

(The following appears in a shortened form in Myers, K., Adler, S., Leonard, D., Taylor, H., (2007) Genderwatch: still watching..., Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books)

School Climate

Rosalyn George and John Wadsworth

Factors that make up the school climate are varied and there is often a complex interrelationship between them. Because of this, readers may find it helpful to consult other schedules in 'Genderwatch: still watching...' in conjunction with this one for a greater level of detail. Where links are obvious these have been indicated at the beginning of each section.

The elements that make up the climate of the school are complex ranging from the quality of interactions between teachers and students to the physical structure of the building and the policies that govern the day to day business of the school. Ellis defined school climate as 'an aggregate of indicators both subjective and objective that conveys the overall feeling or impression one gets about a school' (1988 p.1)

Where the needs, aspirations and potential of all are valued, nurtured and respected, the school climate is more likely to be one where issues of gender bias, race equality and disability lie at the heart of all levels and areas of activity.

The climate will be affected by the perceptions about the school from parents, carers and members of the wider community as well as students and staff working within it. No one factor can, on its own, determine a school climate or its consequential influence on students learning and their experience of the school process. It is the interaction between a number of contributory factors that create a 'fabric of support' (Freiberg, H.J. 1999) that enables a positive environment for learning and teaching to take place.

The school climate will to an extent be determined by the management or leadership style of the head teacher. Judy Marshall (1994) argues powerfully about female values in

leadership and highlights the need for them to complement the traditional male perspectives that have prevailed. She suggests that women leaders are likely to be more comfortable than men with uncertainty and are therefore more likely to ‘find ways to inquire together’ and to listen with respect with others, especially when their view are different from *their* (our emphasis) own’ (Marshall, J. 1994). Where leadership and management is underpinned by more female values, there is likely to be a significant difference from those where dominant values of strength, control and ‘blue sky visions’. *‘Because they step outside the dominant viewpoint, initiatives which welcome the feminine are, by definition, more diversity-respecting than uniformity-seeking’*(Judy Marshall, 1994:172)

Inevitably when focusing on a particular aspect of school climate there will be a degree of overlap and possible replication with the other sections in *Genderwatch*. Nevertheless this serves to underline the contribution of all elements to the overall school climate. We have chosen to illustrate the complex interplay of elements and factors that contribute to the development of a positive school climate as a ‘weave’ (Figure 1) echoing Freiberg’s ‘fabric of support’.

Weave illustrating elements that contribute to the School Climate

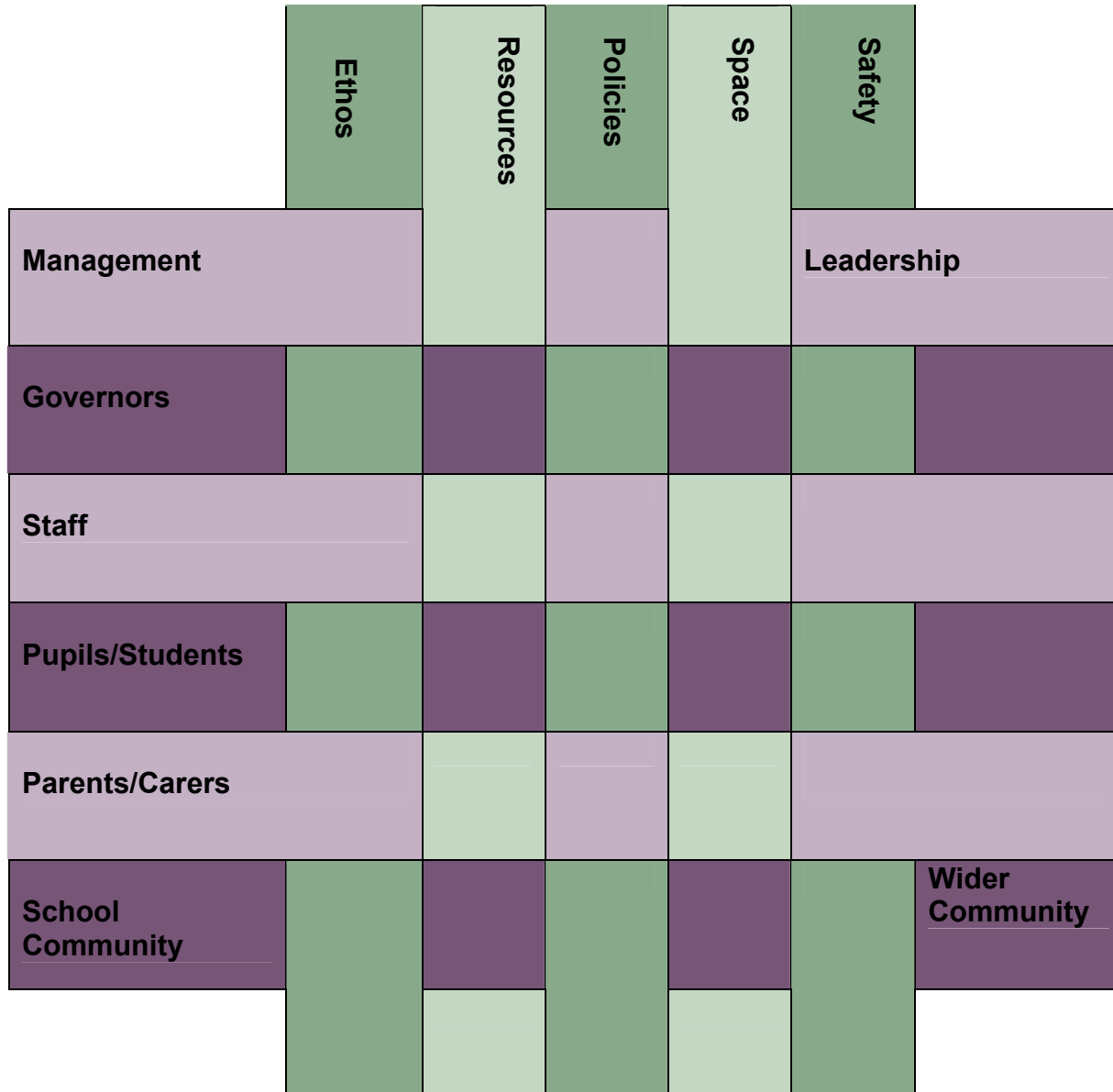


Figure 1: This weave illustrates the interrelationships between all the factors that make up the school climate, like the thread in a piece of fabric, each element contributes to the make up of the whole.

THE SCHOOL CLIMATE 1

The School Community (ethos, resources, policies, space, safety)

The practices and procedures that underpin the school community will at times be determined by legislation and should therefore be non-negotiable. Others such as the allocation of resources, internal policies and the equitable use of space are more fluid and open to negotiation by all members of the school community. Where the school climate places a high value on equality of opportunity there is a greater likelihood that the needs and interests of girls and boys will be accorded equal importance. This will also apply in relation to other issues such as race, class, disability, and sexuality. Because of the integrated nature of the factors that contribute to the school climate in order to make monitoring more manageable, we have chosen to deal with these elements separately.

NB There is no hierarchy implied in the order in which we have listed the following.

Ethos

The ethos of a school is created through an interaction between the formal processes governing behaviour, attitudes, relationships and the curriculum alongside the informal messages given out via displays, documentation, newsletters, use of resources and public space.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Do displays and notices in public areas reflect the diversity of the school community; promote positive images of women, disability, and race?
- Are languages other than English in evidence?
 - Is information about the school available in languages other than English including for the deaf and hard of hearing?
- Does the documentation produced by the school (prospectus, newsletters etc.) demonstrate a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice?

- Are policies on gender, race, disability and bullying displayed prominently for the benefit of visitors and parents?
- Is there consistency in the way people are treated?
 - Are women/men girls/boys treated equitably?
 - Are assemblies and PHSE used to promote the shared values of the school community and an anti-discriminatory approach?
- Is it clear that the principles of anti-discriminatory practice are non-negotiable?
- Are there facilities for parents/carers and other members of the school community to meet?
- Do staff model good anti-discriminatory practice, in their relationships with each other?
- Are staff respectful of all pupils/students?
- Is this model of behaviour reflected by the pupils/students?
- Is there any evidence that stereotypical thinking is challenged?
- Who does the challenging and is this done in an active or passive way?
- Does the school promote collaborative ways of working between pupils/staff?
- Are there systems in place to induct all new members of the school community into the shared values and ethos of the school?
- What systems are in place to ensure that all new members of the school community are able to play a full and active part in the life of the school?
- Are the different dietary needs of faith and other cultures catered for?
- Does the dining hall provide a tranquil, clean and stress free environment?

Policies

See also schedules on relevant Legislation p. 8, Leadership p. 19, It's my school: the power of pupil voice p. 85

Policies include those which are statutory and those which are important to the maintenance of a positive and fair learning environment. It is important that all policies reflect a set of values that are shared and seen to be upheld by all members of the school community. They should be subjected to regular review by all stakeholders to ensure that they continue to meet the changing needs and circumstances of the school.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Are there equal opportunities policies in place?
 - Are they up-to-date?
 - Are they effective?
- Is there evidence that all members of the school community have had the opportunity to contribute to these policies?
- Is there evidence of a whole school approach to equal opportunities?
- Is there evidence that issues of equality are dealt with effectively?
- How often are policies reviewed?
 - Are all parties involved in this process?
- Is there monitoring of equal opportunities policies?
 - For example, are incidents of sexual harassment recorded and acted on?
 - How are students and staff made aware that incidents have been dealt with?
- Are there support systems in place for pupils/students/staff who have been subjected to gender/racist abuse and/or bullying and harassment?
- How are all members of the school community made aware of the Equal Opportunities policies?
- Are there safe ways of reporting incidents?

- What systems are in place for supporting new members of the school community?
- What systems are in place to ensure that mentors are trained and made aware of and sensitive to issues of equity, diversity?

Resources

See also schedules on Governors p.24, Leadership and management. 19, student voice p. 85, Learning and teaching p.113, Budget management p. 29

The ways in which resources are allocated and used will reflect the degree to which different group's interests, issues and concerns are valued or perceived. An unfair distribution of financial and material resources can give powerful messages about the value placed on different interest groups within the school.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Are resources equitably distributed to women and men/girls and boys? For example playground space, resourcing of boys games
- Do the resources in terms of books and equipment take account of the diverse school community and wider society?
- How does the school ensure that both girls and boys have equal access to resources and equipment?
- How are resources/ equipment presented in a way that does not encourage dependency of girls on boys and vice versa? (e.g. tools in design technology)

Space

See also schedules on design for Learning p.113, It's my school: the power of pupil voice p. 85, Home-School relations p. 62, Legislative framework p.8, Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs p. 100

The use of space and accommodation is an important consideration for creating an anti-discriminatory school climate. Careful monitoring and strategic planning can ensure that the use of space is not dominated by a few over the needs of the many. It will also take account of the different needs of younger/older students, staff and members of the wider community as well as those of different cultural and gender groupings.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- To what extent has the school adapted its buildings to meet the requirements of the Disability Act?
 - Are all areas within the school grounds accessible to people with disabilities?
- To what extent does the school meet the needs of parents/carers with pre-school aged children?
 - For example are there facilities for parents to change nappies, breast feed, use the toilet?
- To what have the needs of working parents been addressed by the school's response to the extended schools agenda?
 - For example by making space available for breakfast and after school provision?
- Is the use of the playground monitored to ensure that no one group dominates the space available?
- Is it assumed that girls will have responsibility for keeping spaces clean and tidy?
- Do teaching and non-teaching staff have equal access to the staff room and other communal rest areas?
- Is the accommodation, including the playground well lit and maintained?

- To what extent are the needs of different communities and faiths accommodated?
- Does the welcome area reflect the same level of resourcing as the rest of the school?
 - For example can the attractiveness of the foyer be reflected in the teaching and rest spaces?

Safety

The extent to which all members of the school community feel safe and valued will be a reflection on the school climate and the degree to which an anti-discriminatory approach has been adopted. This aspect of health and safety should be accorded the same level of importance as statutory legislation.

See also schedules on Legislative framework (Health & safety) p. 8, Design for Learning p. 32

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Are there safe havens within the playground for younger pupils/students, girls, quieter boys and other marginalised groups?
- Are all playground supervisors aware of the potential for playground bullying, domination of space by small interest groups?
- Are toilet areas properly resourced to meet the needs of all students?
 - Are they monitored regularly to ensure student safety and that standards of cleanliness are maintained?
- Are there procedures in place for ensuring that women and men are safe when working late or alone or when carrying out home visits in the local community?

THE SCHOOL CLIMATE 2

The school community (management, governors, staff, pupils/students, parents/carers, wider community)

The interplay between the different members of the school community will be determined by the extent to which they share ownership of policies, resources and space, together with a consensual set of values and approaches that are ‘owned’ by everyone. How this translates into practice will be determined to a degree by the power relationships within the school community, legislative frameworks, governance and the degree of level of trust and respect operating in and between the different members of the school community. Because of the complexities involved in monitoring these inter-relationships, they have been broken down into six different groups. However it is important to remember, that a community is interlinked and each group within it is dependant on the other.

NB There is no hierarchy implied in the order in which we have listed the following.

Management/leadership

See also schedules Leadership p. 19, It’s my school: the power of pupil voice p. 85 Design for Learning p. 32, Uniform and Dress Codes p. 82, Using the School Budget p. 29, Relevant Legislation p. 8, Learning and Teaching p. 113

The style of management and leadership of the school is critical in determining the overall school climate. Where school leaders model inclusive and anti-discriminatory practices these are likely to be adopted by other members of the school community. They are likely to ensure that the all important monitoring and review processes take place.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Does the vision for the school reflect concerns regarding gender and other aspects of equality?
- Is that vision owned by the whole school community both teaching and non-teaching staff?
- Is the culture enabling does it promote a positive ethos where women and men, girls and boys can be comfortable and empowered?
 - Does the senior management team reflect the gender and ethnic make up of the staff?

Governors

See also schedules Leadership p. 19, Design for Learning p. 32, Uniform and Dress Codes p. 82, Governors p. 24, Using the School Budget p. 29, Relevant Legislation p. 8

School governors have a critical role to play in upholding and maintaining the agreed and shared values of the school. Their role therefore goes beyond the statutory requirements and requires them to take a proactive approach and interest in the allocation of resources, development of policies and reporting and monitoring of racist and sexist incidents.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Are women and men more or less equally represented on the governing body?
For example, who holds key positions such as chair, vice chair?
- Does the make up of the governing body reflect the make up of the school and the wider community?
- Have the governing body had equal opportunities training?
- To what extent do they implement equality legislation; Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act, Sex Discrimination Act?
 - To what extent do they monitor racist and sexist incidents?
- Has the governing body had interview training to ensure fair practices in staff appointments?
- To what extent are governors encouraged to monitor Equal Opportunities practices when they visit the school during the school day?
- Do all female and male governors feel they have an equal voice at meetings?
- To what extent are governors aware which members of staff have a specific responsibility for Equal Opportunities?
- Do the governing body ensure that resources are allocated fairly/equitably across the whole school community?

Staff

See also schedules Leadership p. 19, Design for Learning p. 32, Uniform and Dress Codes p. 82, Governors p. 24 It's my school: the power of pupil voice p. 85 Learning and teaching p. 113, Early Childhood Education p. 156, Classroom Interaction p. 130, The 14 – 19 Curriculum p. 159, Continuing Professional Development p. 46

Staff have a key role to play in modelling and upholding the shared and agreed values of the school community. This is manifested through their relationships with each other and with pupils/students and their parents/carers.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Are full-time and part-time staff treated equitably?
- Are job-shares available and applicable at all levels?
- Do all staff have equal access to representation on the governing body?
- Are positions of responsibility both at senior management level and across curriculum areas occupied by women and men proportionately to their representation within the staffing body?
- Do women and men have responsibility for curriculum areas that fall outside traditional stereotypes?
- Are there any arrangements to ensure that the timing of staff meetings and other decision making forums does not unduly disadvantage women and part-time staff?
- Do staff talk about or to children in ways that indicate stereotyped thinking?
- Do staff have high expectations of all children?
- Do staff treat girls and boys differently?
- Does the content of the curriculum reflect gender, ethnic and cultural diversity?
- Do all staff model anti-discriminatory practice in their teaching and relationships with pupils?
- Do staff have access to training that supports the development of anti-discriminatory practice?

Pupils/Students

See also schedules Personal, Social and Health Education p. 216, Design for Learning p. 32, Uniform and Dress Codes p. 82, It's my school: the power of pupil voice p. 85 Learning and Teaching p. 113, Early Childhood Education p. 156, Home-School relations p. 62

A whole school approach to anti-discriminatory practice needs to recognise the key role that pupils/students have to play in upholding the agreed set of values. It follows that it is important to make provision for the student voice to be heard, particularly when policy and practice is being developed. It is also important that pupils/students are able to see that sexist, racist and bullying behaviour is taken seriously and dealt with by both management and staff.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- What strategies are in place to encourage and promote independence and autonomy for both girls and boys?
- Do girls and boys have equal access to teacher's time and attention?
- Do girls and boys have an equal voice in the decision making process within the school as required by the Education Act 2002?
 - Is there a School's Council?
 - Are there democratic processes in place for electing members?
 - In mixed schools, are girls and boys equally represented on the School's Council?
 - Is the diversity of the school community reflected in the make up of the School's Council?
- How are pupils able to contribute to the policy making process?
- Do pupils share the same understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable as the management and staff?

- How are pupils/students reminded about school policies (gender, 'race', homophobia, bullying, class, disability)?
- Do pupils have the same view of the effectiveness of policies and systems for redress as management and staff?
- Do girls and boys see all areas of provision and curriculum as being available to them?
- Do the school uniform/dress codes respond to cultural diversity of the school community?
- Does the school adhere to Equal Opportunities with regard to school uniform for example; are girls allowed to wear trousers to school?

Parents/Carers

See section Governors p. 24, Uniform and Dress code p. 82, Relevant Legislation p. 8, Design for Learning p. 32, Home-School relations p. 62

Government legislation is creating an increasingly important role for parents and carers in their relationship with schools. This includes both parent's rights and responsibilities and the requirement for schools to be more supportive of working parents and carers. For a school to develop a climate that is anti-discriminatory it is essential that the voice of parents and carers is heard so that they too are able to contribute to and uphold an agreed set of values.

Areas for reflection and enquiry

- Does the school promote parent/carer partnership that recognises the needs and aspirations of all parties?
- Are all parents/carers treated respect and in a non-judgemental way?
- How does the school respond to different family set ups?
For example, are assumptions made that they will be nuclear/heterosexual or that all carers are female?
- Does correspondence and communication with the home acknowledge different family setups or caring arrangements?
- How are parents/carers made aware of school policies on gender, race, disability class and sexuality?
 - Are there any arrangements in place for parents to contribute to the development of policies?
- To what extent are the different communication needs of parents catered for?
- Are parents treated differently according to their gender, race, sexuality, economic status, marital status?
- To what extent are parents aware of the grievance/complaints procedures?
- What arrangements are there in place for the voices of all parents and carers to be heard?

References

- DfES (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools*, London, HMSO
- Ellis, T.I. (1988) 'School Climate', *Research Roundup*, **4**, 2
- Freiberg, H.J. (1999) *School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments*, London, Falmer
- Freiberg, H.J. (1999) *Beyond behaviourism: changing the classroom management paradigm*, Needham Heights; Allyn and Bacon
- HMSO (1995) *The Disability Discrimination Act*, London, HMSO
- HMSO (2000) *The Race Relations Amendment Act*, London, HMSO
- HMSO (2002) *The Education Act*, London, HMSO
- Marshall, J. (1994) *Re-visioning organizations by developing female values in* Boot, R., Lawrence, J., Morris, (Eds) *Managing the unknown: by creating new futures*, London; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co