

# COOL SCHOOLS PEER MEDIATION PROGRAMME

## EVALUATION 2016



PEER MEDIATION  
PROGRAMME

## ASSESSING PROGRAMME CONTRIBUTION IN 44 PRIMARY SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE

A joint evaluation by the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago, and The Foundation for Peace Studies Aotearoa/New Zealand

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## 1. Executive Summary

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The last evaluation of the Peace Foundation's Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme was undertaken in 2004 as part of the Innovations Fund, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Education. The 2016 evaluation provides an update on how the programme operates in the schools who are regular subscribers to the programme.

The evaluation focused on why the programme was successful (the reason for repeat subscriptions by the schools), what the challenges are, how the programme meets its purpose and the effect it had on Peer Mediators, Programme Coordinators, and the wider school community. The mixed-methods evaluation has a nation-wide sample of 39 Teacher Programme Coordinators and 16 School Principals as survey respondents. Further, open-ended interviews were conducted with five Teacher Programme Coordinators and ten student Peer Mediators in the Auckland region. Details of the participants are confidential.

A total of 15 out of the 16 School Principals surveyed indicated that the programme helped address conflict in the school. The surveyed Principals indicated that the programme contributed to the vision of the school by increasing students' problem solving and leadership capabilities, increasing students' emotional intelligence and enabling students to treat others the way they want to be treated.

From the sample of 10 Peer Mediators who were interviewed, four students reported a difference in their academic performance since becoming a peer mediator. Six students indicated that the programme had helped them with forming better relationships with family and friends. Overall, the programme has had a positive impact regarding increased confidence, understanding people better and their ability to solve problems.

A total of 72% of the teachers reported seeing a positive behaviour change in their students after implementing the programme, while 100% of the teachers responding indicated that students have benefited as a result of the programme. The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme is very popular amongst the schools and it has demonstrated positive results regarding students' ability to solve problems and to promote a safe environment in the playground. Consequently, this report considers that the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme has successfully delivered its goal of improved interpersonal communication, conflict resolution and problem solving within the evaluation sample.

## ***The Research Team***

The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme Evaluation 2016 is a collaborative project between the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (NCPACS), University of Otago, New Zealand and The Foundation for Peace Studies Aotearoa/New Zealand (The Peace Foundation), Auckland.

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## 2. Background

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The Peace Foundation has been running the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme nationwide in primary schools in New Zealand for over 24 years. Cool Schools is designed for both the classroom and the playground. After its introduction in late 1991, due to its success, the programme expanded to a secondary schools programme: Leadership through Peer Mediation (LtPM) and a support programme for parents (Sullivan, 2000).

Peer Mediators are students who are trained to mediate by the Cool Schools Coordinator (a nominated teacher), who in turn received training and support from The Peace Foundation. The aim of the programme is to provide students with the skills to mediate disputes to reach a resolution without using violence.

A primary goal of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme is to address issues related to bullying. Acts of bullying can be classified in a wide spectrum ranging from social exclusion, verbal harassment, and discrimination to physical abuse (Tasker, 2013). New Zealand has taken a pro-active approach in relationship education programmes in both primary and secondary schools with funding the implementation of several programmes such as Positive Behaviour for Learning School Wide (PB4LSW) and Huakina Mai. The Peace Foundation also runs several programmes that reflect a focus on restorative practices for building positive relationships, including the *Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme*, *Kia Tau te Rangimarie* (a Maori-language programme based in *tikanga Maori* / the Maori worldview) and *Leadership through Peer Mediation*.

As indicated in the former Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2004, prior research by Barnes (1994) and O'Meara (1996) reported a decrease in the numbers of incidents and an increase in positive behaviour in the playground as a result of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation programme. The researchers also reported improved self-esteem and self-confidence amongst the Peer Mediators, as well as a reduction in bullying, and a reduction in the time teachers spent resolving conflicts (Barnes, 1994; O'Meara, 1996; Moses, 1998).

Recent research undertaken by Lofty (2013) indicated that removal of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme from the school's curriculum reduced students' overall participation in school decision-making activities; their ability to resolve conflicts independently; as well as their quality of relationships with teachers (independent of decile).

## 2.1 The purpose, objectives and research questions

The last evaluation of the Cool Schools Peer-Mediation Programme was undertaken in 2004 as part of the Innovations Fund, which was commissioned by the Ministry of Education. The purpose of the 2016 evaluation is to provide an update on how the programme operates in the schools who are regular subscribers to the programme. The evaluation focused on why the programme was successful (the reason for repeat subscriptions by the schools), what are the challenges, how the programme meets its purpose and the effect it had on Peer Mediators, Programme Coordinators, and the wider school community.

### The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- evaluate the contribution the programme makes to the schools;
- assess if the programme meets the goals, vision and mission of the schools;
- inform The Peace Foundation of the challenges faced by the schools; and to
- understand the perspectives of the Programme Coordinators, Principals, and the Peer Mediators.

### Research questions and areas of investigation

The research questions were formulated from the objectives of the research to assess the relevance, effectiveness, contribution and sustainability of the programme. The efficiency of the programme was not assessed as it was not relevant to the aforementioned objectives of this evaluation. The research questions investigated:

1. the perceived success of the programme and how aligned it is with the goals and vision of the school;
2. how effortlessly was it integrated into the curriculum and its degree of cultural responsiveness; and
3. the challenges encountered in running the programme and areas for improvement.

## 2.2 Methodology and the presentation of data

This is a participatory evaluation by the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (NCPACS) at the University of Otago and The Peace Foundation, Auckland. The scoping, research design and data analysis were conducted by NCPACS, while the sample recruitment and qualitative data collection were undertaken by The Peace Foundation. A collaborative approach to evaluation enhances organisational learning through participation and joint ownership of the research approach.

The mixed-methods evaluation has a nation-wide sample of 39 Programme Coordinators and 16 School Principals as survey respondents. Further, in-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with five Programme Coordinators (one responded through writing) and ten student Peer Mediators in the Auckland region. Details of the participants were confidential.

Quantitative and qualitative results were gathered from Programme Coordinators and Principals using the Survey Monkey tool. The survey was completed within two months of notification. Appendix A contains the recruitment letters. Please contact the author of this report Marie Nissanka at [nissanmari@gmail.com](mailto:nissanmari@gmail.com) for specific survey and interview questions.

To ensure confidentiality, all participant quotes have been given a unique numerical identifier, so that no school or person can be identified. Therefore, where various quotations by the same participant appears, the quotation will be numbered consecutively, for example Programme Coordinator ID12, Programme Coordinator ID13, Peer Mediator ID5, Peer Mediator ID6, etc. Due to the method of numbering, the number of quotations with a unique ID exceeds the number of participants.

### 3. Findings

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This section describes the findings of the evaluation related to the relevance, contribution, effectiveness and sustainability of the programme. The programme is run by Peer Mediators patrolling the playgrounds and identifying disputes and conflicts amongst students. Most schools have protective regulations so that acts of violence are dealt with by the duty teacher and not by the Peer Mediators.

It is evident from the literature and the overall findings that mitigating conflict related to bullying is an ongoing process and will always remain a relevant and important aspect in cultivating a healthy school environment. The section below describes the relevance of the programme to the schools in the research sample with special reference to how the programme is integrated into the curriculum and its cultural responsiveness (to meet the needs of a diverse school population).

**Table 1: The types of conflict encountered in the school environment**

<b>[To teachers:] In your school, how often does the Cool Schools Peer-Mediation Programme address the following types of conflict?</b>							
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>1. Never</b>	<b>2. Rarely (1-2 times a year)</b>	<b>3. Sometimes (1-2 times a semester)</b>	<b>4. Often (3 times a semester)</b>	<b>5. Very often (4 or more times a semester)</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Common arguments and disagreements	0	0	5	8	25	4.53	38
Fallen out friendships	0	0	10	11	18	4.21	39
Violence related to sports	12	15	8	1	3	2.18	39
Cyber and text-based bullying	27	10	2	0	0	1.36	39
Verbal bullying and threats	6	9	19	2	3	2.67	39
Physical violence	16	11	9	2	1	2.00	39
Identity based harassment (inclusive of gender, race, religion and sexuality)	17	11	10	1	0	1.87	39
						<b>answered question</b>	<b>39</b>
						<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 1 indicates that while common arguments and fallen out friendships dominate the types of conflicts that are encountered, verbal bullying, threats followed by violence related to sports, general physical violence, and identity-based harassment sometimes occur in some schools.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The numerical figures relate to subjective perceptions of the Programme Coordinators and do not represent an objective, evidence-based data.

### 3.1 Relevance

This section investigates if the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme meets the needs of the schools regarding how the programme is integrated into the curriculum and its cultural responsiveness. While the programme's reputation, ability to integrate into the curriculum and to address major issues in the school were the most important criteria as reported in the previous evaluation (Ministry of Education, 2004), the programme's ability to address conflict in the school (15/16 or 94%), was the primary reason the schools subscribe to the programme, as indicated in the survey responses from the Principals.

- ✈ “We have used this programme for some years. It helps support our restorative programmes and anti-bullying focus” [Principal 1].
- ✈ “Several high needs students but on the whole students were active and fairly typical. The behaviour approach was quite punitive, and we wanted a more restorative approach which gave the victim more of a voice” [Principal 2].<sup>2</sup>

#### *Integration into the curriculum*

A total of 32 out of the 39 surveyed Programme Coordinators provided examples of how the Programme was easily integrated into the curriculum through Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), social sciences, health and physical education programmes, drama class, and specialized events (such as National Schools' Peace Week) and programmes like The Virtues Programme and a leadership programme (for senior students). Further, it contributed towards cultivating general respect towards each other in all activities including promoting a safe and happy playground. A total of 100% of the Principals surveyed also concurred that the programme enhanced the established curriculum by integrating into the health, values, peace studies and positive competencies, which the curriculum addresses.

It was noted that sometimes the Programme Coordinators found it challenging to incorporate the Programme into every classroom due to the age and level of experience of the students:

- ✈ “...Also sometimes find it difficult to incorporate it into every classroom. For example, sometimes the five and six year olds don't know what mediators are when they start school. We often send our year 6's to go and introduce themselves and teach them about what peer mediation is. I think the next step

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<sup>2</sup> This quote relates to the complex nature of the students of this school. The Programme has helped the students address their actions towards others through restorative justice.

is to get our teachers to incorporate this Programme into their lesson plans” [Programme Coordinator, ID1].

### ***Cultural responsiveness***

While the demographics of the schools are diverse, the scope of the evaluation does not capture the identity-based demographics of the survey sample by decile. However, most schools are multicultural, and just over 77% of the Programme Coordinators claimed that the Programme is culturally responsive. For example, to mitigate language barriers, “A Chinese child was matched with a Chinese mediator” [Programme Coordinator, ID2], and diverse cultures were represented by “Having students from different ethnicities as mediators. Being able to communicate with students” [Programme Coordinator, ID3].

Table 1 (above, p. 9) indicates that while 17/39 (43.5%) of the schools indicated that identity-based harassment (inclusive of gender, race and religion) never occurs, 21/39 (54%) indicates it happens ‘rarely’ or ‘sometimes’ while it is a frequent problem for one school. Surprisingly, the qualitative responses gathered from the Programme Coordinators did not reflect the challenges associated with prejudicial bullying, perhaps indicating a level of invisibility regarding identity-based bullying. This is considered by the research team to be an important area to concentrate future assessment questions upon.

## **3.2 Effectiveness**

This section investigates if the goals and targets of the schools are met by the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme. From the section that investigates the relevance, the Programme’s ability to reduce conflict was indicated by the Principals as the most significant reason why the schools continue their subscription.

### ***Success of the Programme***

A total of 36 Programme Coordinators responded to this area of questioning. All of them responded with positive comments regarding the Programme’s success in terms of providing peer support; a safe playground; linking school competencies and reward systems; ability to listen and handle conflict and the onus to take ownership to sort out issues.

### ***How the Programme supports the goals of the schools***

All the Programme Coordinators who were interviewed confirmed that their school adheres to a behaviour management policy that is informed by the vision and goals of the schools. According to the Ministry of Education (2004), the most pertinent goals that schools wished the Programme to address was related to social and attitude improvements in students whereas only 4/12 participants indicated a need for improvements in academic performance.

The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme has been effective in meeting the goals of the schools as 72% (28/39) of the Programme Coordinators provided examples of positive behaviour change and a change in students' attitudes and in the school community as a result of the programme: "Students more readily use appropriate language to solve their problems and are more open to discussing their feelings now" [Programme Coordinator, ID4]. "Mediators feel empowered and enjoy helping their peers resolve conflicts. Other students feel more safe in the playground." [Programme Coordinator, ID5].

**Table 2: The goals and targets of the schools**

<b>[To principals:] Does the school have specific goals and targets that you would like the Cool Schools Programme to address, such as:</b>						
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>1. Essential</b>	<b>2. Important</b>	<b>3. Neutral</b>	<b>4. Unimportant</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
A reduction in the rate of bad behaviour	5	5	2	0	1.75	12
A reduction in the rates of expulsions/year	1	3	3	4	2.91	11
A reduction in the rate of detentions/year	0	2	7	2	3.00	11
A reduction in the rate of violence	4	4	3	0	1.91	11
An improvement in academic performance (including the completion of homework)	0	4	6	1	2.73	11
An improvement in student participation in extra-curricular activities and events	1	5	4	1	2.45	11
An improvement in student wellbeing, including attitude, sociability and happiness	7	5	0	1	1.62	13
Other (please specify)						0
					<b><i>answered question</i></b>	<b>14</b>
					<b><i>skipped question</i></b>	<b>2</b>

Table 2 shows that the surveyed Principals indicated that the most important goals they wanted the Programme to contribute towards were:

1. An improvement in student wellbeing, including attitude;
2. A reduction in the rate of bad behaviour; and
3. A reduction in the rate of violence

### ***How the Programme supports the vision of the schools***

The surveyed Principals indicated that the Programme contributed to the vision of the school by increasing students' problem solving and leadership capabilities, increasing students' emotional intelligence and enabling students to treat others the way they want to be treated.

- ✦ “We want our students to feel safe and also to have opportunities to work through conflicting situations” [Principal, ID1].
- ✦ “Our focus on developing life-long learners is supported by the Cool Schools Programme as it builds capacity in our school leaders to develop good problem-solving skills and our whole school community to build stronger relationships” [Principal, ID2].

### ***Barriers to 'success' as encountered by the schools***

There were various challenges encountered regarding running the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme, with varying degrees of seriousness. The lack of time to train, coordinate and monitor mediators was perceived as a challenge, while coordination issues with teachers and students were perceived as problems that can be solved. The section on sustainability discusses issues regarding the challenges that some schools face regarding funding, resourcing and costing. A more serious challenge that could weaken the success of the Programme relates to the behaviour-based challenges encountered by the peer mediators. Two schools reported instances where older students were harassing peer mediators, while the peer mediators reported difficulties in mediating through violent situations. It should be noted that all cases of physical violence are dealt by the duty teacher rather than the Peer Mediators. However, these cases still seem to have an indirect impact on the mediators who may witness violence. While the Programme has been helpful in reducing bullying and violence in schools (refer to the impact section), it is evident that a reduction in violence is not the elimination of violence and these instances may fluctuate. Further, two Programme Coordinators described challenges associated with violence in the home and community environment of some of the students.

#### *a) Challenges with time management*

A lack of time to train, touch base and monitor the Programme has been mentioned in several open text fields in the survey. With the exception of a handful of schools (under 10), a lack of time in the school week remains a pertinent obstacle for most schools in the survey sample.



- ✦ “We can request release in order to get more time.” [Programme Coordinator, ID6].
- ✦ “Too much to fit into the curriculum regardless of how much it is integrated” [Programme Coordinator, ID7]
- ✦ “I think the strengths are that it helps children learn how to solve their own problems and I think having students do that with their peers is the strongest way because they often look up to their peers. The challenge again would be time for coordinators to train mediators and translating what the students are learning to the community.” [Programme Coordinator, ID8].
- ✦ “Sometimes time can be an issue when you’re trying to fit everything into a 30 minute lunchtime meeting while all the kids are trying to eat.” [Programme Coordinator, ID9].
- ✦ “I suppose there have been times where you have to train at lunchtime, that can be challenging especially if you have other roles within the school as well.” [Programme Coordinator, ID10].
- ✦ “Having the time and funding to train mediators fully. I now mix training with on the job experience and meetings to cover the skills needed.” [Programme Coordinator, ID11].
- ✦ “I guess the only real difficulties would be that there is conflict with other responsibilities and commitments for the students.” [Programme Coordinator, ID12].

*b) Programme coordination*

School-wide communication and integrating peace education concepts into the classroom environment was discovered to be a challenge by two Programme Coordinators:

- ✦ “I think the only problem is getting all the teachers on board and implementing this Programme in their classrooms.” [Programme Coordinator, ID13].
- ✦ “Getting teachers to implement the resolving conflict process within the classroom” Programme Coordinator, ID14].

*c) The home and community environment*

Introducing conflict resolution and mediation skills into the home and community environment of the students would benefit the lives of students in multiple ways as some live in violent environments:

- ✦ “Previously – many students come from homes where violence and non-communication is a huge part of their lives – to turn off this when they come to school is difficult – when students have difficulties at school – their parents want to “deal with” the other students parents – and this makes our job very difficult” [Programme Coordinator, ID15].
- ✦ “I think for us it would be the community, getting this Programme out to the parents and really promoting it by finding ways so it has relevance in a family setting.” [Programme Coordinator, ID16].

*d) Challenges for the Peer Mediators*

The evaluation discovered instances where Peer Mediators were victims of bullying and harassment themselves:

- ✦ “There was a situation when some of the older students were harassing their peers who were mediators. The mediators went to the duty teacher to resolve it. Another situation was over the exclusion of a group from a playground facility. This was resolved by designating a different time for them to use the facility” [Programme Coordinator, ID17].

Promoting the profile of the peer mediators was highlighted by a couple of Programme Coordinators as being a challenge. Further, it was reported that:

- ✦ “Some senior students are not always respectful to mediators if they are involved in the conflict resolution” [Programme Coordinator, ID18].

The evaluation also discovered the following instances of inconsistent expectations from the Peer Mediators across the school sample:

- ✦ “Children not following the rules of mediation or disagreeing that there is a problem - the mediators struggle to cope with these issues” [Programme Coordinator, ID19].
- ✦ “Keeping mediators motivated” [Programme Coordinator, ID20].
- ✦ “The strengths of it are that the children are learning the skills together. So, by the peer mediators talking them through how to problem solve, those children are then learning, and I think sometimes children tend to take note of their peers more. Although, when emotions run high and children are upset I think that the peer mediators are not always equipped to handle it.” [Programme Coordinator, ID21].

Conflicting expectations from Peer Mediators could also arise when they have not been trained accurately regarding the boundaries of their role as mediators:

- ✈ “Most of the difficulties arise from the kids not knowing whether the problem they are addressing is something they should deal with or hand over to the duty teacher.” [Programme Coordinator, ID22].

While it was not possible to obtain an accurate figure for the prevalence of physical violence across the sample, it was a persistent problem for 12 schools in the sample (see Table 1, p.9). Three Programme Coordinators explicitly stated that all cases of physical violence are handled by the duty teacher and not the mediators, clearly drawing responsible boundaries regarding the roles of the peer mediators: “Our mediators don't generally deal with challenging situations on their own. They involve the teacher on duty who usually takes over the mediation” [Programme Coordinator ID23].

Three of the Peer Mediators who were interviewed in the Auckland region expressed difficulties in cases where physical violence was involved while three further examples were provided during the interview, indicating that cases of physical violence is prevalent, but falls outside the scope of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme.

- ✈ “There have been some challenges, like if they don't listen it is kind of hard and when they get physical by punching and kicking.” [Peer Mediator, ID1].
- ✈ “Sometimes, like if the fighting gets really out of control and the person can't calm down even though we tried to help him.” [Peer Mediator, ID2].
- ✈ “Yeah sometimes when there is a big fight you can't really stop it and that is challenging.” [Peer Mediator, ID3].

### 3.3 The Contribution of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme

This section provides examples of how the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme has contributed to creating a more peaceful environment in the wider school community, facilitated positive behaviour, increased the academic performance and confidence of Peer Mediators and reduced teachers time spent solving conflicts.

#### ***Impact on the wider school community***

The impact the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme has on the whole school has been described as follows:

- ✦ “The peer mediators have a big presence in the school and when children get up to year 5 they often look forward to being a peer mediator” [Programme Coordinator, ID24].
- ✦ “I think within the school and on the playground, it has made a positive impact” [Programme Coordinator, ID25], while other Teacher Programme Coordinators reported an improvement in listening skills and students having more empathy for each other. Further, 41% of the Principals could remember positive responses from the parents of peer mediators and general visitors to the school.
- ✦ “Yes. Parents are very supportive and when their children come home with incentives from the peer mediators they know that their children have been a part of something positive” [Programme Coordinator, ID26].

Also, five Programme Coordinators stated the programme assisted them in their responsiveness to students and in other relationships in their personal lives. The impact the Programme has on the personal lives and home lives of students has been captured by one teacher: “students learn the art of mediation. To talk about their problems instead of acting them out – this has a direct impact on the way they can help sort out the difficulties at home. This is quite a different way to what would normally occur in many of their home lives” [Programme Coordinator, ID27].

All the Peer Mediators who were interviewed in the Auckland region claimed that the Programme has helped solve bullying in their school and has contributed to forming a positive environment:

- ✦ “It has really helped some other kids, like some kids get lonely and with peer mediation kids are able to be friends with the people helping them.” [Peer Mediator, ID4].
- ✦ “I think it has helped solve bullying and stuff because before the programme there were a bit more situations.” [Peer Mediator, ID5].
- ✦ “Its made coming to school more fun because I enjoy mediating.” [Peer Mediator, ID6].
- ✦ “Yes, it has because there are not much people making fun of other people” [Peer Mediator, ID7].<sup>3</sup>

As record keeping of violence and instances of bad behaviour is not systematically monitored across the sample, a statistical analysis of how the rates have lowered cannot be demonstrated in this evaluation. However, below are examples of behaviour change in students which the Programme Coordinators attribute to the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme (through their experience), even though the evaluation does not support causal evidence of direct attribution.

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<sup>3</sup> To clarify, due to the Programme, students do not make fun of each other anymore.

### ***Positive behaviour change***

A total of 90% of the Programme Coordinators indicated that students are better equipped to solve conflicts as a result of the Programme, while 72% reported seeing a positive behaviour change in their students after implementing the Programme, while 100% of the Programme Coordinators indicated that students benefited as a result of the Programme. Besides a general improvement of how students relate to one another, this quote demonstrates the desired impact the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme aims to achieve: “Yes, one student in particular who has had anger issues, he was in my classroom last year and I did a lot of work with him using the skills from our Peer Mediation Programme. This year he is in year 6, and he has become a Peer Mediator. All of my fellow teachers cannot believe how much he has evolved.” [Programme Coordinator, ID28].

- ✦ “It has been noted that there is positive behaviour change in the playground by duty teachers. It has also been noted that there has been behavioural change within the Peer Mediators themselves. It has definitely improved self-esteem when this has been an issue and given them a sense of achievement and pride in the good job that they do” [Programme Coordinator, ID29].
- ✦ “I feel there has definitely been an increase in positive behaviour in the playground and disputes are being solved quite quickly as the students now have the skills to discuss their problems and listen to others points of view.” [Programme Coordinator, ID30].
- ✦ “We have a trophy that we award at the final assembly at the end of the year for the child that has made the hugest transformation across the school – not academically - but in their behaviour. I believe in – if these students want to be mediators (at the beginning of the year) – training them too – and giving them the chance to turn their behavioural issues around – year after year I am absolutely thrilled when it comes to presenting this trophy as it is those students who have taken part in the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme that have made the biggest shift – they are now responsible citizens and making a contribution to the school – by setting a great example to their peers and the other students. – Behaviour changes, taking ownership, more respect for their school and their teachers and then the learning comes on board – this has happened now for the past 5 years and it is getting to the stage that it is a hard task at the end of the year choosing the student for this award as there are so many nominations” [Programme Coordinator, ID31].

### ***Academic performance***

Regarding improved academic performance, two teachers claim a change in some of the Peer Mediators:



- ✦ “ ...With some of the children that have decided to become Peer Mediators, I’m not sure about other children around the school, but definitely, the children that have decided to become Peer Mediators. It gives them this sense of pride and reasonability, and I think that has a ripple effect into their school work.” [Programme Coordinator, ID32].
- ✦ “There are some improvements as the students get older and I know in my class I’ve observed that it certainly has made a difference in their grades.” [Programme Coordinator, ID33].

Four of the Peer Mediators who were interviewed in the Auckland region claimed that they had seen a difference in their grades after becoming a Peer Mediator. The students claim that the Programme has also helped with their ability to get work done, their understanding of various issues, has improved their confidence and public speaking to name a few.

### ***Impact on teaching time***

The quotes below from Programme Coordinators illustrate how Peer Mediators can resolve problems that teachers previously had to devote time for:

- ✦ “I like the idea that the kids are solving the issues on the playground. This frees up time for teachers and like I said before, I feel that the only challenge is time. Students are often busy with other activities.” [Programme Coordinator, ID34].
- ✦ “Many years ago when we first started the Programme there was a lot of conflict in the playground. Although many of these conflicts were minor, the teacher had to be involved often. Due to the mediators doing their jobs, the teacher has very little to do in the playground now” [Programme Coordinator, ID35].

### ***Impact on the Peer Mediators***

From the sample of 10 Peer Mediators who were interviewed, the Programme has had a positive impact regarding increased confidence, understanding people better and their ability to solve problems. Four students also reported a difference in their academic performance since becoming a Peer Mediator. Six students indicated that the Programme had helped them with forming better relationships with family and friends.

The process of peer mediation is also aided if the school has a vision that is focused on restorative justice: “Peer mediation is an extension of the way we do restorative justice at our school - so it all works together. Our Peer Mediators don't deal with any really difficult situations - these are quickly referred to a teacher and dealt with

through a restorative conversation.” [Programme Coordinator, ID36].

### 3.4 Sustainability

This section discusses the sustainability of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme with relation to continued use, training and teaching resources, funding and the practicalities of making the Programme work within the constricted school week. Finally, the importance of monitoring the Programme to ensure success and sustainability is presented.

#### ***Use of the programme<sup>4</sup>***

All five schools that were interviewed in Auckland claimed that they will continue to subscribe to the programme and confirmed its sustainability in terms of meeting the school’s vision and goals.

- ✦ “With the new principal starting in Term 4 we still need to wait and see what changes with them but I would assume that nothing will change since we’ve been running this Programme for over a decade.” [Programme Coordinator, ID37].
- ✦ “People see the value in it. The history of this Programme being within our school for so long would also make parent community upset if it were to go.” [Programme Coordinator, ID38].
- ✦ “It’s a good thing for the community and it is invaluable for the children to get the opportunity to go to these trainings and gain leadership skills.” [Programme Coordinator, ID39].
- ✦ “It has helped the school and the children feel safer.” [Programme Coordinator, ID40].
- ✦ “Fits in perfectly with PB4L concept – students need ownership within the school and this Programme gives that – plus leadership opportunities” [Programme Coordinator, ID41].
- ✦ “Cool Schools has been now successfully interwoven into the Ranui way of life. It was great getting support from The Peace Foundation in the initial training and the follow up refresher course. It can be seen to be one person pushing the Programme and wanting the school to take it on but once the staff got the buy in – and saw the effect that it makes – the hard sell was done... the job is

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<sup>4</sup> Continued Programme usage was not a survey question.

ongoing and now my challenge is to spread the load so there is continuity – regardless of who is leading the Programme” [Programme Coordinator, ID42].

### ***Training and teaching resources***

The findings were mixed in terms of what schools anticipated they needed in terms of resourcing. Only 31% of the Principals could confirm that the school had sufficient human and physical resourcing to continue the Programme while 38.5% stated the opposite while the remainder were unsure. A total of 87% of the Programme Coordinators indicated they have adequate training while the rest indicated they did not. Two responses coded as ‘other’ stated that even though they had good-quality preliminary training, they wish to undertake a refresher course. Two Programme Coordinators indicated that it would help to have more time with the Cool Schools trainers. From the survey sample, six Programme Coordinators mentioned in comment form that they would like to have access to a refresher course and training opportunities closer to their geographic region (e.g. Cromwell). Three Programme Coordinators indicated a need for more training resources (including video-based training) for Peer Mediators. One Programme Coordinator mentioned a need for more resources tailored specifically for junior Peer Mediators.

### ***Funding***

From the survey sample, four Programme Coordinators indicated that continuing with funding is challenging for the school, and two indicated that the Cool School vests are too expensive.

### ***General feedback from Programme Coordinators on promoting the programme within the school and beyond***

- ✈ “I think it needs to be a whole school approach to start with and every couple of years it needs to be introduced into each classroom. Maybe this Programme could even be constructed into their lesson plans.” [Programme Coordinator, ID43]
- ✈ “I think we do it through our newsletters but I think we need to come up with more ways to access the community in order to get them involved” [Programme Coordinator, ID44].
- ✈ “To have older kids in high schools come in and share their experiences of being a Peer Mediator. They could mentor the younger students.” [Programme Coordinator, ID45].



- ✈ “Perhaps have clusters of schools that could have their own support meetings – much like the meetings that happen between PB4L schools – support meetings to be held either every second term or each term...budget to provide for release for teachers to attend and that would ensure that new teachers to the job could get support from a cluster of teachers – good to brainstorm ideas etc. – and to showcase what schools are doing well – know that there is a one day “peace day” and the newsletter but think that face to face for the adults running the course (rather than a training day) – could help that feeling of “I am the only one in the universe that is running this” feeling. [Programme Coordinator, ID46].
- ✈ “It could be applied to all of our senior students so they could participate in the Programme.” [Programme Coordinator, ID47].
- ✈ “Ideally, I would love if it could be apart of class time and that there could be a time once a fortnight to meet with my Peer Mediators in order to give them a proper lesson instead of trying to cram our lessons in during lunchtime.” [Programme Coordinator, ID48].

### 3.5 Monitoring

The data indicates that observing students in the playground, getting feedback from teachers and getting feedback from students are the most popular methods of monitoring each semester (see Table 3, below). While it is encouraging that 75% (12/16) monitor the Programme against the school's goals and targets, only 50% of the Principals claim to monitor the Programme by collating and analysing measurable data.<sup>5</sup> The interviewed Programme Coordinators demonstrated a variation in how they monitor and record incidents:

- ✦ “We do bullying surveys – we have just completed the Wellbeing at school survey (MOE)... we pride ourselves on the lengths we go to stamp out bullying but we are aware that this is an ongoing difficulty in our community. We have a check in and check out system at our school where students who are having difficulties in the class or playground check in at the beginning of the day to set goals and check out at the end of the day – and review their goals – we call it the PIKI Programme (Positive Intervention/Ka Pai Interactions)... this fits alongside the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme and integrates into our PB4L school wide philosophy” [Programme Coordinator, ID49].
- ✦ “Yes, I keep track of incidents and names of students that are repeat offenders. My role is to talk with those students and get to the root of their problem if they've been consistently accessing their Peer Mediators.” [Programme Coordinator, ID50].
- ✦ “We do in terms of what's happening out on the playground, but it has been one of our challenges to gain a solid monitoring system.” [Programme Coordinator, ID51].
- ✦ “Each year the data is gathered by the mediators on a number of incidents solved/not solved. Difficulties etc., are collated and presented to the staff – this directly corresponds with the mediators' feedback on the difficulties they face on a daily basis – i.e. (teachers not getting out on duty at the right time, teachers being on their cell phones during duty etc.). The report is given back to the staff and then presented to the Board of Trustees. This then sets the tone for the following term's staff meetings.” [Programme Coordinator, ID52].

Monitoring is not consistently undertaken by the schools, making it impossible to evaluate the impact of the Programme in a statistically significant manner. It is recommended that The Peace Foundation undertakes regular monitoring of the Programme in order to conduct a statistically significant evaluation in 2-3 years' time.

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<sup>5</sup> While this evaluation provides a baseline of the evaluation practices in the schools, a follow-up evaluation where the sample is limited to schools that collect measurable data would be valuable to gauge a variation in the types of data collected. Further, it will inform the aspects of the school (related to the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme) which change or do not change over time.



**Table 3: The prevalence of Monitoring across the school sample**

<b>[To Principals:] If yes, how does the school monitor the effectiveness of the Cool Schools Programme?</b>							
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>I don't know</b>	<b>Once a year</b>	<b>Twice a year</b>	<b>Each semester</b>	<b>Rating Average</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Monitoring progress against school goals and targets	2	2	3	3	2	3.08	12
Observing students in the playground or the classroom	0	0	1	1	12	4.79	14
Collating or analysing measurable data	3	2	2	1	5	3.23	13
Getting feedback from teachers	0	0	1	3	10	4.64	14
Getting feedback from students	0	0	2	3	8	4.46	13
Getting feedback from parents	4	3	5	0	2	2.50	14
Getting feedback from other members of the community	5	3	2	0	1	2.00	11
Other (please specify)							3
<b><i>answered question</i></b>							<b>15</b>
<b><i>skipped question</i></b>							<b>1</b>

## 4. Recommendations

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While the Programme was relevant to all schools in the evaluation sample, guidelines for integrating the Programme into teachers' lesson plans could be an effective support service. They may also mitigate some of the time constraints associated with running the Programme in schools.

The survey findings indicated that 54% of the bullying relates to prejudice against a person's identity (inclusive of race, gender, and religion). The quantitative findings were not supported by the interviews with Programme Coordinators, Principals, and Peer Mediators indicating that identity-based bullying could be unvoiced or invisible within the mainstream school community. It is recommended that the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme add a component highlighting the unacceptability of racism and identity-based prejudice.

Monitoring practice is sporadic across the sample, especially as time is a constraint. It is recommended that The Peace Foundation provide quarterly monitoring forms to the schools to better enable the provision of the following services:

- Assistance with promoting the Programme across the school including the school community. This may also aid the Peer Mediators who sometimes feel disrespected by older students;
- assistance with integrating mediation and conflict resolution concepts into teachers' lesson plans (where requested); and
- providing refresher courses to meet new challenges.

Some schools in financial hardship noted difficulties with affording the peer mediator vests. Therefore, a less conspicuous and inexpensive way of increasing the profile of Peer Mediators can be brainstormed.

It would be valuable to undertake annual follow-up surveys while encouraging schools to provide The Peace Foundation with feedback as and when they want to. For further research, it would be valuable to note the number of persistently violent bullies in a school and if they are under the care of Child, Youth and Family.

## 5. References

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## Appendix A: Letters of recruitment

### Generic recruitment e-mail to Cool Schools Co-ordinators

Dear (Name)

Thank you for your service as a Co-ordinator for the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme. The Peace Foundation is committed to delivering a quality programme to meet the goals and needs of your school. In order to monitor the progress of the programme, The Peace Foundation is collaborating with independent evaluators from the National Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago.

The programme will be evaluated by gathering information from a nation-wide online survey and by interviewing Co-ordinators located in Auckland, who have been in the role for over a year. Where possible, the evaluation team will interview (Auckland-based) Principals from selected schools in the sample.

We would very much appreciate your input in our evaluation. The evaluation involves completing a short survey, and for the Auckland region co-ordinators, participating in an optional face-to-face interview. The interview can be arranged if you are willing to be interviewed and if the evaluation team includes your school in the interview sample.

Please note that all responses are strictly confidential, and will be combined with responses from other schools when the aggregated report is written. Please indicate if you are available to participate in the evaluation by replying to this e-mail or by contacting The Peace Foundation at [evaluation@peacefoundation.org.nz](mailto:evaluation@peacefoundation.org.nz).

Thank you for your time and we look forward to hearing back from you.

Kind regards

The Peace Foundation

## Evaluation of the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme Recruitment Letter for School Principals

[Address]

Dear (Name of Principal)

Thank you for your subscription to The Peace Foundation as a Partnership School during 2015. Your support was very much appreciated. The Peace Foundation is committed to delivering a quality Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme to meet the goals and needs of your school. In order to monitor the progress of the programme, The Peace Foundation is collaborating with independent evaluators from the National Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago.

The programme will be evaluated by gathering information from a survey, and by interviewing Principals and teachers (who have been Cool Schools programme co-ordinators for over a year), as well as senior students (where possible). Finally, the evaluators would like to analyse school-wide statistics related to student expulsions and/or detentions (where this data is available).

We would very much appreciate your input in our evaluation. We would be grateful if you could please reply to this letter by e-mailing [evaluation@peacefoundation.org.nz](mailto:evaluation@peacefoundation.org.nz) in response to the following:

1. Your willingness to complete a survey (as soon as we receive your response, we will send you an electronic survey to complete within two weeks);
2. If you are willing to participate in face-to-face interview (interviews are likely to take place in May or June); and
3. If the school can share longitudinal statistics on expulsion and/or detention rates before and after the Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme was implemented.

Please note that all responses are strictly confidential and will be combined with responses from other schools when the aggregated report is written. If you have any queries regarding the evaluation, please contact me at [nissanmari@gmail.com](mailto:nissanmari@gmail.com) and I will respond to your query within three working days.

Thank you  
Kind regards

Marie Nissanka (Lead Evaluator)  
PhD Candidate / Research Assistant  
National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies  
University of Otago