

School-wide Systems Change to Strengthen Prevention

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Why environments, not lessons, determine prevention outcomes

A new curriculum alone will not prevent sexual and family violence. School-wide environments that consistently reinforce protective factors will.

In most schools, students are already being taught about consent, respect, identity, and relationships. What is less consistent is the environment around that learning. Students move from lessons into everyday school life where autonomy is not always upheld, inclusion is not always reflected in practice, and boundaries are not always respected in real situations.

Students describe being told they have a voice, while experiencing environments where decisions are made without them. They speak about boundaries in class, then see those boundaries dismissed or minimised in peer interactions or adult responses. They learn about respect and inclusion, while moving through spaces where language and behaviour do not consistently reflect it.

Over time, those lived experiences carry more weight than the lesson itself.

This is where prevention breaks down. The system is asking young people to carry new learning into environments that still reinforce the norms that allow harm to persist. Young people are not separate from that system. They are shaped by it.

Strengthening curriculum alone will not shift this. Prevention of sexual and family violence depends on protective factors. Safety, belonging, inclusion, respect, and having boundaries upheld are built through everyday experience, not information.

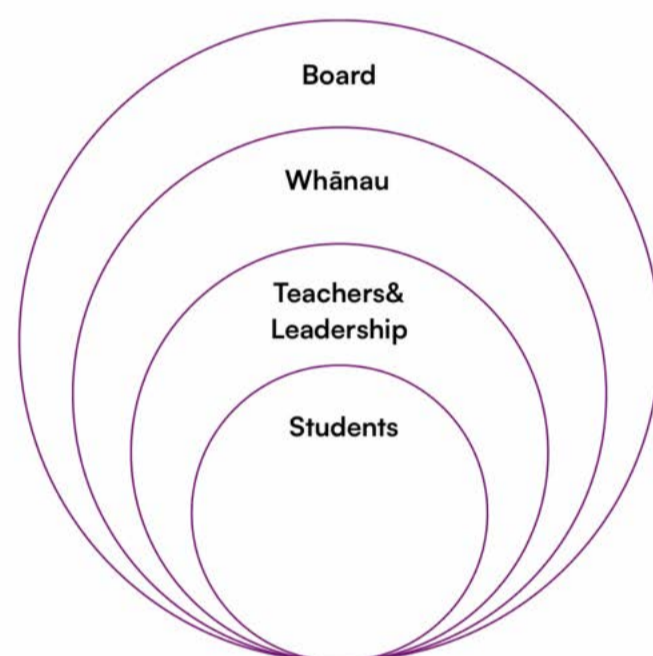
Schools matter because they organise those experiences. They are one of the few places where multiple layers of a young person's environment can be influenced together, consistently, and over time. They bring together students, teachers, leadership, boards, and whānau within a shared environment where interactions are repeated and norms are reinforced daily. What is normalised there shapes how young people move between school, whānau, and wider community, and whether they experience those environments as having their back or not.

Whole of School Approach HIKITIA! - FOR OUR FUTURE

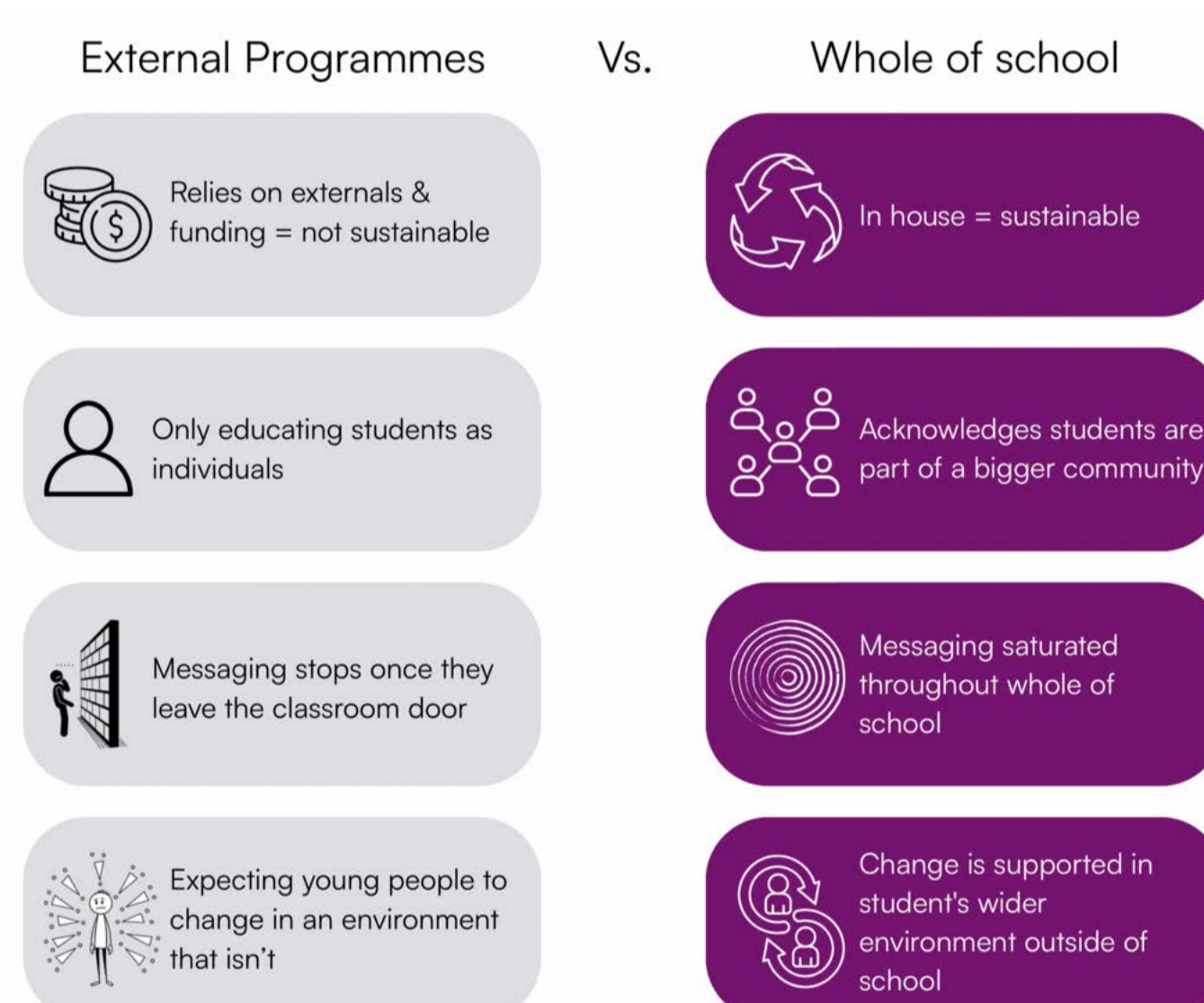
Creating safe futures for our rangatahi/ young people through collaboration and action

Opportunities

- ✓ Amplifying youth voice
- ✓ Training and PD
- ✓ Ongoing relational support
- ✓ Resourcing
- ✓ Whānau/parent hui
- ✓ Weaving prevention through curriculum



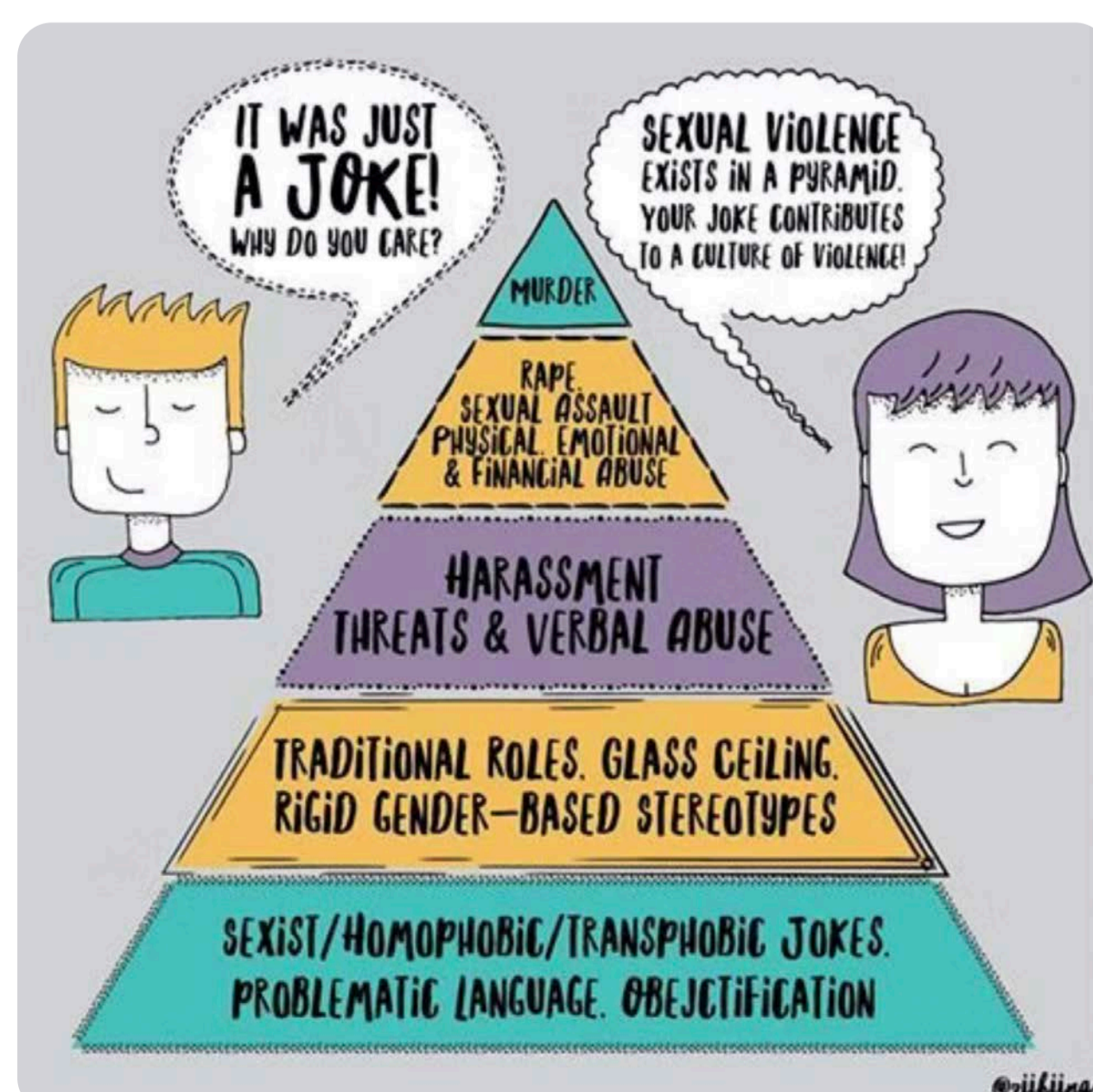
The shift required is from external programme delivery to school-wide ownership. External delivery can reach students, but it relies on outside funding, treats students as the main site of change, and often stops at the classroom door. A whole-of-school approach builds the school's capacity to carry prevention through leadership, staff practice, curriculum, youth voice, whānau engagement, and ongoing relational support. Because this sits in how the school operates, it can be embedded, sustained, and scaled across schools, rather than relying on repeated external delivery.



The work is to identify where the system is reinforcing the wrong conditions, and work alongside schools to shift what is consistently reinforced in everyday practice, so prevention is carried by the environment rather than left to external programmes or individual students.

This sits in how authority is exercised, how participation is expected, how staff respond in real time, how language signals power and belonging, and how harm is acknowledged or minimised. These are system behaviours, repeated across hundreds of interactions each day, shaping what becomes normal.

This shows up in how quickly behaviour is dismissed as "just joking," how reports of harm are downplayed or redirected, and how responses differ depending on who is involved. These moments are not isolated. They signal what is tolerated, what is taken seriously, and what is expected.



Ownership of these conditions does not sit with students. It sits with the system, and with the communities that shape how schools operate. Leadership, governance, and those shaping how schools operate influence what is consistently reinforced. Without that level of ownership, prevention remains something that is taught, not something the environment upholds.

The opportunity is to shift what is consistently reinforced so that protective factors are strengthened through everyday practice, not left to be carried by students.

That is the work.

ToC

If we work with schools and their communities to shift focus from delivering content to shaping environments, they can intentionally reinforce protective factors through everyday practice, influencing how prevention is carried across the wider system.