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## 2. Student wellbeing and positive behaviour

Fostering student wellbeing has been an implicit part of primary school provision for a long time. It was explicitly mentioned in the 1999 Health and Physical Education curriculum guidelines. Student wellbeing has recently come to the fore in the Government's overarching Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy launched in August 2019.<sup>6</sup>

In our 2016 national survey report we provided an overview of the work done in education since 2009 in relation to student wellbeing and positive behaviour, and offered frameworks for understanding the approaches used by schools in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>7</sup>

We start this section with a focus on school-wide approaches to support student wellbeing and related practices and programmes, including approaches to assist students who need extra wellbeing support, and the support for mental health. We touch briefly on the provision of a focus on healthy relationships within sexuality education as part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

The terrorist attacks on mosques in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 underlined the significance of respect for diversity. We next report what principals said about school knowledge and resources to support student understanding of, and respect for, diversity, and teachers' views of their own knowledge and resources to support this.

We then describe teacher reports of school and classroom practices to support student wellbeing, followed by parent and whānau views of their child's feelings of belonging and safety, and school support to develop attitudes and skills that contribute to their own and others' wellbeing.

Finally, we focus on what schools and teachers are doing to promote positive behaviour. Trustee views related to student behaviour follow. We provide some evidence about the increasing challenges of disruptive and extreme behaviour for teachers. We finish with principals' reports of the support and advice they have in relation to supporting wellbeing and positive behaviour.

### Most schools have an active focus on student wellbeing

Most principals reported that their school uses four of the six approaches to student wellbeing we asked about, more often at the 'partially embedded' than 'well embedded' level.

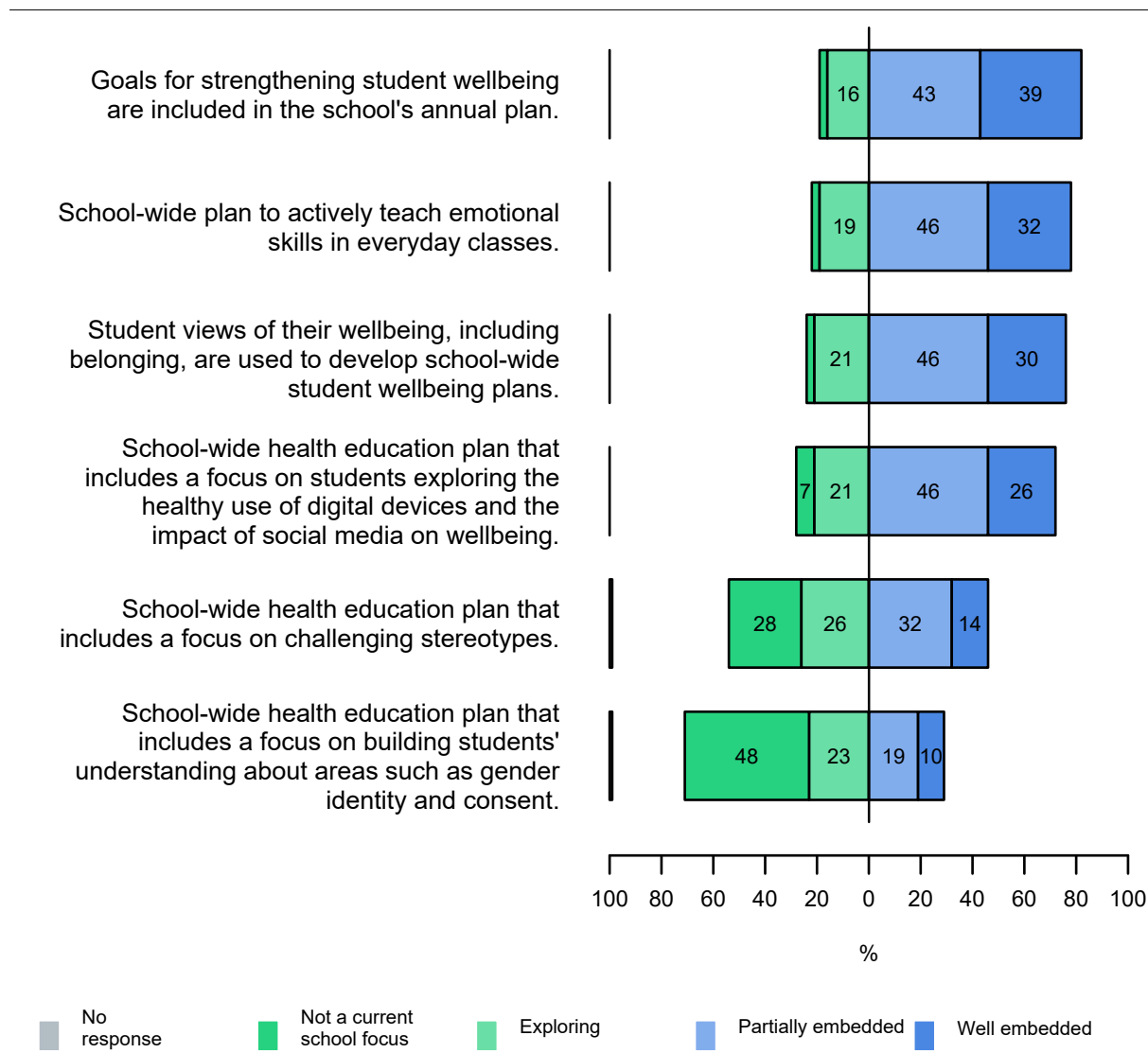
Including goals for student wellbeing in the school annual plan was the most often well embedded approach, followed by a school-wide plan to actively teach emotional skills in everyday classes, the use of student views to develop school-wide student belonging plans, and a focus on the healthy use of digital devices. Less common was a focus on challenging stereotypes. Student understanding about gender identity and consent was the least common approach used in primary schools. Figure 1 has the details.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

<sup>7</sup> Boyd, S., Bonne, L., & Berg, M. (2017). *Finding a balance—fostering student wellbeing, positive behaviour, and learning*. NZCER. [https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/National%20Survey\\_Wellbeing\\_for%20publication\\_0.pdf](https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/National%20Survey_Wellbeing_for%20publication_0.pdf)

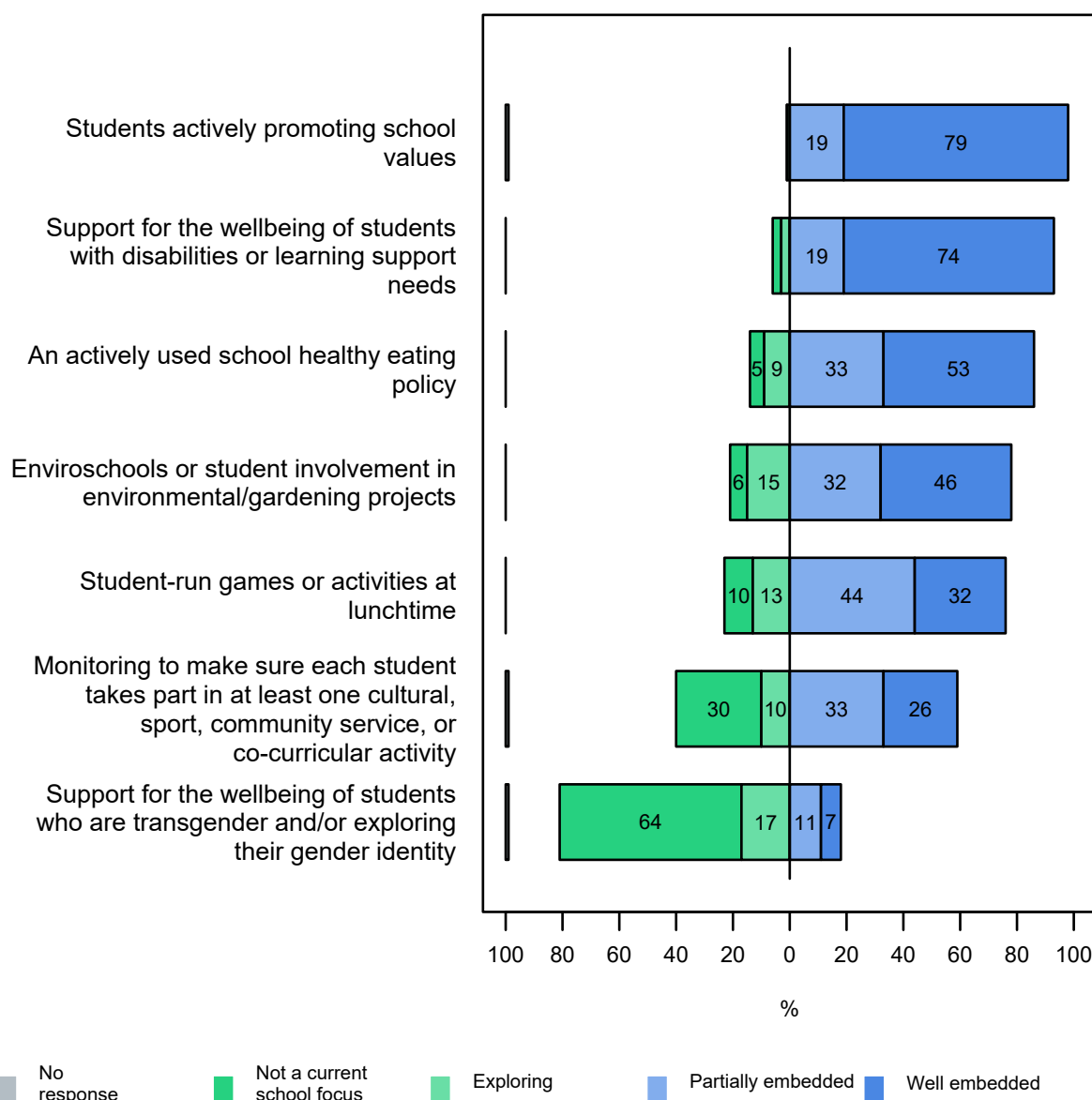
FIGURE 1 School-wide approaches to support student wellbeing (Principals, n = 145)



We also asked one of these items in 2016, school-wide plans to actively teach emotional skills in everyday classes. There was little change in 2019, indicating an aspect that may need more system support. Health education plans are less embedded than other school-wide approaches. This may suggest a need for more system support if primary schools are going to do more to challenge stereotypes and build understanding about gender identity and consent.

Primary schools commonly have a range of practices and programmes that support student wellbeing (Figure 2). Almost all principals reported that students actively promoting school values, and school support for students with disabilities or learning support, were well embedded. Just over half had a well embedded actively used school healthy eating policy, and just under half reported that EnviroSchools or student involvement in environmental/gardening projects was well embedded. Around a third had well embedded lunchtime student-run games or activities, and around a quarter monitored student activity to ensure they take part in cultural, sport, community service, or co-curricular activity. Few had a focus on the wellbeing of transgender students or those exploring their gender identity, again indicating an area that may need more system support.

FIGURE 2 Practices and programmes supporting student wellbeing (Principals, n = 145)



We also included five of these items in the 2016 national survey. There were increases for three of these items, indicating more school attention to student wellbeing. More principals in 2019 reported

- an actively used school healthy eating policy (53% well embedded, compared with 37% in 2016)
- Enviroschools or student involvement in environmental/gardening projects (46% well embedded, compared with 31% in 2016)
- monitoring individual participation in co-curricular activity (26% well embedded compared with 10% in 2016).

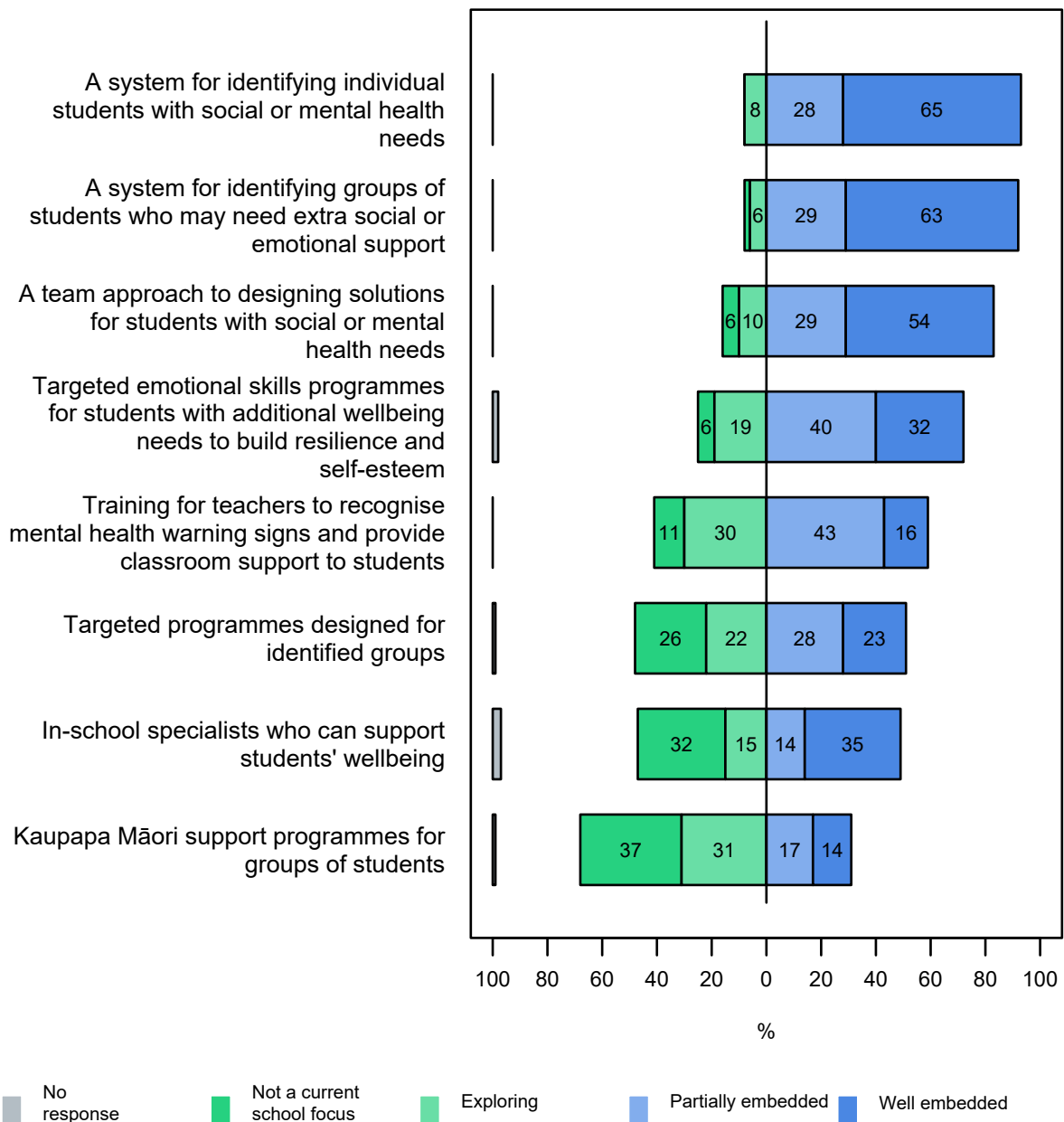
There was no change in the overall picture of having students actively promote school values, or student-run lunch-time games or activities.

School decile was associated with how well-embedded an actively used school healthy eating policy was (75% of decile 1 and 2 school principals reported this, as did 67% of decile 3 and 4 school principals, 39% of decile 5 and 6 school principals, 55% of decile 7 and 8 school principals, and 31% of decile 9 and 10 school principals).

## Many schools have approaches to assist students who need extra wellbeing support

Figure 3 shows that many schools had well embedded systems of identifying individuals and groups with social or mental health needs. Over half had a well embedded team approach to designing solutions for them, and a third had in-school specialists to support student wellbeing. Training for teachers to recognise mental health warning signs and provide classroom support was less common, and least common were targeted programmes and kaupapa Māori programmes for students who need extra wellbeing support.

FIGURE 3 Approaches to assist students who need extra wellbeing support (Principals, n = 145)



In-school specialists to support student wellbeing were reported most by decile 1 and 2 school principals (79%).

### More schools are focusing on student mental health needs

We also asked this set of items in 2016. More principals in 2019 now reported:

- training for teachers to recognise mental health warning signs and provide classroom support (59% well or partially embedded in 2019, compared with 15% in 2016)
- a system for identifying individual students with social or mental health needs (65% well embedded compared with 44% in 2016)
- a system for identifying groups of students with social or mental health needs (63% well embedded, compared with 52% in 2016).

Fewer principals now reported targeted programmes designed for identified groups (51% well or partially embedded in 2019, compared with 63% in 2016).

There was little change for the other four items in this set.

However, although more schools were now responding to students' mental health needs, 63% of principals identified support for students with mental health or additional wellbeing needs as a major issue for their school: one of the top four issues (see Table 34 on p. 163). Student behaviour was also identified by 28% of principals as a major issue—little changed from the 21% in 2016—and 15% identified student bullying, including cyber bullying.

Support for students with mental health or additional wellbeing needs was identified by 26% of the trustees as a major issue facing their school; 15% also identified student behaviour, and 10%, student bullying as major issues.

### Most schools include sexuality education in policies and procedures

Sexuality education is part of the Health and Physical Education learning area. The guidance for schools shows that it is framed within the development of wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

Most schools have included sexuality education in their policies and procedures (78%), and many (60%) have included age appropriate relationships and sexuality education in their Health and Physical Education curriculum. However, just over a third had had PLD on the recent changes to the national Health and Physical Education curriculum, as shown in Figure 4.

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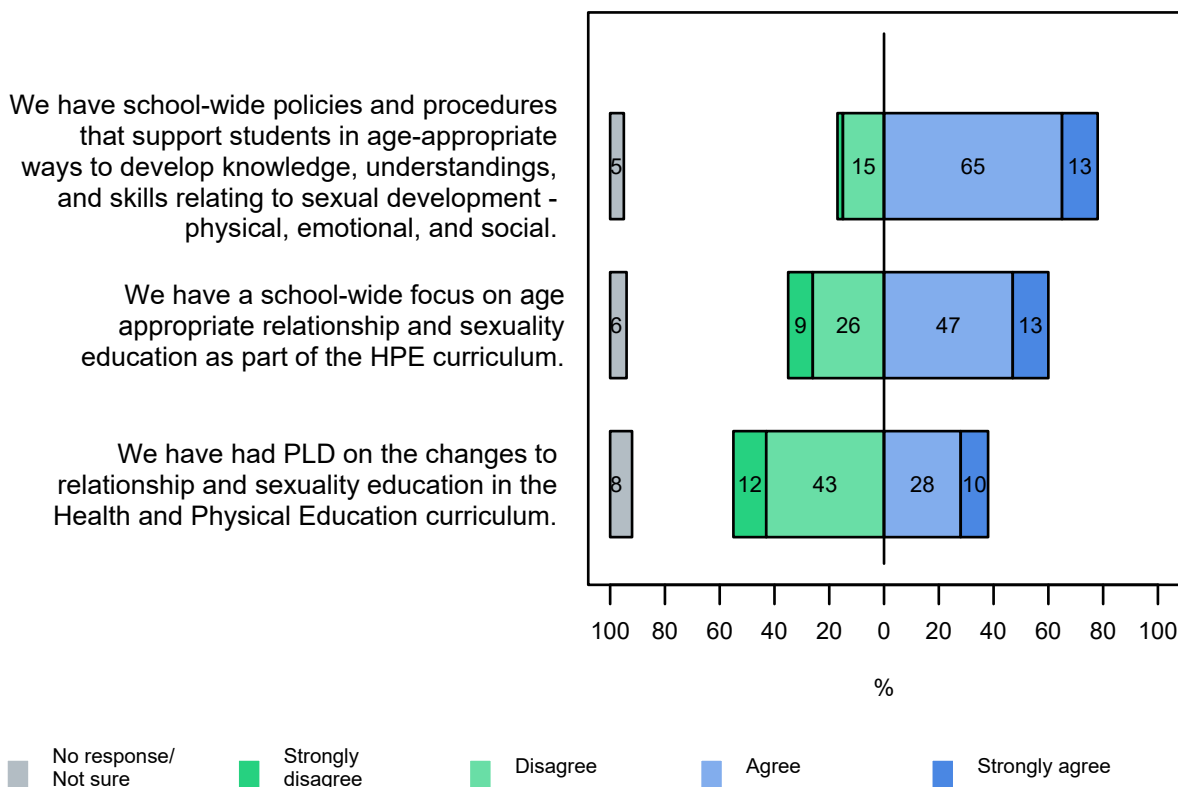
8 <https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-guidelines/Sexuality-education-a-guide-for-principals-boards-of-trustees-and-teachers/Sexuality-education-in-The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>.

“All young people need access to information and opportunities to think about, question, and discuss issues related to relationships, gender, sexual identities, sexual orientation, sexual behaviour, sexual and reproductive health, and societal messages. Sexuality education provides a framework in which this can happen.”

The 2015 Relationship education programmes guide is at:

<https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-guidelines/Relationship-Education-Programmes-Guide-for-Schools>

FIGURE 4 Sexuality education (Principals, n = 145)



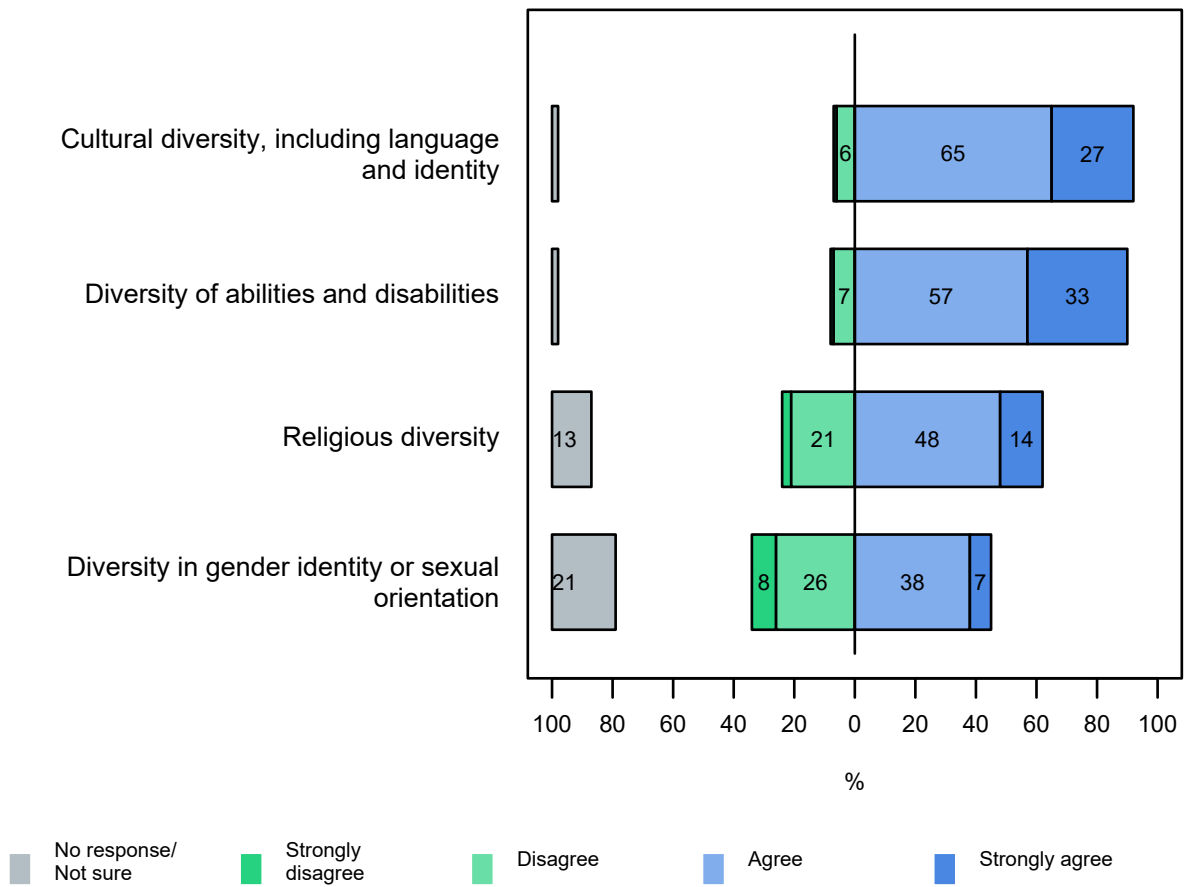
### More confidence around supporting student understanding and respect for some forms of diversity than others

In a set of questions about school culture, we asked teachers to indicate how well their school was seeing all forms of student diversity as a resource and a strength, not as a difficulty. Just under a third of teachers (32%) reported this to be happening very well at their school, and 39% to be happening well—71% overall.

We also asked principals and teachers to indicate their confidence in relation to supporting student understanding and respect for four kinds of diversity.

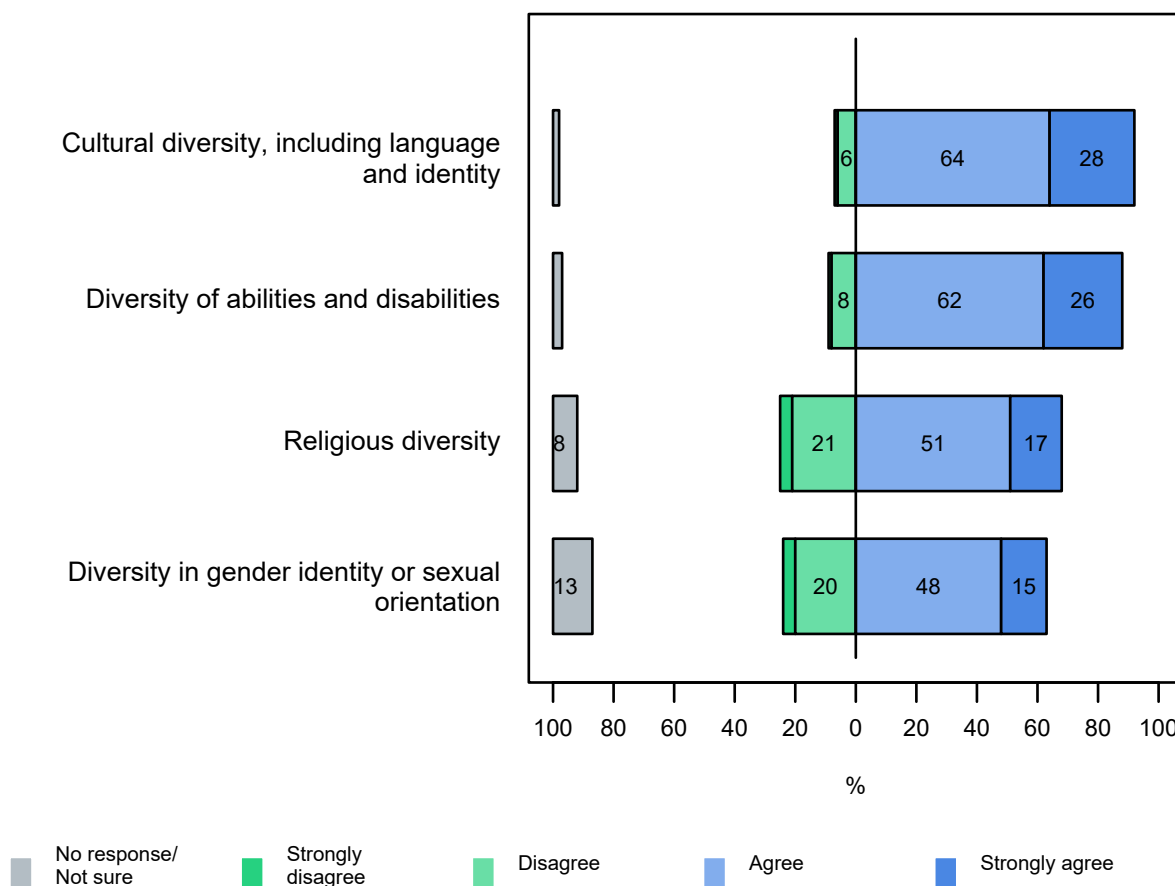
Figure 5 shows that principals were most confident that the school’s teachers had the knowledge and resources they need to support students’ understanding of, and respect for, diversity of abilities and disabilities, and cultural diversity. They were less confident, or unsure, about whether knowledge and resources were there to support students’ understanding and respect for religious diversity, and even less so for gender identity or sexual orientation.

FIGURE 5 School knowledge and resources to support student understanding of and respect for diversity (Principals,  $n = 145$ )



A very similar picture is given by teachers, who we asked to focus on their own knowledge and resources (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6 **Teacher knowledge and resources to support student understanding of and respect for diversity (Teachers, n = 620)**



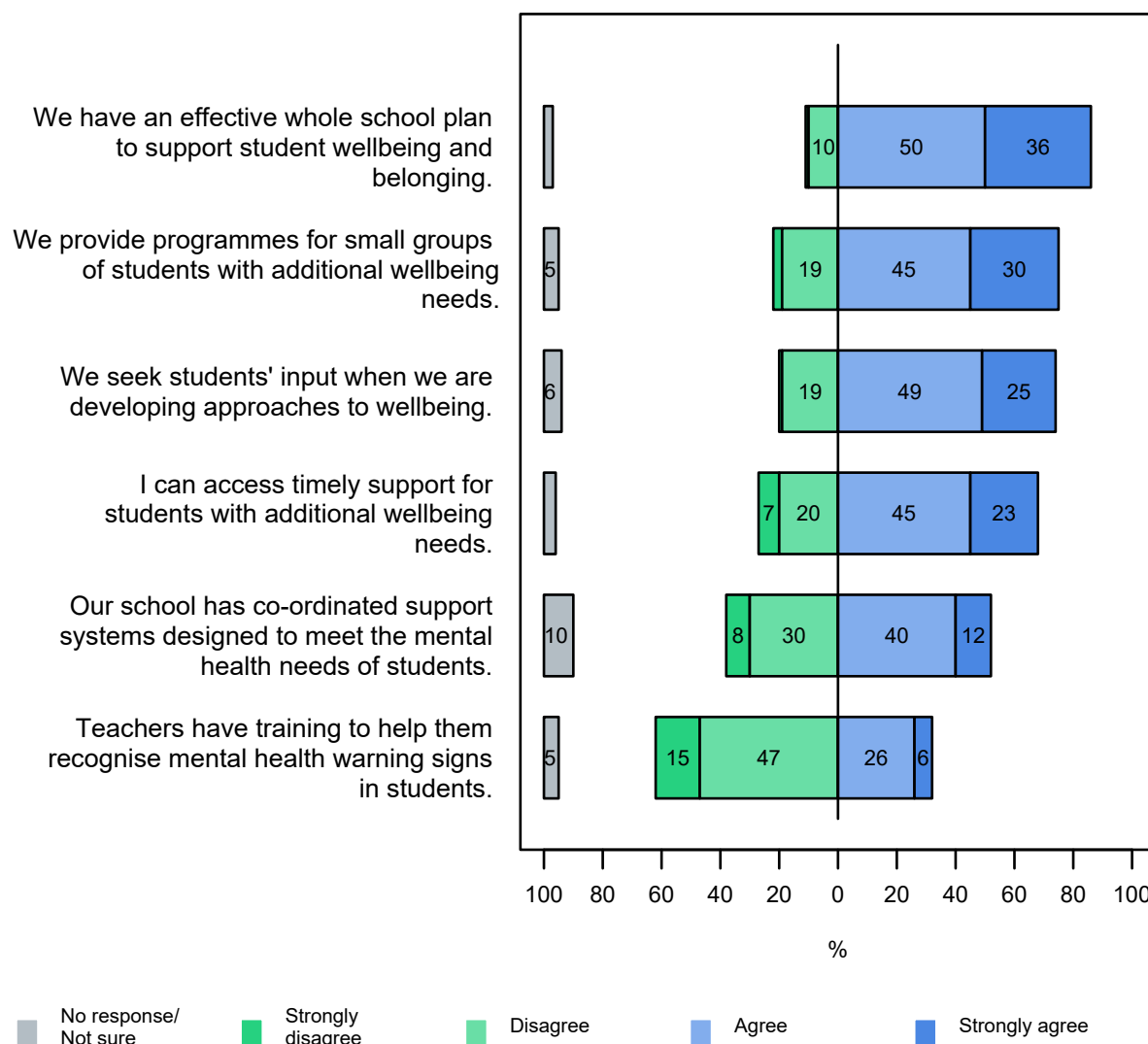
### Teachers are largely positive about school support for student wellbeing, but most lack training on mental health warning signs

Most teachers reported that their school had an effective whole-school plan to support student wellbeing and belonging, and around three-quarters reported that their school had small group programmes for students with additional wellbeing needs, and that student input was sought when developing wellbeing approaches (74% in 2019, an increase from 57% in 2016).

Around two-thirds could access timely support for students with additional wellbeing needs. Student mental health needs were less supported, with 52% of the teachers reporting co-ordinated support systems in their schools. Only 32% reported they had had training for teachers to help them recognise mental health warning signs in students. However, that is almost double the 17% who reported such training in 2016.



FIGURE 7 School supports for student wellbeing (Teachers, n = 620)

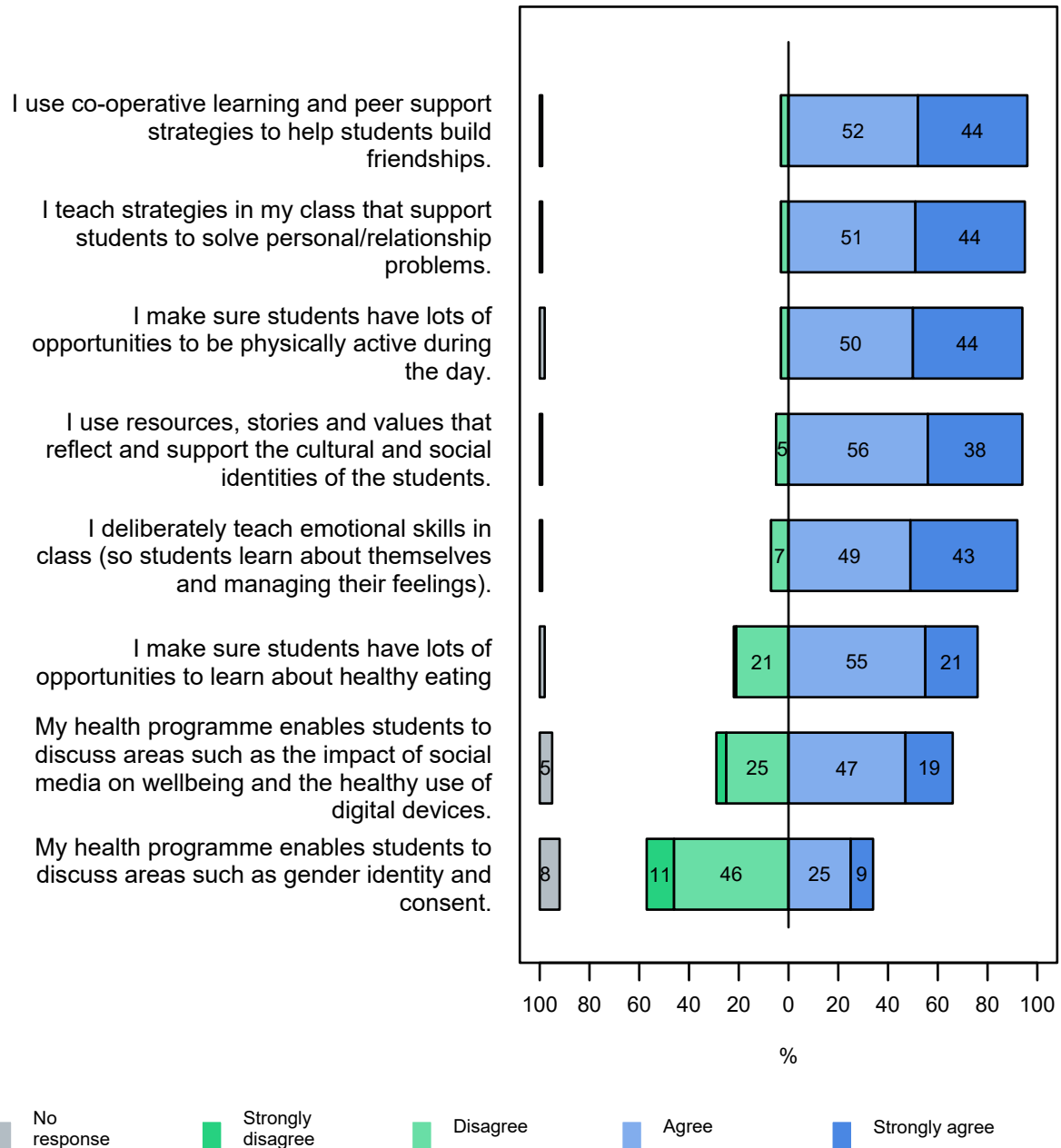


### Most teachers provide strategies and topics to support student wellbeing

Most primary teachers were consciously including strategies and topics to support students' relationships with their peers, their cultural and social identities, and emotional and physical wellbeing, with Figure 8 showing between 38% and 44% strongly agreeing that they included these in their classroom work.

There was less strong agreement about more recent areas of concern for student wellbeing such as opportunities to learn about healthy eating (21% strongly agreed), the impact of social media and healthy use of digital devices (19% strongly agreed), and gender identity and consent, which are included in the 2015 sexuality guidelines for schools (9% strongly agreed).

FIGURE 8 Classroom practices that support student wellbeing (Teachers, n = 620)



Somewhat more teachers reported making sure their students had lots of opportunities to learn about healthy eating in 2019 (76% agreed or strongly agreed) compared with 2016 (65%); and somewhat more strongly agreed that they were making sure students had lots of opportunities to be physically active during the day (44% in 2019, compared with 32% in 2016).

More decile 1 and 2 school teachers strongly agreed that they made sure students had lots of opportunities to learn about healthy eating (35% compared with 19% of decile 3 to 10 school teachers).

## Parents and whānau are largely positive about their child's wellbeing experiences at school

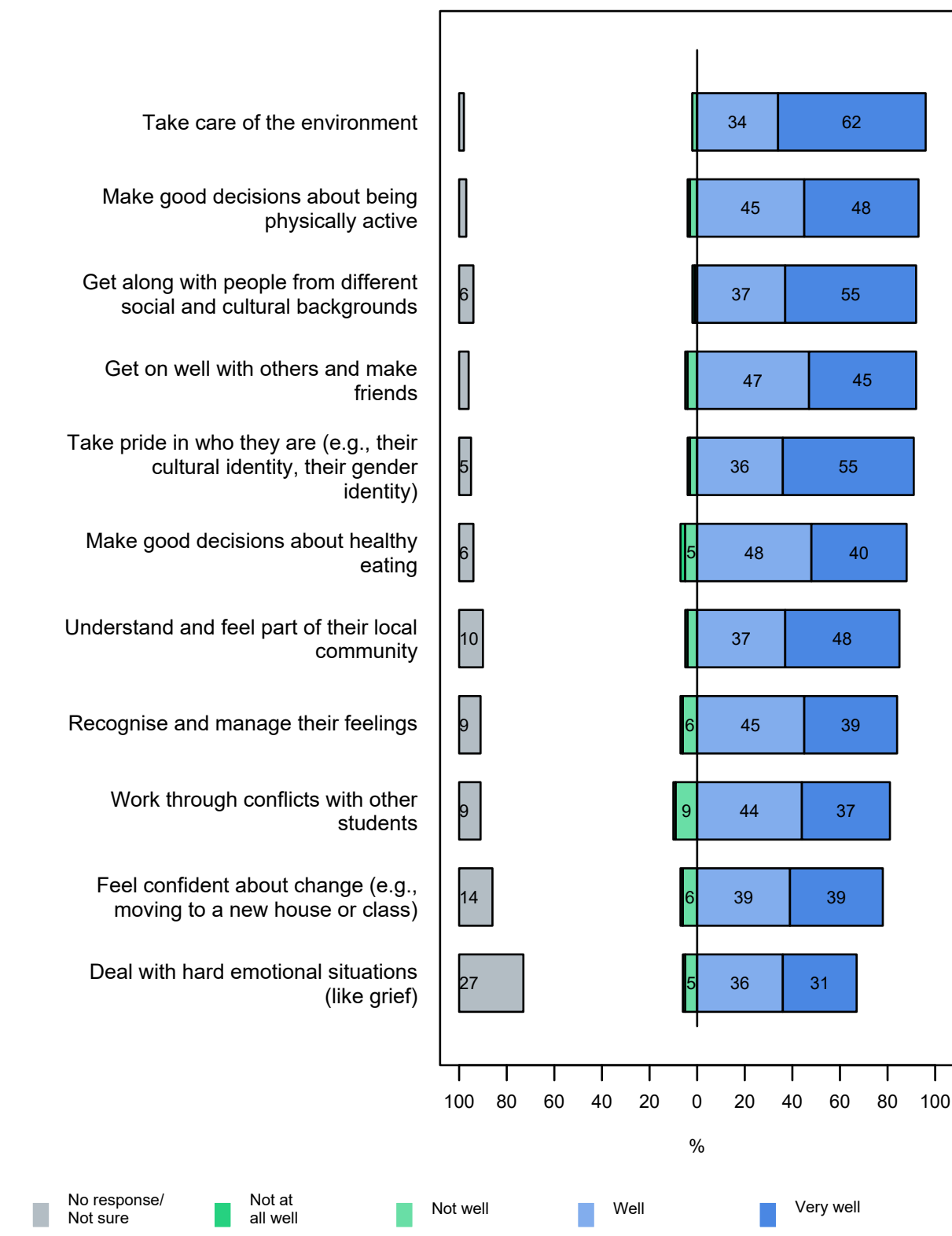
Almost all the parents and whānau responding to the national survey thought their child felt they belonged in the school (53% strongly agreed, 41% agreed), and felt safe there (57% strongly agreed, and 41% agreed).<sup>9</sup>

They were also positive about how their child's school was helping them develop wellbeing attitudes and skills, as shown in Figure 9.

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<sup>9</sup> 395 parents and whānau from 170 schools took part. Their schools were broadly representative of all school deciles, but the parents and whānau had higher qualification levels than the general population.

FIGURE 9 Parent and whānau views of how well the school helped their child develop attitudes and skills that support wellbeing (n = 395)



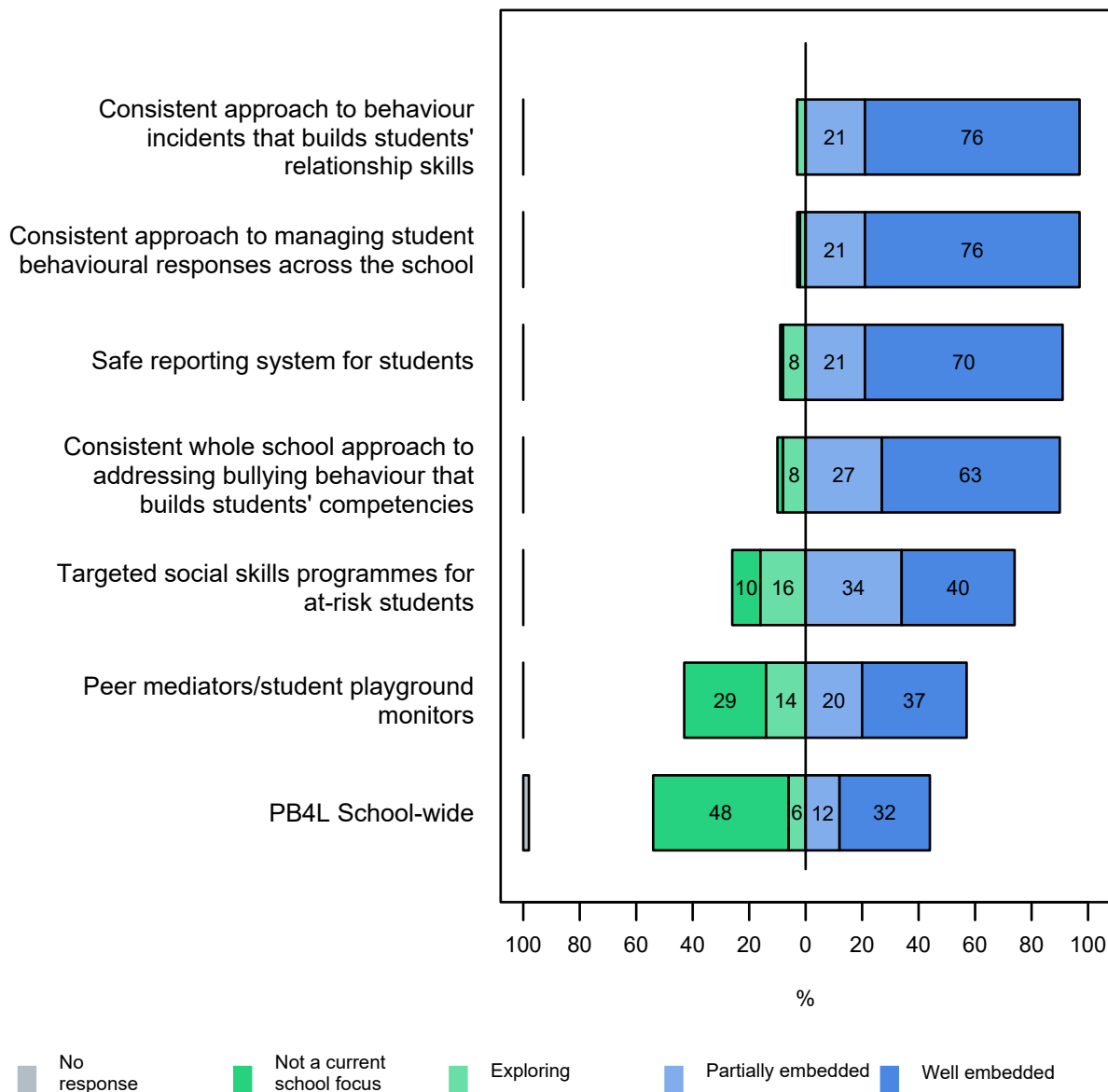
Parents and whānau whose child had a disability or needed additional learning support were less positive about the school's support for their child to develop wellbeing attitudes and skills; the detail is given in Section 5.

Compared with parent responses in 2016, more parents and whānau thought that their school helped their child well or very well in relation to getting along with people from different social and cultural backgrounds, taking pride in who they are, and recognising and managing their feelings.

### **Positive student behaviour is commonly promoted**

The growing emphasis on fostering wellbeing as a key school purpose that also enhances students' learning capabilities is aligned with a shift in policy to move approaches to student behaviour away from framing it in terms of discipline for unwanted behaviour, towards considering what schools can deliberately do to foster and teach positive student behaviour. This was given impetus by the PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning) suite of supports that began in 2010. Many schools took up the PB4L School-wide framing and support. What Figure 10 shows is that, while a minority of schools have PB4L School-wide well embedded, many more report they have the consistent whole-school approaches that PB4L has emphasised, suggesting that the policy emphasis has had a wider impact beyond the actual PB4L School-wide programme.

FIGURE 10 Promoting positive student behaviour (Principals, n = 145)



This set of items was also asked in 2016. The picture is much the same in 2019 as for 2016, with two exceptions:

- More of the schools had taken part in PB4L School-wide (44% well or partially embedded in 2019 compared with 25% in 2016)
- More had safe reporting systems for students well embedded (70% in 2019, compared with 57% in 2016).

PB4L School-wide was reported as well embedded by 58% of decile 1 and 2 school principals.

### Most teachers are in schools that are active around supporting positive behaviour

The most common approaches to support positive behaviour that teachers report are clear expectations for behaviour, encouragement and celebration of positive behaviour or success, emphasis on relationship building after behaviour incidents, and clear school-wide processes to address behaviours like bullying and racist or discriminatory comments or behaviour.

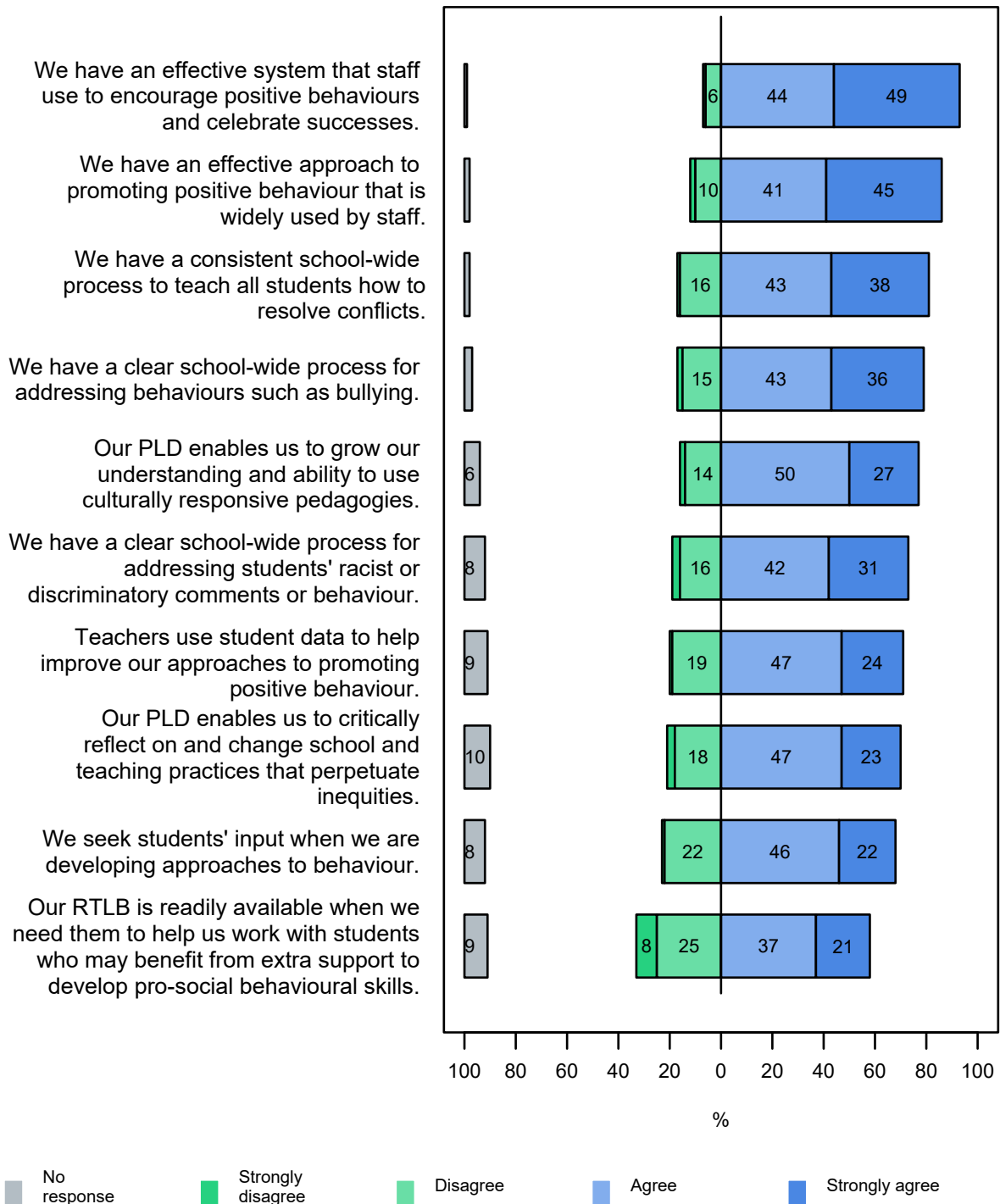
Figure 11 also shows that only around half the teachers find their Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTL<sup>B10</sup>) is available when needed, or use student data to help improve their approaches to promote positive behaviour. Slightly more than a fifth say their school does not use student input when developing approaches to behaviour, though this has been an important aspect of PB4L School-wide and developing student belonging in the school, and their commitment to behaviour approaches.

Decile 1 and 2 school teachers were somewhat more likely than others to strongly agree or agree with items in this set.

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<sup>10</sup> RTL<sup>B</sup> clusters work with groups of schools.

FIGURE 11 Supporting positive student behaviour (Teachers, n = 620)





### Student behaviour or bullying is the perennial main issue parents and whānau raise with school boards

Nineteen percent of the trustees said that student behaviour or bullying was the main issue raised by parents and whānau with their board. The same has been true since 2010, at much the same proportion.

### Extreme behaviour is more of an issue

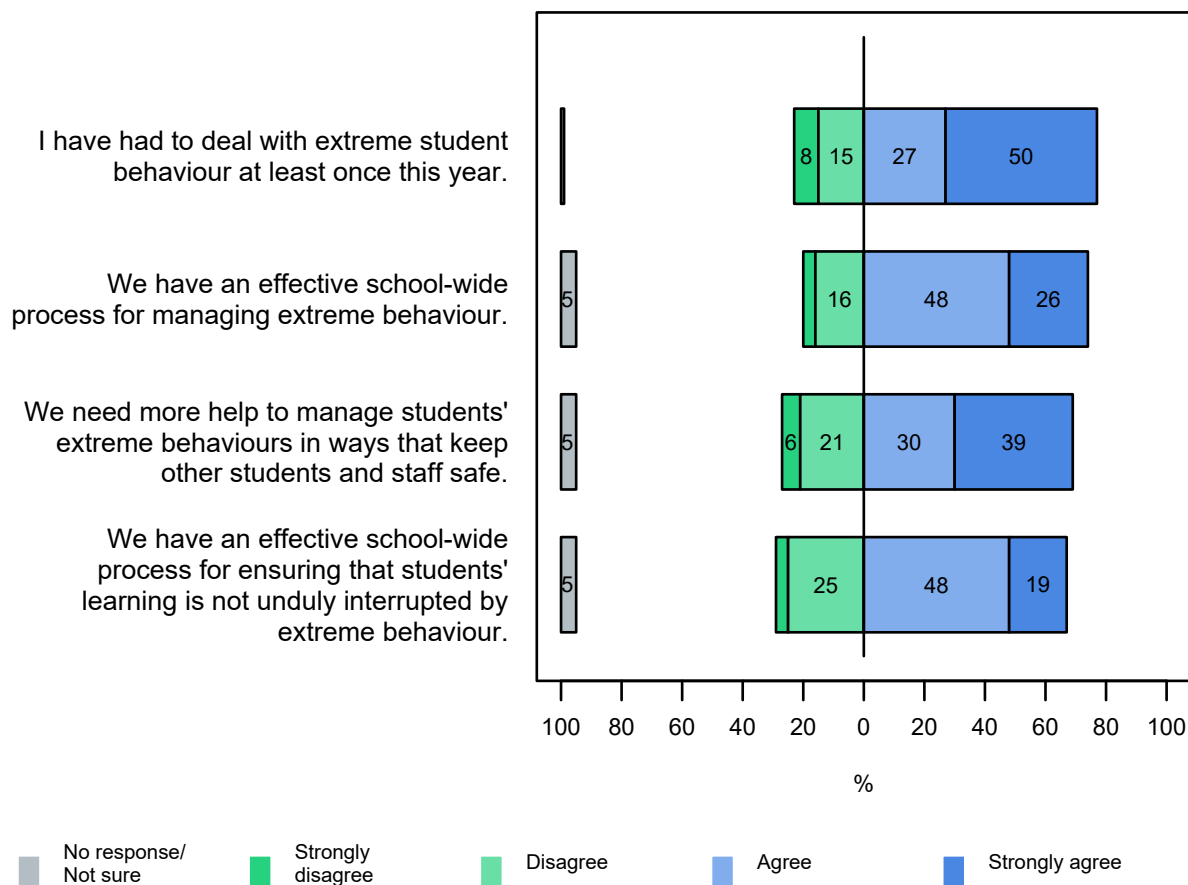
There has been increasing concern expressed by NZEI Te Riu Roa and NZPF about increases in disruptive student behaviour. The 2019 survey data shows that teacher reports of disruptive student behaviour and of feeling unsafe in their class had increased noticeably from 2016.

- In 2019 25% of teachers said they often experienced student behaviour that caused serious disruption in their class. In 2016 17% of teachers said they often experienced behaviour that disrupts teaching (a wider question than we asked in 2019).
- 24% of teachers felt unsafe in their class occasionally in 2019, double the 12% who reported this in 2016. One percent in both 2019 and 2016 felt frequently unsafe in their class.
- 23% of teachers felt unsafe in the school grounds occasionally in 2019, double the 11% who felt unsafe occasionally outside their classroom in 2016. Two percent frequently felt unsafe in the school grounds in 2019, and 1% frequently felt unsafe outside their classroom in 2016.

Feeling unsafe was not related to school decile, but often experiencing student behaviour causing serious disruption was (reported by 37% of decile 1 and 2 school teachers, 32% of decile 3 and 4 school teachers, 28% of decile 5 and 6 school teachers, 16% of decile 7 and 8 school teachers, and 21% of decile 9 and 10 school teachers).

We added a new question in 2019 to find out more about teachers' experiences with extreme student behaviour. Figure 12 shows that 77% of teachers had to deal with at least one incident of extreme behaviour in 2019. Most thought they had effective school-wide processes to manage such behaviour, and to ensure that students' learning was not unduly interrupted. However, most teachers also wanted more help to manage students' extreme behaviours in ways that keep other students and staff safe.

FIGURE 12 **Managing extreme behaviour (Teachers, n = 620)**



Decile 1-2 school teachers were most likely to strongly agree that they had had to deal with extreme student behaviour at least once in 2019 (66%).

### Support for schools around student wellbeing and behaviour is variable

There is a wide range of support and advice schools can draw on in relation to student wellbeing and behaviour. We asked about 18 sources, mostly government funded or provided. Table 1 shows school use of these support services. Use of services reflects their availability, for example, school-based social workers and health professionals are only funded for schools in low socio-economic communities.

TABLE 1 School use of support and advice related to student wellbeing and behaviour (Principals, *n* = 145)

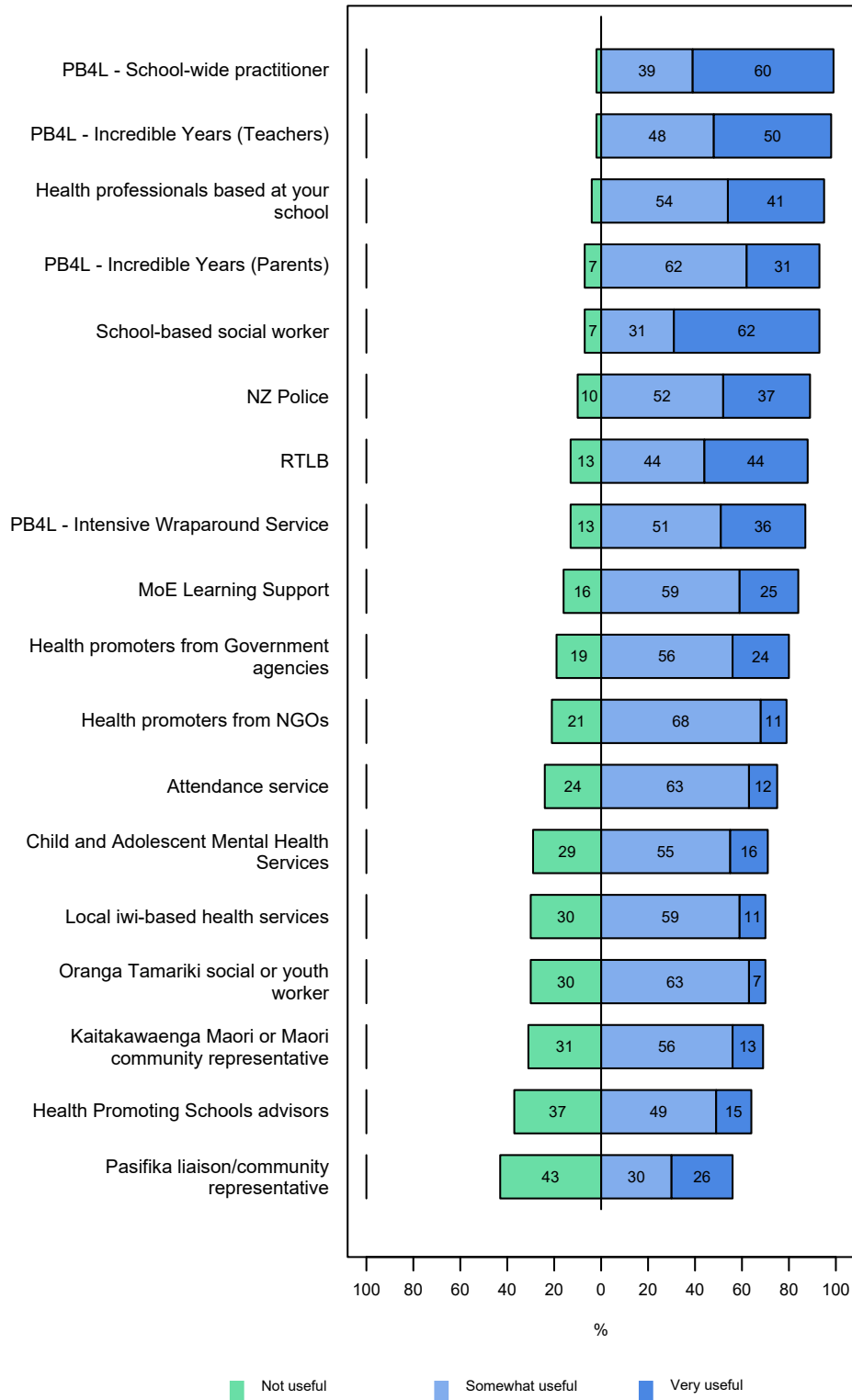
Source	
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	99
RTLB	97
Ministry of Education Learning Support	95
NZ Police	86
Attendance service	79
Oranga Tamariki social or youth worker	76
Health promoters from government agencies (e.g., local DHB, regional sports trust)	65
PB4L—Incredible Years (Teachers)	59
Health Promoting Schools advisors	57
Health promoters from NGOs (e.g., NZ Heart Foundation)	52
School-based social worker	38
PB4L—School-wide practitioner	32
Health professionals based at your school	32
PB4L—Intensive Wraparound Service	31
PB4L—Incredible Years (Parents)	31
Local iwi-based health services	30
Kaitakawaenga Māori or Māori community representative	27
Pacific liaison / community representative	16

Figure 13 shows principals' views of the usefulness of these services, as proportions of the total who gave views, indicating that they used a particular service.<sup>11</sup> Views of usefulness are likely to reflect actual availability when needed, and school expectations of what a service should provide. Views are also likely to reflect the level of knowledge and capability of a service to work with the school's culture, ways of operating, strengths, and needs.

Services that were rated as very useful by a third or more of users are mainly support that is offered onsite, such as school social workers, or aspects of PB4L professional development and support. Services for students with mental health needs or deep family needs are used by many schools, but are the lowest rated, a pattern that has persisted over time.

<sup>11</sup> Principals could select a 'not applicable' response, indicating that they did not use a source of support and advice.

FIGURE 13 Principals' views of the usefulness of student wellbeing and behaviour supports<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> There are different numbers giving their views for each item, depending on the number of principals whose school used the individual service.

Some of these services had more principals giving them ratings in 2019 than 2016, indicating greater contact and use. The set below includes some services that underline the growing concern around mental health and student attendance, in a wellbeing and student achievement context, as well as more schools having experience with PB4L support.

- CAMHS 58% of schools rated their use in 2016, 99% in 2019
- Oranga Tamariki 60% of schools rated their use in 2016, when it was CYF, and 76% in 2019
- Attendance service 68% of schools rated their use in 2016, and 79% in 2019
- PB4L Incredible Years (Teachers) 45% of schools rated their use in 2016, and 59% in 2019
- PB4L Intensive Wraparound Service 15% of schools rated their use in 2016, and 31% in 2019
- Health Promoting Schools advisors 46% of schools rated their use in 2016, and 57% in 2019

There were also indications of increased use of PB4L Incredible Years (Parents), and PB4L School-wide practitioners, and experience with Māori and Pacific services.

Some services also had higher proportions of principals rating their experiences of them as very useful in 2019 than in 2016 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 **Behaviour and wellbeing services with higher proportions of principals rating them as very useful in 2019 compared with 2016**

Service	% of principals with experience of service rating them 'very useful' 2016	% of principals with experience of service rating them 'very useful' 2019
PB4L – Incredible Years (Parents)	4	31
PB4L – Incredible Years (Teachers)	37	50
PB4L Intensive Wraparound Service	13	36
CAMHS	6	15
Pacific liaison/community representative	2	26

## Summary

It is a decade since the Taumata Whanonga cross-sector behaviour summit created the necessary momentum for schools and the education agencies to focus together on wellbeing and positive behaviour. The 2019 national survey findings show that most primary schools and teachers are actively working to thread this focus through school processes and the learning experiences of their students. Parents and whānau responding were largely positive about their child's sense of belonging and safety at school, and their gaining skills and attitudes that contribute to wellbeing, both individually and as a society. There are some marked gains around student learning about healthy eating and their part in the environment, both of which have also received input and support from beyond education.

Most schools work with agencies—education, social, and health—with variable experiences. They are mostly positive about those who work more closely with schools, often onsite, and with whom they can develop good ongoing relationships, such as school-based social workers, PB4L professional development providers, and to a lesser extent, RTLBs and school nurses. More schools were working with CAMHS and Oranga Tamariki, but principals continued to rate these services less positively than others.

But although schools have more systems in place to identify and support students with social or mental health needs, mental health issues are proving difficult for schools and teachers to respond to well either proactively or reactively. Schools are not alone in this, but it is proving to be an increasing issue for them.

Some schools are proactive and responding to changes in society by providing health education that enables students to challenge stereotypes, explore gender identities, and learn about areas such as consent and the impact of social media. However, these topics do not appear to be common in many school health education programmes, suggesting a need for more support in this area.

Despite school and teacher work and attention to supporting positive behaviour, many teachers did experience incidents of extreme behaviour, and there has been an increase in student behaviour that often causes serious disruption, and teachers occasionally feeling unsafe in their class.