to air the grievances and reporting bullying that has occurred outside of the classroom. Follow-up school culture survey, Teacher.*

*Students increased [their] trust in key staff and knew that they had safe spaces and people to talk to. Students were also more likely to disclose confidential information. Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.*

One teacher reported a direct link between a student learning about gender-based violence and the student's ability to later identify a past personal experience as sexual assault:

*There was a disclosure [from one student] around a sexual assault that the student didn't know was sexual assault until she got some education around what was okay and what wasn't okay. So I think, in that respect, it's really good because it is teaching young people what is the law [...], but also what they're comfortable with. Focus group session, Teacher.*

In a small number of cases, trauma linked to prior experiences of violence meant that it was not appropriate for some students to attend classes with respectful relationships material. Teachers made efforts to handle this sensitively, but expressed concern around how these students should be supported by the school:

*Some kids [...] have had significant trauma [and] they have not been able to cope with even being in the program. [...] That's a very minimal number [of students] though. How [do we] manage the kids [that have significant trauma and previous sexual abuse] and what's the best way to support those kids? Focus group session, Teacher.*

One staff member mentioned the potentially damaging legal ramifications for a school if they do not address disclosures appropriately:

Facilitator: *Do you think schools are equipped to be able to deal with the fallout that comes from addressing sensitive issues?*

Teacher: *No, I think the problem is some schools hold onto it with welfare coordinators, and don't do the proper referrals out [to external support services]. They need to do that proper referral, because if [...] you hold [any disclosures] within the school, [and] then later on, somebody comes back and says: 'I disclosed this and I wasn't supported by a professional'. [T]here are so many legal cases that are happening left, right and centre at the moment.*

### **Schools also experienced disclosures from staff members**

While the concern around disclosures often focuses on students, there were staff disclosures in RREiS. The following exchange highlights the need for more support during professional learning and during respectful relationships curriculum delivery for staff and more awareness in the school community around the needs of survivors of gender-based violence:

Teacher: *There was one member of staff [who] had some post-traumatic stress associated with the program, [they] then sought [help from] outside.*

Facilitator: *Okay, so you had supports in the school to provide support for them?*

Teacher: *That was probably something that wasn't discussed widely in the training. [...] So they got outside help for that but that wasn't something that went through the school or through the principal, staff or anything to actually engage and help them. I think it was pure luck [that the staff member was able to identify that they were affected by] post-traumatic stress. [...] So maybe one of the gaps was that there was no training, there was nothing about that for the staff.*

*“I think around any disclosure we get around sexual assault, [...] it's still unclear about how schools manage it.”*

– Teacher.

### School staff expressed low confidence in responding to disclosures

While it appears that disclosures in the RREIS pilot schools did increase, there were concerns expressed by staff on the lack of clarity around how schools should respond to disclosures:

*I think around any disclosure we get around sexual assault, [...] it's still unclear about how schools manage it. Do we call SOCA [the Victorian Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit]? Do we call the parents? Do we keep the kids apart? All of those things are almost case-by-case depending on what the disclosure is. Focus group session, Teacher.*

The quote above indicates that staff remain unclear about their role in reporting and which incidents fall within the Child Protection Mandatory Reporting guides for school staff.

The Project Implementation Leaders were also not aware of any specific improvements to school capacity to deal with disclosures. Once again, the increase in disclosures highlighted to schools the need for internal processes and policies:

*[The school] had a number of disclosures since this project started. [T]hey said they had five disclosures of sexual-physical violence or sexual assault and six of harassment which is really high compared to what they were dealing with before. [The disclosures] made them look at their own internal processes and go: 'Well are we equipped for this?'. Interview, Project Implementation Leader.*

Overall, schools certainly demonstrated an appreciation of why it was important to address disclosures in the correct manner, shown by teachers expressing concern over the issue and pointing to potential serious ramifications if disclosures are not appropriately addressed. But the qualitative data showed little evidence that the school briefing and training adequately prepared staff to respond to disclosures, even though that was one of the two aims of the *Whole School Briefing*. The limited time allocated to the briefing was likely to have been a barrier to providing adequate briefing on disclosures. The briefings, which lasted 1-2 hours, were often the first introduction to the RREIS pilot for staff and the briefings needed to cover key concepts and aims, as well as disclosure procedures. The curriculum guidance, *Building Respectful Relationships*:

*Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence*, provides some general advice on how to respond to disclosures, based on particularly those of a serious nature, however, feedback from teachers indicates that more support was required.

### **Limited opportunity to work more closely with community-based organisations**

Focus group sessions with relevant organisations revealed that there were opportunities for community-based organisation to play a bigger role in supporting schools to deal with disclosures. Beyond assisting schools to facilitate training, external organisations currently play a relatively limited role in terms of providing ongoing support to schools. Focus group sessions also revealed that community-based organisations were unaware of any changes the schools had made during the year and had not witnessed any increase in referrals from schools. Nor did they have any knowledge about whether the briefings had improved school staff's capacity to respond to immediate disclosures.

Community-based organisations and Department of Education and Training staff expressed their concern on the risk of not having procedures in place to deal with disclosures and other incidents as they arise. This was a very strong concern consistent across all interviews and focus groups:

*We're putting principals at risk who don't know how to deal with the issue and we're putting staff and students at risk if there's not the support around to deal with it.* Focus group session, Community-based organisation representative.

*We need to make sure that leaders in our schools are dealing with this work, especially given that [...] it's not just about Year 8 and 9 with the *Stepping Out* curriculum; we're going to be talking about [gender-based violence] in primary schools as well. We need to make sure our teachers know how to respond. What do you say? What's an appropriate management or response to disclosures?* Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.

## **Enablers and barriers to supporting staff and students**

### **A safe classroom environment to encourage open discussion**

The increase in student disclosures at some schools indicates that staff were able to create an environment where students felt comfortable to discuss past or current concerns about relationships, sexuality or gender-based violence. As noted in the *teaching and learning* component, staff reported that their delivery of the curriculum resources enhanced their relationship with students. The increase in disclosures can be viewed as a positive impact of Respectful Relationships Education, especially when considering the students and staff who disclosed may have received support for the first time.

## Adequate professional learning

It appears that while most schools understood the importance of appropriately addressing disclosures, teaching staff did not feel confident in their ability to respond to disclosures from students or other staff. School leaders and student wellbeing staff expressed fewer concerns, and this may be due to regular exposure and experience responding. Overall, the majority of schools reported that the *Whole School Briefing* was insufficient. While one of the two aims of this briefing was to ensure that staff knew how to deal with disclosures, evaluation findings suggest that this was not achieved. Teachers frequently referred to a lack of confidence even after teaching the curriculum and therefore having further professional learning than the *Whole School Briefing*:

*I'll be honest, I didn't get any disclosures, but I think if a student had come to me and told me that I'm not sure how I would have been able to support that student. I probably would have gone straight to others [...]. What the hell do I do? I would like more professional development or support in how to handle that situation.* Focus group session, Teacher.

Other staff noted a need for school policies and formal internal processes to ensure that disclosures received the proper response and referral; all of which indicate that more support for staff is required.

There were a couple of examples of school leaders using the information presented at the professional learning sessions to support their staff:

*I am very conscious that some staff would be experiencing [gender-based violence] outside school. For one staff member, I gave them the [name of service] details and referral. Support for staff that the Department paid for, some counselling open 24 hours...that came out from that briefing session and I was initially unaware of it. So the session flagged an awareness for me of that.* Focus group session, Leadership team member.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch recommends for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools:

### **Develop comprehensive response guidelines for schools (Recommendation 10)**

The Department of Education and Training should work closely with specialist services (including family violence, sexual assault, child protection and youth services), as well as the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet to address the gaps in guidelines for schools in responding to disclosures from staff and students including how to address student disclosures which fall outside the 'Child Protection – Mandatory reporting' section of the Victorian Government Schools Policy and Advisory Guide.

### **Develop comprehensive professional learning on responding to violence-related trauma (Recommendation 11)**

The Department of Education and Training's statewide professional learning strategy for education staff should include content and assess staff capacity to:

- identify and respond to a range of disclosures (including direct and vicarious trauma) and when to make a referral to an external community organisation
- respond in an age-appropriate way to both students and staff who are survivors and/or perpetrators of violence
- ensure staff are familiar with state mandates and their own school's processes on responding to disclosures.

### **Fund further research into effective early interventions for young people experiencing or perpetrating gender-based violence (Recommendation 13)**

Research indicates that, while it is crucial that tailored *support* be offered to children and young people experiencing, living with or perpetrating violence, deficit-based *education* approaches – particularly those that isolate or differentiate children and young people who have experienced violence from their peers – are not the most effective in reducing future perpetration or experience of violence.<sup>1</sup> Further research is required to identify the best options to support young people in such circumstances, and on the evidence for various early intervention options.

## 4.4 Community partnerships

### Introduction

This component of the whole school model relates to the partnerships between community-based organisations, the Department of Education and Training and schools with the aim of delivering Respectful Relationships Education. Evidence suggests that Respectful Relationships Education initiatives are most successful where schools are supported by local community organisations with gender-based violence (i.e. response) and gender equality expertise. The RREiS pilot was unique in that, unlike many existing Respectful Relationships Education programs, the initiative was driven by a partnership between Our Watch and the Victorian Department of Education and Training, with funding from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, rather than an external agency separate to the Victorian education system.

This section outlines evaluation findings related to the pilot schools' relationships with external partners, including organisations with expertise in responding to gender-based violence, primary prevention and gender equality and the Department of Education and Training regional offices.

### Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

#### Community partnerships differed across regions

Over the course of the year, all Project Implementation Leaders made efforts to establish connections with local community organisations. While all community organisations commented on the brief timelines of the project and the lack of consultation beforehand (due to the embargo during the planning stages), the degree to which this affected relationships differed across the regions. In some areas, the Project Implementation Leaders were quickly able to establish strong relationships with community agencies, in others there was greater resistance to the pilot and uncertainty about what that meant for local initiatives. There was also criticism that the selection of schools was not undertaken in consultation with local organisations. Regional offices of the Department of Education and Training identified schools to invite to participate in the pilot, and the Deputy Regional Directors of each regional office contacted schools to respond with an Expression of Interest. Representatives from these community organisations reported that, if consultation had occurred, more schools might have been willing to participate. These organisation representatives also acknowledged that due to the embargo on the announcement of the pilot, these organisations were not consulted prior to recruitment of schools.

#### No new community partnerships were formed during the RREiS pilot

As part of their role, the Project Implementation Leaders undertook planning and consultation with community organisations, in particular the integrated family violence (response) system and organisations with primary prevention and gender equality expertise. Although several existing relationships were strengthened, there was no evidence of any new relationships being formed between schools and community

organisations. As noted earlier, the embargo on the announcement of the pilot had flow on effects to the level of communication and collaboration throughout the pilot.

While community organisations from the gender-based violence system were involved in supporting each of the *Whole School Briefings*, it appears that, for most organisations, this was the extent of their involvement and they were unsure how to connect more broadly with implementation of the RREIS pilot. Many organisations were more experienced at providing intensive support to a small number of schools, a role taken by the Project Implementation Leaders in this instance, and they were unsure how to connect with RREIS:

*Our approach is to usually work with one school for an extended period, so over a year up until 18 months. Focus group session, Community-based organisation representative with expertise in prevention of gender-based violence.*

As noted later in this section, there was considerable concern about how community organisations with expertise in gender and prevention could provide support to a larger number of schools.

## Enablers and barriers to building community partnerships

### Support provided by the Project Implementation Leaders

There was strong validation and praise for the role of the Project Implementation Leaders in facilitating relationships between schools, community-based organisations and the Department of Education and Training. There was appreciation from the community-based organisations that the Project Implementation Leader provided a contact person through which they could gain access to the schools. The community-based organisations also felt that having the role positioned within the Department of Education and Training was valuable:

*“I think it’s critical that there is leadership sitting within Education.”*

*Focus group session, Community-based organisation representative.*

Staff from the Department of Education and Training also commented on the value of having the Project Implementation Leader situated in the Department of Education and Training and the subsequent benefits of raising the issue of gender equality and primary prevention among other staff more broadly. An additional benefit was the increase in knowledge and capacity of secondary school nursing staff (who are employed by the Department of Education and Training but work in select schools) and their role championing the pilot in schools. The role of the Project Implementation Leaders was also viewed as critical in keeping the focus on the whole school model, beyond the curriculum:

*When I got involved in [the pilot] I saw it as a curriculum model. Then some of the questions and the process that we went through with [the Project Implementation Leader] sort of unpacked a range of other elements that were about workforce management and whether we implemented discriminatory practices in our workplace... [the Project Implementation Leaders] certainly did a good job in terms of keeping it on the radar [among] the millions of things that happen daily in a school. Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.*

## **Positioning and funding of the Project Implementation Leaders' role**

There were different views on the positioning of the Project Implementation Leaders as Our Watch staff but embedded in Department of Education and Training regional offices with official department emails and access to intranet. Some stakeholders felt that having the position outside the Victorian Public Service, with direct reporting lines and salaries paid by Our Watch, was an advantage as it gave Project Implementation Leaders a greater degree of autonomy and ability to somewhat work outside the bureaucracy. On the other hand, some Department of Education and Training staff felt that the funding model and design of the pilot was flawed and suggested that resources for pilot implementation (including funding for Project Implementation Leader positions) should have been provided directly to the Department of Education and Training and integrated within department processes to ensure accountability. Without this level of accountability, implementation of the pilot sometimes relied on 'spontaneous outbursts of goodwill' from schools, reducing the capacity of the Department of Education and Training to address issues across schools.

Other suggested advantages of having the Project Implementation Leader positions funded by the Department of Education and Training included the prospect of appointing more senior Department of Education and Training staff to the role (which would again allow for enhanced levels of accountability) and the ability of the Department of Education and Training to address changes in staff in a timely manner.

## **High levels of engagement from the Department of Education and Training and regional offices**

While there were various viewpoints on the specific structure employed in the pilot, it did achieve the critical aim of engaging senior staff in the Department of Education and Training. The previous quote reflects the strong support and engagement in the initiative. Deputy Regional Directors took a leadership role in promoting the pilot and Respectful Relationships Education at the various networks and forums in which they participated.

The level of engagement from Department of Education and Training regional offices validates the structure of the pilot:

*I know that [de-identified] and [de-identified] in particular fought really hard for it to be set up in this particular way – for the Project Implementation Leaders to be in the Department of Education and Training and for there to be a Deputy Regional Director in each regional office to drive it. I think that without those fights, it would be a very different project and it probably wouldn't be giving us as many learnings.* Interview, Project Implementation Leader.

### **Informal and unplanned nature of partnerships**

The variety of informal connections between the integrated gender-based violence system and organisations with schools is another unique challenge of this work. It was evident from interviews with schools and their local gender-based violence services that their connections are individually driven; they do not rely on procedural guides or formal agreements, but are maintained by connections between staff in schools and individuals in the agency.

*People in the school need to know who they should be contacting. All of those relationships in the community that you had in one school, [when] you go somewhere else all of a sudden who do I ring? I don't know. I'm in a different local area, I don't know who the people are... some of them are quite stretched and others are saying, we're sitting here – we want the kids to come to us.* Focus group session, Community-based organisation representative.

Community organisations also expressed concern about the capacity of existing community services to support more schools. This has implications for future scalability:

*To do this well [...] is resource-intensive and given the huge number of schools across the region if we're talking about every school, obviously our capacity without huge additional resources – it's just not going to happen. Even if we collaborated with a range of community agencies to ensure that there was somebody in that role making those links with schools, I think even that would be pretty challenging.* Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.

While there are divergent opinions how to structure future rollout of Respectful Relationships Education, in particular the role of community organisations, Department of Education and Training and Our Watch, it is possible to conclude that the RREiS pilot has been successful in engaging key partners as a first step. There is little doubt that community-based organisations and the Department of Education and Training regional offices are now all interested in seeing how the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education can be developed further and scaled up and their expertise and experience will be invaluable to inform future rollout.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch recommends for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools:

### **Resource the integrated gender-based violence system and interdepartmental collaboration to address service gaps (Recommendation 12)**

The Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services should fund and facilitate closer working relationships between schools and community-based organisations to:

- a. ensure that schools have access to local gender-based violence response experts to play an active role in providing ongoing support and advice to schools on appropriately responding to disclosures, which may include capacity building and resourcing existing services to provide appropriate responses to younger age groups
- b. establish a working group of key gender-based violence (including family violence), sexual assault, child protection and youth services stakeholders to develop, implement and evaluate a strategy to ensure availability and accessibility of statewide integrated approaches that:
  - i. provide age-appropriate interventions and/or responses for young people already experiencing or perpetrating violence within in their relationships
  - ii. provide appropriate supports and/or interventions for young people witnessing or living with violence at home, given strong evidence that life experience can impact long term relationships patterns.

## 4.5 Teaching and learning

### Introduction

This component of the whole school approach relates to the teaching and learning outcomes of delivering Respectful Relationships Education in the classroom, focusing specifically on whether students have the knowledge, attitudes and skills to engage in respectful relationships.

While the classroom activity of respectful relationships curriculum is only one component of a whole school approach, for the majority of schools, the teaching and learning component was the entry point into the RREiS pilot and into the other various strategies. The curriculum resource, *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence*, is a set of sequential and developmental teaching and learning activities designed to educate Year 8 and 9 students in secondary schools about gender, violence and respectful relationships. This teaching and learning resource is one part of a larger strategy. It is designed to provide curriculum advice to schools as part of the implementation of a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.

As noted previously, one of the weaknesses of the evaluation was that measures of behaviour change were not possible within the project timelines. Longitudinal evaluation would be required to assess the benefits to students in their future relationships and safety. Therefore, the following impacts are focused on the influence of RREiS on the influencing factors behind behaviour: students' knowledge, attitudes and classroom behaviours as well as reported relationships skills.

### Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

#### Student knowledge and attitudes of gender, violence and respectful relationships improved

Students demonstrated higher levels of understanding about the key concepts of Respectful Relationships Education following the delivery of the classroom component as shown through quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitative data measuring changes in student knowledge and attitudes pre-pilot and post-pilot demonstrated the effectiveness of the pilot. Across all 24 questions students' understanding and attitudes on domestic violence, gender equality and respectful relationships improved from the baseline survey (2,078 respondents) to the follow up-survey (1,587 respondents). For example, students' understanding of the types of behaviour which constitute domestic violence improved following the RREiS pilot. The proportion of students who agreed that *'slapping or pushing a partner to cause harm or fear'* was domestic violence increased from 70% of students in the baseline survey to 80% of students in the follow-up survey. The term 'domestic violence' was used instead of family violence or the broader category of gender-based violence to ensure that these surveys were consistent with the wording of existing standardised tools, in this instance, the National Community Attitudes Survey. For more details on results from the baseline and follow-up student surveys refer to the Summary Report of findings in Appendix B4 and B5.

During focus group sessions, when initially asked about the causes of family violence, many of the students immediately identified a number of common misconceptions and triggers such as drugs, mental illness and

financial stress. However, once students were asked to discuss concepts of gender, gender equality and violence, they were able to articulate quite sophisticated understandings of these complex and connected issues:

*Gender is not what sex you are, but what you want to be.* Focus group session, Student.

*People think that sexual assault is about sex, but it's about power... It's about a sense of entitlement.* Focus group session, Student.

[Gender inequality includes] *the stereotype that the man [should be] more powerful [than a woman] so he can tell her what to do.* Focus group session, Student.

Students were also able to identify examples of gender inequalities in the workplace, in sport and even in their own lived experiences:

*Gender inequality is, say, a man doing the exact same job that the woman's doing, but [...] getting paid more. There are a lot of activists out there [...] protesting about how women deserve more respect, better pay for basically doing the exact same thing that men do, which is obviously fair enough.* Focus group session, Student.

*In sports classes, the sports teachers kind of talk to the boys more than the girls [...] They constantly think that we can't do it.* Focus group session, Female student.

Students also reported a deeper understanding of the complex and varied forms of violence, including financial abuse, emotional abuse and controlling behaviours that could occur within a broad range of relationships. They understood that gender-based violence could take many forms and that it could be subtle, involve threats and be ongoing. Students were also aware of the statistics on gender-based violence:

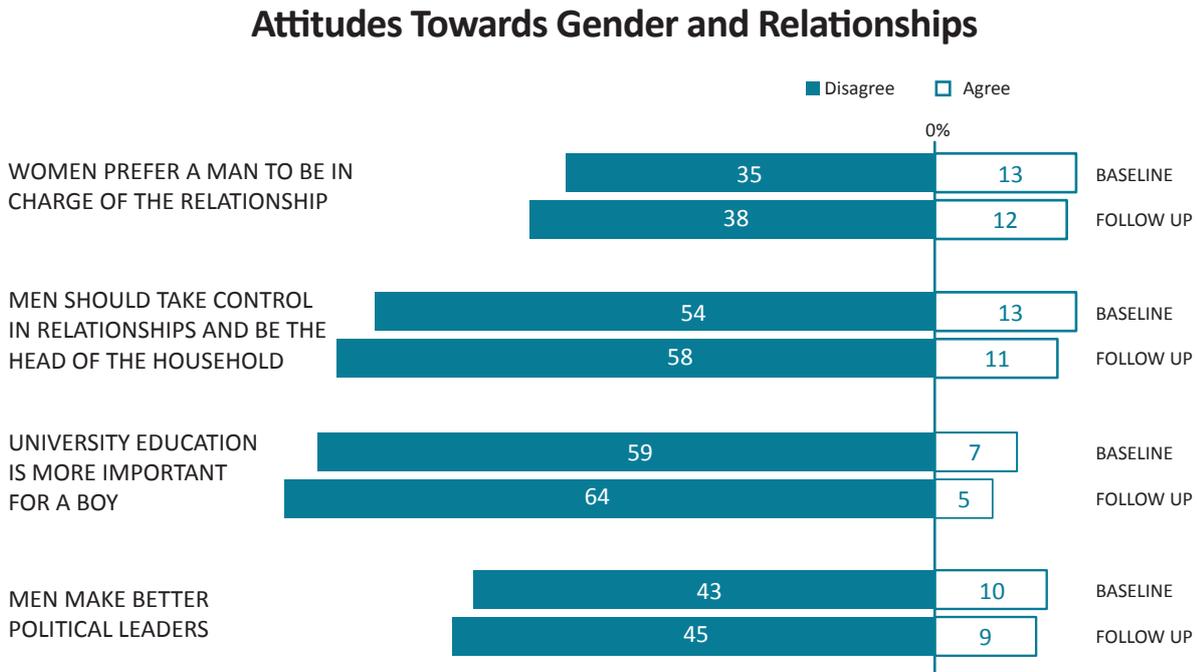
*I kind of already knew that [gender-based violence was a serious issue]... but not to the extent of the percentages. I think one in six women get abused in a relationship and that's a pretty scary number.* Focus group session, Student. Note: This statistic has since been updated by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to: one in four women have experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15.<sup>30</sup>

Results from the follow-up survey showed students were less likely to trivialise and excuse gender-based violence (including domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment) than they were prior to the delivery of the curriculum resource. For example, 67% of students in the follow-up survey disagreed or strongly disagreed that *'domestic violence could be excused if it results from people getting so angry that they temporarily lose control'*, compared to 61% of students in the baseline survey. Students were also less likely to victim blame: 52% of students in the follow-up survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement *'if a woman is raped while she is drunk or affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible'*, compared to 47% in the baseline survey.

While baseline survey results indicated that students already had a fairly healthy attitude to relationships, the follow-up survey results showed that there were improvements in students' understanding of what respectful relationships look like. The proportion of students who

agreed that ‘having a respectful relationship means you both compromise sometimes’ increased from 77% to 83%. Attitudes on gender equality and gender in relationships also improved: 58% of students in the follow-up surveys disagreed that ‘men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household’, compared to 54% of students in the baseline survey (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Changes in students’ attitudes on gender and relationships



There was also evidence that students, particularly male students, saw the importance of Respectful Relationships Education for the continued promotion of gender equality to future generations:

*I think it's a good idea to have this sort of program in more schools. It'll stop the system; boys growing up thinking that they should be the more dominant person in the relationship and learning this now might stop that and make it less of a problem. Student.*

#### Positive impacts on students’ skills and confidence

As noted in discussion of the *school culture and environment* component, perhaps the greatest impact of the RREiS pilot was the positive change in student behaviour. An assistant principal noted:

*After the respectful relationships [training], the feedback I got from two of the teachers was mind blowing how they had changed... yeah, big change. Focus group session, Assistant Principal.*

Teachers referred to the impact of teaching the curriculum on improving respectful behaviour in the school, with 27 of 42 teachers (64%) maintaining that there had been positive change to classroom behaviour (see Figure 8).

The follow-up student surveys detected improvements in students' self-reported confidence to negotiate respectful relationships in their own lives. For example, 79% of students felt confident to 'call out [their] friends if they're saying or doing something sexist', compared to 74% in the baseline survey. Teachers reported that the RREiS pilot had given female students in particular the confidence to report and call-out sexist and disrespectful behaviour:

*Girls told a group of boys that saying 'plays like a girl' is sexist and not fair as it is using being a girl as an insult. Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.*

Teachers also referred to the positive impact the pilot had on student participation, particularly on females and students who don't usually have the confidence to participate in classroom discussions:

*We were concluding the respectful relationships program [and] one of my quiet Year 9 girls who identifies as Muslim [...] put her hand up and said: 'While we're talking about respectful relationships, can we have a discussion about [the November 2015 attacks on] Paris and how my people are portrayed in the media at the moment?' So we spent 35 minutes talking about that. She prompted the conversation. She rarely speaks in group settings. She wanted the discussion in front of 35 of her peers. It was fantastic! Focus group session, Teacher.*

Focus group sessions yielded a number of examples of students reflecting on their own past and current relationships and reassessing their expectations to include greater respect from their partners:

*I've got girls [who] have been in relationships and [for them] it's all clicking. They'll say: 'He wouldn't let me see my friends' and I'll say: 'Is that a good relationship? [Now] you know what the next relationship is going to look like because you're not going to accept all of that crap that went with the last one'. She's like: 'Yeah – yeah I'm not'. It's those 'Aha!' moments. I think that's why I really do love this program. I think it's brilliant. Focus group session, Teacher.*

As noted earlier in the *school culture and environment* component, many students (and teachers) claimed that understanding what respectful behaviour was had impacted their own behaviour and that of other students. For example, one student observed that some students who would normally make sexist or homophobic comments were now less likely to do so. It had built a set of respectful and equitable principles for the class, an influence that went well beyond the classroom and into the wider school community.

## Personal change

Focus groups revealed a number of emotive examples of personal change. Some young men recognised the impact of their own behaviours or potential behaviours on their relationships with others:

*“Before respectful relationships I was a very, very, very angry person. I had a massive temper. But after learning a few things about respectful relationships and everything like that I’ve kind of calmed down.”*

Focus group session, Student.

*As a guy, I don’t ever want to go through my life doing that to a girl. It’s just unfair on the girl.* Focus group session, Student.

These teaching experiences provided opportunities for students to understand that there are alternative – more respectful – ways of interacting with their peers. It also enabled them to explore where attitudes come from:

*I’ve been having students come [to me] and say: ‘My parents literally taught me this [way of seeing gender] and now I’ve seen this other perspective’.* Focus group session, Principal.

*One particular student had a very strong belief that it was the victim’s fault or [...] girls shouldn’t dress certain ways because that spurs on men, etc. I had a really good chat to him about his thoughts and beliefs [...]. I don’t believe his thoughts and opinions portrayed the message we tried to get across, but they certainly changed in a positive way.* Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

In another example, a male student who had a history of violence asked if he could leave the room during one of the sessions. The teacher found him sobbing outside:

*I said to him: ‘Where’s this coming from?’ and [...] he couldn’t even speak. I said: ‘Is this reflection?’ He goes: ‘Yeah’, like – he actually was reflecting on what he does and how that impacts on others... There’s been massive improvement, even since then. [...] He wants to go and get help outside school because he doesn’t want to be that.* Focus group session, Teacher.

## Enablers and barriers to improving students' knowledge, attitudes and skills

### Professional learning for teachers

Universally, teachers and school leadership teams acknowledged the critical role of professional learning as critical for teaching the curriculum resources. It built confidence, awareness, knowledge and commitment to the prevention of gender-based violence. It provided the opportunity to develop skills and pedagogical approaches that engaged the students in a safe learning environment. At a more practical level, it enabled teachers to become familiar with the curriculum resource and begin the planning process.

*[The professional learning session] was wonderful. Sorry, I'll say it louder. THAT WAS WONDERFUL! Both of us came back buzzing from that. The professional development was fantastic. It was really motivating.* Focus group session, Teacher.

Feedback gathered via a survey of teachers who attended the professional learning sessions, *Planning for RREiS*, showed that the majority of respondents (88%) felt that the sessions provided sufficient information to help participants plan and implement a whole school approach to respectful relationships and gender equality. Furthermore over 90% of respondents stated the session increased their confidence to implement the RREiS pilot in their school. See *Professional Learning Session Feedback Summary* at Appendix B1 for more details.

While it was made clear to schools that only trained teachers should deliver the curriculum, resource constraints and changes in staff and circumstances meant that some schools needed to engage untrained staff in delivery. These teachers found the experience more challenging, struggled with student questions, and in some cases provided students with inaccurate information:

*I wasn't at the training [and] I don't know if there was an opportunity [to discuss difficult questions] you might get from a student in class. That would have been really beneficial to know how to prepare a response.* Focus group session, Teacher.

The importance of professional learning for teachers and the problems which arose when untrained teachers delivered the curriculum are discussed in further detail in the *professional learning strategy* component.

### Sexuality education

Students who had already engaged in appropriate sexuality education prior to the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education were more prepared for the curriculum resources than those who did not. In several cases, schools implemented the *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence* resources prior to their sexuality education curriculum. These teachers reported that their students struggled because issues such as sexual assault and consent were challenging for students who had not had any sexuality education.

*...Like the gender stereotypes, they got through that okay, but it was more of the sexual stuff [sex-related concepts] I think that, because we hadn't done the sex-ed first whereas I think the combination might work better. Focus group session, Teacher.*

### Quality teaching and learning resources

Having resources which are relevant, engaging and fun for students, well-planned, easy to deliver, contained useful and interactive tools, and prompted discussion, particularly about sensitive topics, was critical in the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education:

*You've got to make sure you've got the right resources and you can just sort of run in there, you feel confident about what you're actually going to teach. Having this sort of stuff is pretty good. Focus group session, Teacher.*

Although the content was at times challenging and emotionally exhausting for teachers and students, they found the activities engaging, easy to use and increased student and teacher knowledge. Teachers also appreciated the additional audiovisual resources that were provided to accompany the curriculum resource, developed by the Project Implementation Leaders, maintaining that this increased engagement and provided variety.

### Time limitations

Some teachers reported feeling under pressure to complete the lessons in the time available:

*I don't know what school has the time to implement all these activities. Focus group session, Teacher.*

*The times allocated for each lesson were often not long enough. Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.*

The curriculum reflection survey revealed that 'time and resource limitations' were the most frequently cited reason for teachers not completing curriculum subject units with their students. Teachers also talked about a lack of time to prepare the activities and modify where necessary, and the constraint of having to move through the activities too quickly, missing important opportunities to explore issues in more depth.

*More time allocation to organising and coordinating the curriculum at school would have been beneficial. Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.*

### Support from the leadership team

As discussed in the *school leadership and commitment* component, the level of support provided by the school leadership teams was crucial in the implementation of RREiS. There were a number of examples where teachers felt that they did not receive support from the leadership team, which impacted how effectively they could implement the whole school approach:

*We walked in really passionate and really excited and then [we were told] 'No, it's not your job to change policy'... I just felt really deflated. In the end we just [focused on delivering the curriculum].*

*I know it's supposed to be about the culture of the school, but let's just worry about hitting the kids hard with this stuff and that hopefully we will see some change.* Focus group session, Teacher.

### Teachers' ability to modify and adapt curriculum resource

Teacher training, *Delivering RREiS*, emphasised that teachers may need to adapt the curriculum resources to suit their local context, student abilities and prior learning. Survey data and focus group discussions revealed that teachers modified and/or extended the curriculum materials in line with their student needs and interests. Results from the curriculum reflection survey of teachers who delivered the curriculum showed that 59% of respondents altered the way the curriculum was delivered, with 40% of teachers modifying the curriculum to suit literacy and language needs of students. The following illustrations are examples of how teachers modified the curriculum resource in response to students' interest level, to suit literacy levels of students, or engage students in a more practical way to explore the connection between behaviour, language and gender-based violence:

*We added a lot of content from real life situations that were current in today's news and publications. We also elaborated on areas that students were very interested in and wanted to spend more time on.* Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

*Our kids just don't have that language ability. When we were looking at sexuality, [the teachers] did a lot of research into simplifying [concepts of] sexuality and gender so that the kids could click with it.* Focus group session, Teacher.

*We went into the lesson with Ping-Pong balls and basketballs and we literally ran a game session. [...] The kids kept looking at each other going: 'This is meant to be respectful relationships [class]?' Then we finished [...] the session [and] started writing up on the board dialogue that we'd heard between the kids: 'Oh my god! You throw like a girl!' and all that kind of stuff.* Focus group session, Teacher.

### Students having the prerequisite knowledge to participate in respectful relationships curriculum

The importance of students having some background in sexuality education was raised by a number of teachers. Some teachers felt that teaching Year 9 students without the students completing the Year 8 activities provided limited background for students and made the focus very 'heavy'. In several cases, schools implemented *Stepping Out* prior to their sexuality education curriculum and felt that some issues, such as sexual assault, were challenging for students who had not had any sexuality education:

*The heavy stuff was more of the sexual [education material]. The gender stereotypes, the [students] got through okay, but [...] we hadn't done the sex-education material first... whereas I think that [sequencing] might work better.* Focus group session, Teacher.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch recommends the following for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools:

### **Ongoing support for curriculum teachers (Recommendation 7c)**

In addition to the face-to-face accreditation program, the Department of Education and Training should fund opportunities for ongoing professional learning for teachers and support staff who currently teach or support Respectful Relationships Education to:

- update professional skills
- share and debrief experiences
- access additional resources to address the identified areas of need including but not limited to sexuality and gender inclusivity, transgender and backlash.

### **Conduct regular reviews of curriculum guidance (Recommendation 9)**

The Department of Education and Training should conduct regular reviews, at a minimum of every three years, of curriculum guidance including the existing curriculum resources, to ensure age-appropriate and relevant resources, digital technology, additional audiovisual materials, updated statistics and legality issues and integration of emerging evidence. Further advice and resources will be required as part of rollout to ensure adaptability and usability for teachers and schools.

## 4.6 Professional learning strategy

### Introduction

This component of the whole school approach relates to the professional learning strategy (sometimes referred to as training) provided to school staff, and is specifically focused on whether all staff are engaged in a whole school approach to respectful relationships and are equipped to respond to disclosures and whether selected staff are equipped to deliver respectful relationships curriculum. Professional learning is perhaps the most important vehicle in developing the shared understanding and commitment required to bring about cultural change within a school. Through a range of professional learning experiences and approaches schools, teachers and the broader school community develop a common and consistent understanding of gender-based violence and what is needed in its prevention in schools.

This section outlines the evaluation findings related to the professional learning strategy of the RREiS pilot which included the delivery of:

- *Whole School Briefing*
- *Delivering RREiS* which was provided primarily to school staff who would be delivering respectful relationships lessons in the classroom
- *Planning for RREiS* which was delivered to members of school leadership teams – see further discussion of findings in the *school leadership and commitment* component.

See Section 2.6 for further detail on the content and timing of the three professional learning sessions.

### Findings: Impact of the RREiS pilot

#### Professional learning was a crucial change agent

The professional learning provided by the RREiS pilot was perhaps the greatest change agent in the development of a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education, from the participating school's perspective.

*In a beautiful world, I'd love to see every single staff member trained in [Delivering RREiS]. Even if you're not teaching the program, having that knowledge so that when the conversation comes up with a student – because that's the type of conversations our kids will bring up with us – having that background and that confidence to be able to respond to them appropriately and make sure that you're not pushing those stereotypes. That would be something I'd love to see. Focus group session, Leadership team.*

The three-tiered approach of *Planning for RREiS*, *Delivering RREiS* and the *Whole School Briefing* provided to supported schools ensured that some professional learning was available to all staff in the school.

## Delivering RREiS professional learning sessions increased staff knowledge and confidence

The aim of *Delivering RREiS* was to build teacher capacity for classroom curriculum delivery, specifically the *Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence* Year 8 and 9 units. These two-day workshops were developed by Our Watch with support from primary prevention capacity building experts. There was widespread consensus that this professional learning was highly effective, often referred to as 'fantastic'. Sessions were delivered by two facilitators: the local Project Implementation Leader (bringing gender equality and primary prevention expertise) and an experienced facilitator/trainer with teaching experience. The facilitators were highly praised for their skill and practical approach.

*Delivering RREiS* was a key enabler for classroom teachers, providing the opportunities to build awareness, increase knowledge, comfort and confidence. challenge preconceived ideas and provide a range of activities to use with students.

*The training was essential to flesh out the program, bring it to life and make sure that those important discussion points were had.*  
Focus group session, Teacher.

Classroom safety issues also emerged as a key issue during focus group interviews. Teachers felt that the professional learning had helped them know how to set up a safe classroom and how to 'protectively interrupt' to prevent unsafe disclosures from students:

*Another good part of the training was [how to respond] if kids were going to elaborate on personal stories – ways to shut them down but still supporting them.* Focus group session, Teacher.

Improved knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence was an important outcome of the professional learning. Teachers also referred to the importance of having the opportunity to 'think more deeply' about the issues and how these might be impacting their students. A number of teachers found parts of the workshop emotionally challenging:

*I got emotional at the PD [professional learning] days because I thought, oh, it was just a kid that was late to school. I've never thought about why someone might be late to school. Just little things like that get you thinking. All these things start going off in your mind.* Focus group session, Teacher.

## The absence of professional learning poses potential risks

Where teachers did not undertake the professional learning there were negative impacts for some classes. Focus groups revealed examples of untrained teachers who presented to students information which contradicted the key messages of Respectful Relationships Education which were provided in the professional learning and in curriculum. Reflections from untrained teachers indicated that they did not understand the nature and extent of gender-based violence or what the RREiS pilot was trying to achieve. The following comment was made by an untrained teacher on their experience of teaching the curriculum:

*One of the interesting things I found through the kids was that a lot of them [...] have that misconception that domestic violence [impacts] mainly women. They didn't realise that there was the male perspective of how the men are subjected to different types of violence in the household. Focus group session, Teacher.*

This led to confusion and contradiction for the students in these classes. On the one hand, the students in focus group sessions were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of gendered power relations and statistics on gender-based violence, yet maintained that they had learned that we need to 'talk about how the women can be violent to men'. In one example, a group of students referred to a story they had heard in class about a man being raped at gunpoint by two women. As a result, these students believed women sexually assaulting men 'happens all the time' which is converse to national statistics on sexual assault which show that women are four times more likely than men to experience sexual violence, and that of the women who experience sexual assault the perpetrators are 33 times more likely to be male than female.<sup>31</sup>

There was evidence that the teachers who did not participate in the professional learning relied on their own anecdotes, rather than using those contained in the resource. There are reports that additional resources chosen by teachers did enhance the curriculum, particularly current media stories, however, there were examples of inappropriate stories being used by untrained staff. For example, in a classroom discussion about sexual assault and harassment, an untrained teacher used a story about a man masturbating behind a little girl at a festival and ejaculating on the girl. As national statistics show that Australian women are most likely to experience violence perpetrated by a known person, rather than a stranger<sup>32</sup>, the example presented by this teacher is not representative of the majority of gender-based violence. Furthermore, the example does not appear to invite a conversation about the key messages of the curriculum resource, which aim to understand power and control in the context of gender.

### **More professional learning wanted**

It appears that there was a significant appetite for further training, beyond the suite of three sessions provided. One teacher even suggested that a weekly briefing of staff about the issues being covered in the curriculum would have built awareness, knowledge, understanding and commitment and enabled all staff to respond if required. Some teachers felt so positive about the professional learning that they suggested there should be RREiS training for all staff in all schools regardless of whether they are involved in curriculum delivery:

*This should be a statewide mandated training course [...] so that all staff are trained and competent on the subject matter; not only health and PE [physical education] because this content is relevant throughout all areas of education. Focus group session, Teacher.*

There was a general consensus from teachers that the classes were at times 'emotionally exhausting' which indicates that teachers delivering these materials are likely to require ongoing support and mechanisms for debriefing or emotional support.

### **Whole School Briefing increased school staff understanding but was not sufficient and had some shortcomings**

Schools were provided with a one-to-two hour briefing aimed at ensuring that the whole school developed an understanding of the need for Respectful Relationships Education, its implementation and how to appropriately respond to students and fellow staff members who disclose an experience of violence. Leadership team members reflected that the session was useful:

*“I think the staff got a lot out of the session, the understanding of it.”*

*Focus group session, Assistant Principal.*

School leadership acknowledged that staff found this briefing challenging, however, as one principal pointed out, this was important to raise common misconceptions about gender-based violence:

*I thought it was really useful... I just did a little bit of follow up. People came and said that was a bit of ‘male bashing’. I think they were coming to me for a bit of ‘oh, there, there’. But I just said, ‘Well, it’s all true. Get it. It’s true. What was presented is how it is. Do something about it’.* Focus group session, Principal.

However, there were a number of concerns raised, particularly about staff emotional safety and introducing the content of the *Whole School Briefing*. A common concern was the content of the introductory session in schools was too confronting, and lacked detail on the background to RREiS:

*It was way too heavy. [The sessions] needed to have an introduction where it talked about what is the program, what is Our Watch, what are the organisations involved doing this, what is the curriculum component.* Focus group session, Teacher.

A number of participants felt there was a lack of safety for teachers, maintaining that the presenters should have been more prepared and the environment should have been set up to enable staff to leave the room if need be.

*I had to leave the professional development [Whole School Briefing] early, because within 15 minutes several staff had had to leave, because they were so confronted with what was raised... It wasn’t set up the way it needed to be... It was not a safely done thing, which was kind of terrible given that it was ladies from [name of local sexual assault service] who facilitated the professional development – that was my biggest concern.* Focus group session, Principal.

*The chairs were too close together, so people trying to get out could not leave.* Focus group session, Teacher.

In response to these gaps identified in the briefing, some schools were able to expand on the existing professional learning by providing additional time for exploring the concepts included in the curriculum guidance with all staff.

*We extended it from just the briefing [...]. I actually gave all the staff the kids' feedback [baseline data]. They sifted through that and came up with what our opportunities were and the strengths and weaknesses of what happened.* Focus group session, Principal.

### Responding to student disclosures and staff needs

The other aim of the *Whole School Briefing* was to ensure that staff knew how to deal with disclosures from students and staff, however, the data suggests that this was not achieved by the pilot. Teachers frequently referred to a lack of confidence even after teaching the curriculum and completing the professional learning. For more detailed discussion, refer to the *support for staff and students* component.

## Enablers and barriers to effective professional learning

### School commitment

Commitment and active engagement from the school leadership teams and from teachers were obviously critical enabling factors for the RREIS pilot. This was evidenced by the number of staff who participated in some form of professional learning. The most successful were schools that went above and beyond the existing professional learning and provided additional supports for staff. The use of succession planning and mentoring was also an enabling factor (see below).

### Access to training for all curriculum staff

One of the challenges for schools was enabling all teachers who would be using the curriculum resource to participate in the two-day workshop. An enabling factor was the provision of funding to all participating schools. Schools were provided with a \$2,000 grant as an incentive for participating in the pilot. Several schools opted to use these funds to support the back fill of teachers attending the professional learning, however, principals were also very clear that while this was a welcome contribution, it did not sufficiently cover training costs incurred by the schools:

*Look, the \$2,000 didn't cover anything... and we made that pretty clear. [...] I wouldn't say no thanks to it but that doesn't cover [the] \$300 a day to send a staff member out [to a professional learning session].* Focus group session, Principal.

Due to a lack of back fill and other conflicting commitments, a number of teachers were required to deliver the resources to students in the absence of training. This clearly impacted on the confidence and comfort of teachers. Schools attempted to address this challenge in a number of ways: team teaching, running their own professional learning for staff, having a coordinator to organise all teaching materials and activities or using non-teaching staff members, such as a chaplain or nurse, whom they felt had the expertise to teach the curriculum. It was evident from data collected through focus group interviews and the staff reflection survey that staff who had not attended the workshop did not have the same understanding about gender-based violence and were far less confident or willing to manage some of the more sensitive issues that arose. Characteristic comments included:

*Teacher knowledge for delivery was the biggest challenge.*

Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

*If you didn't do the training, it was a bit tricky sometimes.*

Curriculum reflection survey, Teacher.

### Team-teaching

In an effort to boost the collective capacity of their schools, some schools developed a mentoring model, where teachers who attended the two-day workshop provided support or engaged in team-teaching with untrained staff. There was evidence that this model caused some frustration to both the trained and untrained teachers:

*Being with an untrained person I felt like I was running the show completely and he was just there to help quieten them down and everything... So it was very hard with a trained and a non-trained person.* Focus group session, Teacher.

*I'm sure it will be difficult but for myself, I would have preferred to have been involved in the professional development beforehand. I think that anybody instructing it would benefit from having involvement.* Focus group session, Teacher.

### Approach and content

All professional learning was provided in a face-to-face format. The feedback from school staff strongly indicates that face-to-face was required and appreciated for the professional learning on this topic:

*I need my teachers trained face-to-face by experts; not online, not remote, not teleconference. I need them trained face-to-face so that they can have conversations with other people there and explore and develop the relationships with other people that are there.* Focus group session, Principal.

In particular, classroom teachers reported that the interactive nature of the workshop built their pedagogical skills, awareness, understanding, confidence and an opportunity to explore a range of positions. The ability to listen and 'challenge' others was a frequent comment made by teachers.

### Further training

Ongoing and additional professional learning was seen as an enabler and critical to the ongoing success of whole school implementation of Respectful Relationships Education.

*More training will always be beneficial... There has not been enough training at our school... There were only a select few staff members chosen for the training... More training would have been valuable especially completing all the activities ourselves in a group training setting.* Focus group session, Teacher.

*Even though I've done the professional development, I'd like more – now that I know the things that I found challenging, I've got questions. Even things I'd like to hear from other schools as well. If we could meet up again with those same staff members it would be really interesting to see how they've implemented it.* Focus group session, Teacher.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch makes the following recommendations for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools:

### **Provide career-long professional learning and online tools (Recommendations 7a, b, d, e and g)**

To support future rollout, the Department of Education and Training needs to develop and resource a professional learning strategy to support all school staff to implement Respectful Relationships Education. It is recommended that this includes:

#### **a. A professional learning strategy with accredited educator trainers**

A Department of Education and Training-funded professional learning strategy should include an accreditation program that allows for trainers across the state to be accredited to deliver, at minimum, the three tiers of professional learning delivered by the RREiS pilot.

#### **b. Professional learning for all teachers delivering Respectful Relationships Education curriculum**

All teachers involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum should undertake a separate accreditation process that includes a minimum two day face-to-face professional learning delivered by training providers whose quality is assured through the accreditation program in (a) above.

#### **d. Preservice training**

For Respectful Relationships Education to become 'core business' in schools, all student teachers will require introductory training on gender-based violence prevention and response in the school context. Those intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering respectful relationships curriculum will require more comprehensive training. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training supports universities to ensure they have the resources to adequately prepare preservice teachers, including:

- training for preservice teacher educators
- comprehensive modules for student teachers intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering Respectful Relationships Education, covering – at a minimum – the content in the two-day in-service module in (b) above
- Introductory modules for all student teachers in recognising and responding to violence, and their role in contributing to whole school cultures of non-violence and gender equality
- updated resources. The online resource Sexuality Education Matters should be updated with the RREiS findings, new primary prevention research and an expanded emphasis on primary school and early childhood teaching.

**e. Regular briefings to all school staff**

All staff, including those not directly involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum, should undertake professional learning on Respectful Relationships Education and gender equality through their roles as teachers to students and in their workplace (the main objectives of the whole school briefings which were delivered as part of RREiS). This should align with and complement training in implementing new policies and guidance in recognising and responding to violence in Recommendations 12 and 13.

**g. Online resources for school staff**

Through the pilot, Our Watch developed a Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit which includes guides and resources to support the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education and will be made available online. The Victorian Government should fund development, testing and consultation to refine the toolkit to align with all school levels, including primary school, and to ensure the toolkit supports curriculum resources for all school levels.

## 4.7 Suggested mechanisms for statewide rollout

### Introduction

In addition to assessing each component of the whole school model, the evaluation sought to advise on how to scale up, sustain and mainstream Respectful Relationships Education in schools across Victoria. Interviews with stakeholders, including community-based organisations, schools and Department of Education and Training staff specifically asked for different perspectives on how a future rollout could be facilitated. These findings are summarised below.

### Findings: perspectives on future statewide rollout

#### Support for schools to achieve whole school change

Overall, the evaluation findings reinforced the crucial importance of taking a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education that is integrated into Department of Education and Training systems and structures. Feedback indicated that schools need support from dedicated experts in the primary prevention of gender-based violence to achieve this across a range of school settings:

*I think if you're going to implement it well across many schools then you need a dedicated resource to energise and motivate and cajole and monitor and all that sort of stuff. I think that's necessary. Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.*

While it was recognised that dedicated primary prevention experts were required to champion this work, there were a variety of opinions about how these roles would complement the roles of community agencies, school nurses and senior education advisors in any future rollout.

#### Coordination from the Department of Education and Training

Feedback indicated that future rollout to schools would require a level of direct support from the Department of Education and Training. This includes coordination and oversight from the central office, using the networks and reach of the regional office to have localised support and adaptability:

Facilitator: *You were talking about the need for coordination. But who do you think would be best to drive that?*

Dept. staff: *It needs to be a statewide initiative... so it needs to be coordinated centrally but within the new structure there's an Executive Director for Early Childhood and School Support. Now they will have responsibility for supporting implementation statewide strategies within the region. I would think oversight for this needed to sit with them.*

It was noted that commitment needs to be made public and led from the top:

*Some of that leadership from the department has to say ‘This [gender-based violence] is an important issue’. We’re the Education Department and we can play a large role in the shaping and for the whole community and the outcomes around family violence, prevention is one of them. [Education Minister] saying we need to have this discussion at staff level and an understanding around gender issues behind family violence. Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.*

It was also noted that the regional office structure had its own limitations in terms of the number of schools in each region and support available from the regional office, as noted in the following focus group discussion with regional office staff members:

Facilitator: *Do you feel that there is less support [from regional offices to schools]?*

Dept. staff: *Well it is less [regional office support to schools] at the end of the day. The region is 30% of the state of Victoria so it is huge compared to what it was and there’s fewer staff. So it’s just the realities of life I suppose.*

It is relevant to note that these quotes were recorded prior to the announcement of the Education State Reforms<sup>33</sup>, including the deployment of additional regional staff to provide operational support and advice to principals. At the time of writing, the role of these regional staff in supporting rollout of Respectful Relationships Education was unclear.

### **Integration into other education system initiatives**

It was identified that future rollout of Respectful Relationships Education needs to align and integrate with policy and processes for quality improvement occurring within Victorian schools led by the Department of Education and Training. For example, at a school level it must be a part of individual school strategic plans which are developed by principals in consultation with the senior advisors from their region. If this does not take place and future Respectful Relationships Education approaches are not integrated into the broader education, health and community service systems, the findings suggest that it is unlikely to be effective, engage schools and achieve sustainable outcomes. Integrating the Respectful Relationships Education approach into the Department of Education and Training must consider the need for school autonomy. It was noted that the RREiS pilot’s independence from the Department of Education and Training (being managed and led by Our Watch) gave schools confidence that they would have control over the data collected from them for evaluation purposes. Several school leaders commented that one of the most influential aspects of the RREiS pilot was the survey data provided directly to schools for planning purposes, however, schools were not required to share confidential findings more widely. A partnership approach of an external-to-government statewide coordinating role and the Department of Education and Training, as used in the RREiS pilot, could address these issues particularly in the early years of a statewide rollout.

It was noted that rollout of Respectful Relationships Education would require significant resources and there were a variety of suggestions regarding the different ways resources could be maximised efficiently. It was suggested that schools from the RREIS pilot could potentially mentor new schools to the rollout. For several focus group participants (both within schools and external to the schools), the level of resourcing provided in the RREIS pilot was viewed as necessary for future rollout and there was concern about the impacts if this level of support was not available:

*I think the whole school approach is critical to its success, not only in looking at the school culture and the policies and all the work that goes across all the areas of the school but in terms of the student program as well. Historically, there have been lots of programs around one-off sessions, which we know are a waste of time... Doesn't work... I'm a very staunch supporter of the whole school approach even though I know that it is incredibly resource intensive... And not that it just isn't effective if you do it [as ad-hoc one-off sessions]; it could do harm... It could be dangerous. Focus group session, Community organisation staff.*

*I'd say this amount of resource, from an education department perspective, would be a bare minimum, one person [referring to the Project Implementation Leader] to nine schools, especially in the establishment phases. Focus group session, Community organisation staff.*

Community-based organisations criticised other programs which had not adopted the whole school approach and had not been informed by an evidence-based, feminist framework. While these packages were often attractive to schools, as 'off the shelf solutions', experienced practitioners noted that, at best, these programs could be ineffective and, at worst, may be harmful to students.

***“I think it's really important to have programs that are based on evidence and standards around their delivery, so that we're not doing more harm to kids and people know what they're doing.”***

**Focus group session, Community-based organisation representative.**

It was also suggested that further work was required internally within the Department of Education and Training to ensure that the principles of Respectful Relationships Education are both understood and modelled by staff internally, alongside rollout to schools:

*... before you even think about curriculum and embedding that in schools and trying to get schools to do that, I think at a department level you've got to do department-wide discussion around gender equality issues so that everyone in the department from central to schools understands the gender issues around family violence.*  
Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.

*I'd be very surprised if [departmental staff] got it – that this is about prevention of domestic or family violence. They really think it's about, oh the kids will be nicer to each other.* Focus group session, Department of Education and Training staff.

These concerns have implications for resourcing training internally, for Department of Education and Training staff, as well as the sequencing of this rollout.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings outlined in this section, Our Watch makes the following recommendations for future implementation of the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education in schools

### Plan for a staged statewide rollout, through an opt-in model (Recommendation 1)

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education should be staggered over several years (minimum five years) to allow time for workforce capacity building – in schools and community organisations – for further system and policy development, and to ensure that a whole school approach is integrated systematically into all Victorian schools.

### Identify a mechanism for whole of government coordination (Recommendation 2)

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education is relevant to a wide range of government departments as well as Victorian and Commonwealth plans. Education planning should be long term and link to state policy frameworks, including the forthcoming Victorian Gender Equality Strategy and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. This will require strong interdepartmental governance mechanisms, for example, an interdepartmental committee. It is therefore recommended that the Victorian Department of Education and Training should lead interdepartmental planning for RREiS rollout in close partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Women and Royal Commission branch and the Department of Health and Human Services, and in the context of broader interdepartmental activity and policy frameworks for prevention of violence against women and their children.

**Establish statewide mechanisms for consultation, planning and monitoring (Recommendation 3)**

Planning and delivery of rollout should be informed by an evidence-based, rights-based approach, supporting the education system as an institution for education, community hub and workplace to actively address the drivers of gender-based violence. This is a specialist and emerging field and it is therefore recommended that state planning is informed by a formal process of consultation with organisations with gender and violence prevention expertise. There is the need for further consultation via a statewide, cross-sector committee (to be established) to identify the actions required for long term planning and coordination across the state as well as monitoring systems. Stakeholders include the Department of Education and Training, peak bodies such as the Principals Association, Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Authority, and the gender-based violence response sector and primary prevention sector. This collaboration may be led internally by Department of Education and Training, via an external expert organisation such as Our Watch, or through a co-chair model. It is also recommended that this Victorian group consults with other Commonwealth bodies including the Commonwealth Department of Education, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Education Council.

**Ensure leadership across the work areas of the Department of Education and Training (Recommendation 4)**

The coordination of statewide rollout will require wide-ranging interdepartmental coordination (see Recommendation 2). Currently, Respectful Relationships Education is led by the Student Wellbeing and Engagement branch. Leadership on this issue should not be restricted to this area within the Department of Education and Training and will require intradepartmental coordination across multiple groups and divisions, for example, teams with expertise relating to curriculum, strategic policy and planning and human resources.

# 5 Discussion of findings

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Overall, the evaluation findings reaffirmed the crucial importance of:

- taking the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education
- systematising Respectful Relationships Education via integrated Department of Education and Training coordination and support
- ensuring the support of appropriate community organisations (and resources to enable such organisations to provide this support), specifically, the need for technical expertise on both primary prevention and gender equality as well as support services for staff and students experiencing or perpetrating violence.

These key findings are discussed below in the context of the broader Respectful Relationships Education literature to identify implications for future statewide delivery.

## 5.1 Value of the whole school model

According to the 2009 research paper commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, *‘the single most important criterion for effective violence prevention and Respectful Relationships Education in schools is the adoption of a whole school approach’*.<sup>34</sup> In line with this recommendation and the model for implementation outlined in **Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out against Gender-based Violence**, the RREiS pilot supported schools to implement a whole school approach to complement the formal curriculum delivered to students.

The evaluation data presented in the previous section indicated that during the four terms of implementation, the whole school approach was applied to varying degrees, allowing for points of comparison across the schools in the pilot. Interview and focus group data suggested that for schools that already had, or were able to develop, a culture that modelled respectful practices, this environment was just as important a teaching tool as the curriculum guide. According to one school principal, *‘the curriculum is just the icing on the cake’* compared to the five other components that make up the whole school model. The curriculum guidance may have been the ‘entry point’ for many schools, however, over the course of the pilot, the staff that participated in focus groups stressed that it was the whole school approach that was critical to the impact and sustainability of the classroom materials.

### Shaping students’ understanding and behaviour

Perhaps the most powerful impact in terms of quantifiable data was the increase in student recognition and understanding of respect and respectful relationships. This is an encouraging finding for the effectiveness of the current curriculum resources for a whole school approach to the prevention of gender-based violence. It indicates that

an explicit focus on gender, power and violence, when sustained across the school, can successfully raise students' awareness of the nature and extent of gender-based violence, not only in general terms, but in relation to their own lived experiences.

It is also clear from this research that concerns about protecting the 'innocence' of young people, or 'demonising men', often cited as reasons for not undertaking this kind of work, are unfounded.<sup>35</sup> Both young men and young women in this study frequently affirmed the importance of Respectful Relationships Education for their futures as respected and respectful adults. This is consistent with the most recent Australian research on young people's expressed needs and preferences with regard to sexuality education in schools. New data (to be published in coming months) from an online survey of 2,325 young people aged 13 to 16+ in South Australian and Victorian government secondary schools shows that students want more out of sexuality education, in particular, more information about violence in relationships and about gender and sexual diversity.<sup>36</sup>

The benefits to be gained by reinforcing the formal curriculum with other components of the whole school approach, including school policies and practices, is another promising finding from this pilot. School leaders and teachers referred to the positive impact of reminding students what they were learning from the curriculum guidance and pointing out when this differed from their own behaviour, either within or outside the classroom. This approach also appeared to give students increased confidence to report disrespectful practices without fear of reprisal. This finding supports that of a 2010 national study<sup>37</sup> of same-sex attracted young people in schools, and suggests that making school policy visible to young people helps them to feel safer and respected.

### **The importance of engaging school leaders**

The RREiS pilot has confirmed existing literature recommending that implementing Respectful Relationships Education in schools requires commitment from the school leadership team to the whole school approach.<sup>38</sup> Further, the implications from this pilot were that while support from official school leaders such as principals and assistant principals is essential, leadership and commitment from a wide range of stakeholders also assists in creating an enabling environment for this work. It is acknowledged that, by volunteering to participate, the pilot schools were already demonstrating a level of leadership and engagement before the trial commenced. It is therefore recommended that rollout to other schools commences with those schools with leadership teams that demonstrate enthusiasm and motivation to lead this work. Systems and supports will be required to identify these schools and to support other schools building 'readiness' for implementation.

Training and ongoing support from the Project Implementation Leaders played a critical role in building the capacity of these school leaders. From interviews it was evident that most school leaders completed the pilot with a sound or improving understanding of RREiS beyond the classroom level (including the role of school culture and workplace gender equality), even where these concepts were not well understood at the beginning of the project. There was also evidence that this learning was an iterative process that required time and external support, as in many cases the broader elements of the whole school approach would not have been

addressed if the Project Implementation Leaders had not been available to provide expert input. This affirms the importance for any broader rollout of providing schools with access to external sources of expertise, support and guidance.

### Professional learning

Overall, the strategy of providing three tiers of professional learning was an effective one. Training was essential to ensure that all staff had an understanding of the pilot, the whole school approach, why it was important and how they could facilitate its implementation. However, feedback from participating schools suggests the timing and content of all three tiers requires review. It appears that one short 'top down' *Whole School Briefing* for staff was inadequate in meeting the aims of the project. Feedback from school leaders suggests this briefing needs to be longer and implemented after *Planning for RREIS and Delivering RREIS*.

Findings from this pilot suggest that the current two-day format of training for classroom teachers was effective in preparing them to teach the curriculum resources, allowing them to engage with other teachers in workshops, work through the activities, explore classroom approaches and have adequate time for planning and processing. It is also clear that all staff teaching the curriculum resources to students must have appropriate professional learning. Adequate training is crucial in ensuring that the messages students receive are carefully delivered and based on evidence and not assumptions and misconceptions. There is, however, evidence from other studies that building the capacity of teachers to train and mentor other staff is an effective strategy only if staff choose to do so and funding and time is available to support this process.<sup>39</sup> This has significant implications for implementation of the curriculum resources from this pilot across other schools. Schools will require funding for staff back fill and resource development to ensure that all teachers delivering respectful relationships curriculum are both willing to do so and have access to sufficient training and tools to enable them to deliver the material effectively and appropriately.

There was a strong demand from schools for ongoing opportunities for professional learning as well as professional support and debriefing. The experience from RREIS and other studies shows that teachers need to be properly supported if they are to take the emotional and social risks associated with teaching sensitive issues such as gender-based violence<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, teaching staff require regular opportunities to engage in reflection, both individually and collectively. This suggests a need to plan for and resource effective support mechanisms, such as communities of practice, for teaching staff.

## 5.2 Systematising via integrated Department of Education and Training coordinated support

### Leadership from the Department of Education and Training central office

There was universal consensus on the need for the central office of the Department of Education and Training to take a leadership role in future rollout of Respectful Relationships Education to ensure strong school engagement. For regional and school level change to occur, this approach to addressing gender-based violence and the key principles behind Respectful Relationships Education need to be understood, acknowledged and publicly promoted 'from the top down'. This finding is consistent with lessons learned from primary prevention work in other institutions, such as workplaces.<sup>41</sup> The prevention of gender-based violence within any institution needs to involve senior staff who have the authority to direct others and make decisions.<sup>42</sup> Some interviewees suggested that this recommendation needed to be extended, and wished to see the Education Minister continue to publicly promote the issue and the need for the whole school approach.

### Preparing schools to deliver the curriculum, embedded in the whole school approach

There was much discussion about what a statewide rollout of Respectful Relationships Education might involve. Focus group and interview participants identified a number of risks, including that schools may begin implementing programs that are not evidence-based if curriculum resources, training and external supports are not made available. However, there was also an acknowledgement that the development of quality curriculum and whole school guides will take time:

*You can't [rush it] – the curriculum based [resources] have been really evidence-based and really clear and age-appropriate. To pull that together at a moment's notice is only going to water down the value and the strength of it.* Interview, Department of Education and Training staff.

Participants also pointed to a risk of schools only implementing the curriculum component and not taking the whole school approach, particularly the components that address the school as a workplace, which were noted as one of the great strengths of the pilot. There was consensus on the need for thorough planning to both manage these risks and maximise the opportunity for the successful components of the RREIS pilot to be delivered at a large scale.

## Influencing cultural change across the education system

Evaluation data suggests that, while one year is insufficient time to demonstrate significant cultural change, there was anecdotal evidence that RREiS had been a catalyst to beginning this change. This was evident for example in changes in language used at schools, classroom behaviour and staff awareness and commitment to preventing gender-based violence through gender equality.

Interview and focus group feedback confirmed that all the components of the pilot played some role in facilitating engagement and triggering the early stage of cultural change, including the curriculum guidance, audit tool, school culture survey, and the support of the Project Implementation Leaders. Each of these components was designed to be adaptable to suit the unique context and circumstances of each school, and the Project Implementation Leaders reported providing support in different ways and at different times throughout the year, to suit the various school contexts. In any future rollout it should be expected that different schools will respond in different ways to the strategies on offer and all these elements should be included and provided in a flexible, adaptable manner. The challenge will be how to resource the external support provided by the Project Implementation Leaders. This was a topic of considerable debate in the focus groups and interviews, and is discussed below.

It was suggested that Department of Education and Training regional offices provide the ideal mechanism for allocating resources towards systematising the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education to Victorian schools, supported by leadership from the central office. However there were a range of views about how many schools could be reached in each of the different models that respondents suggested. Focus group participants from community organisations and Department of Education and Training regional offices debated whether existing department staff had the capacity and expertise to address and embed gender equality within the education system and provide appropriate support to schools. Participants felt that there was a need both for capacity building within the Department of Education and Training, and for the engagement of external prevention experts to support the rollout and ensure that all aspects of the whole school approach were properly implemented. This stakeholder feedback is consistent with best practice primary prevention literature that stresses that this kind of significant cultural change requires *'mutually reinforcing activities at all levels from policy, legislative and institutional reform to community and organisational level programs'*.<sup>43</sup> Just as classroom activities need to be reinforced and supported by broader school culture and policy, so too do schools implementing robust and evidence-based Respectful Relationships Education require the support and reinforcement of broader structures that also model and promote gender equality and respectful relationships.

## 5.3 The need for community organisation support

### Technical expertise to respond to disclosures

The RREiS pilot was consistent with other Respectful Relationships Education trials which found that increased awareness around gender-based violence was correlated with an increase in disclosures.<sup>44</sup> This was viewed a success of the pilot because it suggests that RREiS had successfully created a safe space for staff and students to disclose their experiences of violence. While the main focus of Respectful Relationships Education is primary prevention, as distinguished from early intervention or response efforts, staff and students alike will benefit from an effective response mechanism system. Receiving support following a disclosure of violence – especially in the context of whole school Respectful Relationships Education – can help change trajectories for students affected by violence and help them envisage and build healthy relationships in their future lives.

Research indicates that, while it is crucial that tailored *support* be offered to children and young people experiencing, living with or perpetrating violence, deficit-based *education* approaches – particularly those that isolate or differentiate children and young people who have experienced violence from their peers – are not the most effective in reducing future perpetration or experience of violence.<sup>45</sup> Further research is required to identify the best options to support young people in such circumstances, and on the evidence for various early intervention options.

While RREiS may have provided one of the most extensive approaches to equipping schools for responding to disclosures (all staff in all 19 schools were briefed by the Project Implementation Leader and a local response service provider), feedback indicates that this still fell short of what staff need to feel confident to provide an appropriate response. This was also evident in other similar trials, including the 2010 pilot of the curriculum resource undertaken by CASA House. According to trainers who were involved in both the CASA and RREiS pilot, the professional learning model delivered by CASA covered responding to disclosures in greater depth than the RREiS two-day workshop, yet teachers in 2010 also reported low confidence in responding to potential disclosures.

Responding to disclosures is not unique to schools implementing Respectful Relationships Education, and all Victorian schools are required to complete mandatory reporting training. There are a number of existing Department of Education and Training policies to guide staff responding to disclosures, however the RREiS survey indicates that most staff are not familiar with these. Compared to teachers, student wellbeing staff and members of the school leadership teams appeared to have a higher level of confidence in their ability to deal with disclosures, therefore there is a need to specifically target training, including policy briefings, to the needs of classroom teachers.

The pilot found that schools had very relationship driven, informal relationships with violence response agencies. The risk of increasing access to Respectful Relationships Education is that many schools may not have procedures in place to deal with disclosures and other incidents as they arise. This was a very strong concern that was consistent across all interviews and focus groups:

*We're putting principals at risk who don't know how to deal with the issue or don't feel supported and we're putting staff at risk and students at risk if there's not the support around to deal with it.*

Interview, Department of Education and Training staff.

There also needs to be future discussion and planning on the most suitable support model to be put in place. As mentioned, there were a range of views presented on the best model to support schools (i.e. who should receive funding) and further consultation and planning with the response sector is required to ensure an alignment of effort and outcomes.

# 6 Recommendations

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## MAKING RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION CORE BUSINESS

### 1. Plan for a staged statewide rollout, through an opt-in model

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education should be staggered over several years (minimum five years) to allow time for workforce capacity building – in schools and community organisations – for further system and policy development, and to ensure that a whole school approach is integrated systematically into all Victorian schools.

#### a) Commence rollout with opt-in schools

School readiness and support from appointed school leaders was essential for uptake of the RREiS pilot. It is recommended that statewide rollout includes an 'opt-in model' for school participation in the initial years of implementation.

#### b) Give schools time to prepare

All schools will require time to prepare for implementation of a whole school approach. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training engages with schools as soon as possible in 2016 to begin preparation for implementing respectful relationships curriculum in classrooms. Schools will require adequate time to establish crucial community partnerships, prepare for and integrate Respectful Relationships Education into their school planning cycle, and allocate adequate resources.

### 2. Identify a mechanism for whole of government coordination

Statewide delivery of Respectful Relationships Education is relevant to a wide range of government departments as well as Victorian and Commonwealth plans. Education planning should be long term and link to state policy frameworks, including the forthcoming Victorian Gender Equality Strategy and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. This will require strong interdepartmental governance mechanisms, for example, an interdepartmental committee. It is therefore recommended that the Victorian Department of Education and Training should lead interdepartmental planning for RREiS roll-out in close partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet's Women and Royal Commission branch and the Department of Health and Human

Services, and in the context of broader interdepartmental activity and policy frameworks for prevention of violence against women and their children.

### **3. Establish statewide mechanisms for consultation, planning and monitoring**

Planning and delivery of rollout should be informed by an evidence-based, rights-based approach, supporting the education system to actively address the drivers of gender-based violence as an institution for education, community hub and workplace. This is a specialist and emerging field and it is therefore recommended that state planning is informed by a formal process of consultation with organisations with gender and violence prevention expertise. There is the need for further consultation via a statewide, cross-sector committee (to be established) to identify the actions required for long term planning and coordination across the state as well as monitoring systems. Stakeholders include the Department of Education and Training, peak bodies such as the Principals Association, Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Authority, and the gender-based violence response sector and primary prevention sector. This collaboration may be led internally by Department of Education and Training, via an external expert organisation such as Our Watch, or through a co-chair model. It is also recommended that this Victorian group consults with other Commonwealth bodies including the Commonwealth Department of Education, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the Education Council.

### **4. Ensure leadership across the work areas of the Department of Education and Training**

The coordination of statewide rollout will require wide-ranging interdepartmental coordination (see Recommendation 2). Currently, Respectful Relationships Education is led by the Student Wellbeing and Engagement branch in the Department of Education and Training. Leadership on this issue should not be restricted to this area within the Department of Education and Training and will require intradepartmental coordination across multiple groups and divisions, for example, teams with expertise relating to curriculum, strategic policy and planning and human resources.

### **5. Ensure ongoing and longitudinal evaluation**

The pilot has demonstrated that the methodology for evaluation, including feedback loops to inform project activity, has been a significant strength. However, a weakness of the pilot was the lack of longitudinal evaluation data. Longitudinal evaluations allow for follow-up interviews and surveys with those students and staff who have participated in the program, and for comparisons between their experience and that of a control group. Longitudinal evaluation is the only way we can know for certain whether a program has

been successful in reducing participants' future experience or perpetration of violence. Appropriate resourcing of a longitudinal evaluation of future Respectful Relationships Education approaches is recommended to ensure:

- **continual improvement** – providing a mechanism for reflecting on practice to inform future planning and implementation, at the teacher, school, regional and state level. Aligning this with a five year staged rollout across the Victorian education system will allow for the approach and its various elements to be continually refined and adapted to the diverse needs of Victorian schools and regions.
- **strengthening the evidence base** – including longitudinal evaluation to measure the long term impacts of Respectful Relationships Education to demonstrate the long term societal and economic benefit of the government investment in Respectful Relationships Education across Victoria.

External expertise should be provided to schools to analyse, interpret and use data from their staff and students to ensure programs are properly evaluated while at the same time maintaining school anonymity.

## 6. Employ specialist staff to inform work at a regional level

Future delivery will require the input of expert, readily available support, similar to the Project Implementation Leader, to regional offices. These workers require primary prevention, educational and systems change expertise to support regional educational offices to:

- provide specialist Respectful Relationships Education advice and direction to schools, to embed all elements of the whole school approach
- connect and support locally based community organisations and schools
- support school leaders to engage in self-assessment and planning processes.

The evaluation provided mixed recommendations on whether these experts should be directly employed by the Department of Education and Training or externally employed but located in the Department of Education and Training. However, there was clear consensus that their location in the regional offices was ideal. Further consultation and scoping research is required to identify the preferred model and it is recommended that this aligns with and is informed by any reforms, restructures or other system changes anticipated from the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence findings and the Education State Reforms.

## BUILDING EDUCATION SECTOR CAPACITY

### 7. Develop and provide career-long professional learning and online tools

To support statewide rollout, the Department of Education and Training should develop and resource a professional learning strategy (aligned with the statewide professional learning strategy for the education sectors) to support *all* school staff to implement Respectful Relationships Education through a whole school approach. It is recommended that this includes:

**a. A professional learning strategy with accredited educator trainers**

A Department of Education and Training-funded professional learning strategy should include an accreditation program that allows for trainers across the state to be accredited to deliver, at minimum, the three tiers of professional learning delivered by the RREiS pilot.

**b. Professional learning for all teachers delivering Respectful Relationships Education curriculum**

All teachers involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum should undertake a separate accreditation process that includes a minimum two day face-to-face professional learning delivered by training providers whose quality is assured through the accreditation program in (a) above.

**c. Ongoing support for curriculum teachers**

In addition to the face-to-face accreditation program, the Department of Education and Training should fund opportunities for ongoing professional learning for teachers and support staff who currently teach or support Respectful Relationships Education to:

- update professional skills
- share and debrief experiences
- access additional resources to address the identified areas of need including but not limited to sexuality and gender inclusivity, transgender and backlash.

**d. Preservice training**

For Respectful Relationships Education to become ‘core business’ in schools, all student teachers will require introductory training on gender-based violence prevention and response in the school context. Those intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering respectful relationships curriculum will require more comprehensive training. It is recommended that the Department of Education and Training supports universities to ensure they have the resources to adequately prepare preservice teachers, including:

- training for preservice teacher educators
- comprehensive modules for student teachers intending to teach in subject areas where they will be delivering Respectful Relationships Education, covering – at a minimum – the content in the two-day in-service module in (b) above
- Introductory modules for all student teachers in recognising and responding to violence, and their role in contributing to whole school cultures of non-violence and gender equality
- updated resources. The online resource Sexuality Education Matters should be updated with the RREiS findings, new primary prevention research and an expanded emphasis on primary school and early childhood teaching.

**e. Regular briefings to all school staff**

All staff, including those not directly involved in the delivery of respectful relationships curriculum, should undertake professional learning on Respectful Relationships Education and gender equality through their roles as teachers to students and in their workplace (the main objectives of the whole school briefings which were delivered as part of RREiS). This should align with and complement training in implementing new policies and guidance in recognising and responding to violence in Recommendations 12 and 13.

**f. Provide specialised support for school leaders**

The Department of Education and Training should provide accessible, ongoing professional learning for school leadership teams including principals and assistant principals on the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education. Offering schools incentives to participate and providing ongoing support for school leadership teams may help maximise participation and leaders' capability.

**g. Online resources for school staff**

Through the pilot, Our Watch developed a *Respectful Relationships Education Toolkit* which includes guides and resources to support the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education and will be made available online. The Victorian Government should fund development, testing and consultation to refine the toolkit to align with all school levels, including primary school, and to ensure the toolkit supports curriculum resources for all school levels.

**h. Integrate quality assurance mechanisms into delivery**

Schools should ensure that staff, students and the broader school community are aware of and competent in policy and practice on promoting gender equality and respectful relationships, and responding appropriately to disclosures (including those of past abuse and perpetration) and that staff are supported and competent in the implementation of policy and practice. The Department of Education and Training may consider how these measures can be integrated into existing school audits or surveys such as the student attitudes to school survey or school staff survey.

## 8. Establish implementation teams within schools

Schools should consider internal mechanisms for embedding Respectful Relationships Education within their schools, such as forming and resourcing teams consisting of teaching, wellbeing and leadership staff to plan and support implementation at the classroom level. Teams can:

- provide support to staff and students who may need additional wellbeing support
- ensure flexibility in approaches based on context
- ensure adequate time for planning and opportunities to debrief.

Teams can also consider the timing and sequencing of lessons and ensure that students have the prerequisite understanding and knowledge prior to participating in respectful relationships lessons. For example, it is critical that students completing the Year 8 and 9 modules of the curriculum guidance have completed basic sexuality education.

## 9. Conduct regular reviews of curriculum guidance

The Department of Education and Training should conduct regular reviews, at a minimum of every three years, of curriculum guidance including the existing curriculum resources, to ensure age-appropriate and relevant resources, digital technology, additional audiovisual materials, updated statistics and legality issues and integration of emerging evidence. Further advice and resources will be required as part of rollout to ensure adaptability and usability for teachers and schools.

### MEETING DUTY OF CARE TO STAFF AND STUDENTS

## 10. Develop comprehensive response guidelines for schools

The Department of Education and Training should work closely with specialist services (including family violence, sexual assault, child protection and youth services), as well as the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Premier and Cabinet to address the gaps in guidelines for schools in responding to disclosures from staff and students including how to address student disclosures which fall outside the 'Child Protection – Mandatory reporting' section of the Victorian Government Schools Policy and Advisory Guide.

## 11. Develop comprehensive professional learning on responding to violence-related trauma

The Department of Education and Training's statewide professional learning strategy for education staff should include content and assess staff capacity to:

- identify and respond to a range of disclosures (including direct and vicarious trauma) and when to make a referral to an external community organisation
- respond in an age-appropriate way to both students and staff who are survivors and/or perpetrators of violence
- ensure staff are familiar with state mandates and their own school processes on responding to disclosures.

## 12. Resource the integrated system response to gender-based violence, and interdepartmental collaboration, to address service gaps

The Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services should fund and facilitate closer working relationships between schools and community-based organisations to:

- ensure that schools have access to local gender-based violence response experts to play an active role in providing ongoing support and advice to schools on appropriately responding to disclosures, which may include capacity building and resourcing existing services to provide appropriate responses to younger age groups
- establish a working group of key gender-based violence (including family violence), sexual assault, child protection and youth services stakeholders to develop, implement and evaluate a strategy to ensure availability and accessibility of statewide integrated approaches that:
  - i. provide age-appropriate interventions and/or responses for young people already experiencing or perpetrating violence within in their relationships
  - ii. provide appropriate supports and/or interventions for young people witnessing or living with violence at home, given strong evidence that life experience can impact long term relationships patterns.

### **13. Fund further research into effective early interventions for young people experiencing or perpetrating gender-based violence**

Research indicates that, while it is crucial that tailored *support* be offered to children and young people experiencing, living with or perpetrating violence, deficit-based *education* approaches – particularly those that isolate or differentiate children and young people who have experienced violence from their peers – are not the most effective in reducing future perpetration or experience of violence. Further research is required to identify the best options to support young people in such circumstances, and on the evidence for various early intervention options.

# 7 Acknowledgements

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First and foremost, Our Watch acknowledges that the current pilot would not have been possible without the efforts and advocacy of other organisations that have pioneered Respectful Relationships Education in Australia. Our colleagues in the women's health, family violence and sexual assault sectors have put gender-based violence prevention in schools at the forefront of prevention activity.

Our Watch would like to congratulate all the schools that participated in the RREiS pilot. It has been a privilege to have shared the journey with this group of leading schools. The RREiS pilot would not have taken place without the schools' enthusiasm and willingness to support both the pilot and its evaluation. We wish them well in continuing this work over the coming years.

Thank you to each of the Project Implementation Leaders: Joanna Brislane, Django Love and Ann Nicholls who led the work in schools and contributed to the pilot development and evaluation. Special thanks also to the manager, Cara Gleeson and previously Emily Maguire, who in their roles as Policy and Projects Manager, Children and Young People, led the project in addition to contributing to Our Watch's broader policy work in this space.

Our Watch thanks the Project Advisory Committee for their input and guidance throughout the project:

- Dr Lara Fergus, Patty Kinnersly, Cara Gleeson and Emily Maguire, Our Watch (co-chair)
- Kris Arcaro and Caitlin Greenwell, Department of Education and Training (co-chair)
- Rachael Green, Department of Health and Human Services
- Simon Milligan, Deputy Regional Director, North Western region
- Lesley Hubble, Deputy Regional Director, South Western region
- Anthony Raitman, Deputy Regional Director, North Eastern region
- Linda Beilherz, Women's Health Loddon Mallee
- Judy Flannagan, Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault
- Dr Sue Dyson, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society
- Dr Debbie Ollis, Deakin University
- Kellie Nagle, Municipal Association of Victoria
- Vig Geddes, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria.

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# 8 Glossary and abbreviations

Acronym/Term	Definition
<b>Gender-based violence</b>	This term is usually used to explain violence against women, referring to violence that is specifically ‘directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately’. However it is also useful to explain other forms of violence, in recognition that ‘rigid, binary and hierarchical constructions of gender, sex and sexuality’ are also a driver of violence against people whose experience and/or identity does not conform to such binary definitions, including members of the lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer and intersex communities.
<b>Primary prevention</b>	Whole-of-population initiatives that address the primary (‘first’ or underlying) drivers of gender-based violence. There is a growing body of evidence to demonstrate that gender-based violence can be prevented by changing the social conditions – largely related to gender inequality, that excuse, justify, trivialise or downplay violence against women.
<b>Respectful Relationships Education</b>	Respectful Relationships Education is the holistic approach to school based, primary prevention of gender-based violence.  It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence. <sup>46</sup>
<b>RREiS</b>	Respectful Relationships Education in Schools, the pilot study delivered by Our Watch from Term 4, 2014 to Term 4, 2015.
<b>Violence against women</b>	Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.
<b>Whole school approach</b>	A whole school approach means providing students with multiple exposures to key messages across the curriculum and in different areas of the school and community is more likely to result in sustained changes at the individual level. It involves engaging not just students, but school staff and the wider school community in the process of cultural change.

# 9 References

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# 10 Alternative text for figures

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## Alternative text for Figure 1: Definition of Respectful Relationships Education

Figure 1 defines Respectful Relationships Education as “the holistic approach to school based, primary prevention of gender based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools as both education institutions and as workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender based violence and to create a future free from such violence.”

## Alternative text for Figure 2: The Whole School Approach to Respectful Relationships in Schools

Figure 2 depicts the key elements of the whole of school approach to Respectful Relationships Education. The figure depicts 6 equally weighted and interdependent factors, which include the school culture and environment, school leadership and commitment, professional learning strategy, teaching and learning, support for staff and students, and community partnerships. At the center of these six interlinked elements is the evaluation process.

## Alternative text for Figure 3: Key stakeholders in the Respectful Relationships Education pilot

Figure 3 depicts the key stakeholders involved in the Respectful Relationships Education pilot.

The first tier of the chart lists the key partners, which includes The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Funder), Our Watch (Coordination and Project Lead), and the Department of Training and Education (Government partner).

The second tier of the chart identifies the program manager, Our Watch.

The third tier lists the three Project Implementing Leaders of from Our Watch who are each situated within their corresponding Department of Education and Training Regional Offices in the North Western, South Western region, and North Eastern region. These Project Implementation Leaders are each responsible for 4 to 8 schools in their region.

The Project Advisory Committee sits parallel to this structure, and advises the key partners. Members of this committee include, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Human Services, Our Watch, Women’s Health Grampians, the Eastern Centre Against Sexual

Assault, the Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society, Deakin University, the Municipal Association of Victoria, and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria.

## **Alternative text for Figure 4: Pilot Participants**

Figure 4 states that the Respectful Relationships Education Pilot reached 19 schools, 4,000 students (who directly participated in classes) and 1,700 school staff.

## **Alternative text for Figure 5: Respectful Relationships Education Pilot timeline**

Figure 5 plots the timeline for the Respectful Relationships Education pilot.

In June 2014 Our Watch was recruited as the program manager. In July, the implementation plan was approved, and in September the project leaders were recruited. In November, pilot schools were engaged through an Expression of Interest process. The implementation period commenced in February 2015, beginning with whole of school briefings, school leadership, and delivering RREIS professional learning.

In March 2015, a baseline culture survey was conducted. In March, curriculum resources were delivered to year 8 and 9 students. In May, gender audits were conducted, as well as a baseline survey with students on skills, knowledge and attitudes. Over the October to December period, focus group interviews were conducted, and at the conclusion of the pilot period a follow up survey on skills, knowledge and attitudes was conducted with students.

In February 2016, the implementation period ended and this evaluation report was completed.

## **Alternative text for Figure 6: RREiS evaluation participants**

Figure 6 includes a list of all those who participated in the evaluation process. Phone interviews were conducted with 3 senior department staff, 3 project implementation leaders, and 2 managers. Online surveys were conducted with 3,665 students and 1,870 school staff. Focus groups were conducted with 81 school staff, 71 students, 11 department staff, and 9 community based organisations.

## **Alternative text for Figure 7: Feedback following Planning for RREiS training session**

Figure 7 depicts feedback provided from 43 school leadership team members following their participation in the planning for RREiS training sessions.

Participants were asked the question “Having completed this session, how confident do you feel explaining the following concepts?”

56 percent of participants reported a high level of confidence in explaining the whole of school approach to the RREiS program, 40 percent reported some confidence, and 5 percent provided no response.

67 percent of participants reported a high level of confidence the concept of violence against women, 28 percent reported some confidence and 5 percent provided no response.

70 percent of participants reported a high level of confidence explaining the link between gender equality and violence against women, 26 percent reported some confidence and 5 percent provided no response.

74 percent of participants reported a high level of confidence explaining the concepts of sex and gender, 21 percent reported some confidence and 5 percent provided no response.

## **Alternative text for Figure 8: Curriculum reflection survey – changes in student classroom behaviour**

Figure 8 depicts feedback from 42 staff who completed the curriculum feedback survey. Staff were asked the question “over the course of the curriculum, did you observe any changes in student classroom behaviour?”

No participants stated that they witnessed worse behaviour, 2 percent reported that it was worse at times. Thirty four percent stated that they saw no change, while the majority of 59 percent stated that student classroom behaviour was better at times. Five percent stated that it was much improved.

## **Alternative text for figure 9: Changes in students’ attitudes on gender and relationships**

Figure 9 depicts student’s attitudes towards gender roles and relationships at the baseline survey and again at follow up. Participants were asked whether they agree, or disagree with a set of statements.

When asked if they agree that “women prefer a man to be in charge of the a relationship”, 35 percent disagreed and 13 percent agreed in the baseline survey, compared with 38 percent and 12 percent in follow up.

When asked if they agree that “men should take control of the relationship and should be the head of the household”, 54 percent disagreed and 13 percent agreed, compared with 58 percent and 12 percent in follow up.

When asked if they agree that “university education is more important for boys” 59 percent disagreed and 7 percent agreed, compared with 64 percent and 5 percent in follow up.

When asked if they agree that “men are better political leaders”, 43 percent disagreed and 10 percent agreed, compared with 45 percent and 9 percent in follow up.

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