

DEVELOPING A SCHOOL CULTURE IN WHICH TEACHERS AND LEARNERS THRIVE



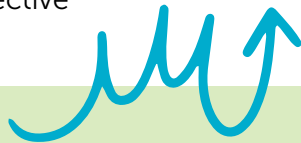
Encouraging a learning culture in which both teachers and learners can thrive is crucial for long-term educational achievement. Such a school culture doesn't come by accident; it grows through purposeful practice, shared values, and supportive leadership. At the core lie three cornerstones upon which to build a school ethos: **trust**, **recognition**, and the **sense of safety**. When embedded in a school culture, they invigorate engagement, wellbeing, and achievement for everyone. Let's distinguish between school **culture** and **climate**:

Culture ...	Climate ...
Is the group's personality	Is the group's attitude
Provides for a limited way of thinking	Creates a state of mind
Takes years to evolve	Is easy to change
Is based on values and beliefs	Is based on perceptions
Can be felt through traditions, rituals, leadership styles, professional norms, shared mission	Can be felt when you enter the school: safety, relationships, teaching quality, learner engagement, physical setting
Is part of us	Surrounds us
Is "The way we do things around here"	Is "The way we feel around here"
Determines whether improvement is possible	Is the first thing that improves when there is positive change
Influences and sustains climate	Reflects the current expression of the underlying culture
Is more structural and collective; embedded in shared expectations	Is in your head (shaped by perceptions of how culture feels)

Building Trust

Trust forms the foundation of any healthy school culture. For teachers, it comes from open communication, regular support, and autonomy in the classroom. When trusted, teachers are willing to experiment with instruction, work openly with peers, and invest heavily in learner performance. For learners, trust grows through consistent, empathetic, and fair treatment from adults. Daily habits – learning learners' names, active listening and keeping promises – create a sense of reliability and connection.

Open conversation between staff and shared decision-making help break down hierarchy walls and foster professional trust. Likewise, encouraging learners to question, admit uncertainty, and share ideas promotes deeper, more effective learning.



Recognition and Appreciation

Recognition creates purpose and motivates excellence. When teachers feel valued – through praise, development opportunities, or awards – it boosts morale and commitment. However, recognition must be sincere and aligned with school values to be meaningful.

Learners also benefit from appreciation for academic and non-academic achievements. Publicly displaying learners' work, positive feedback, and peer-nomination awards help everyone feel that their contributions matter – not just those of high achievers.



Psychological Safety

Psychological safety – feeling safe to speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without fear – is essential for learning and innovation.

Teachers need it to reflect honestly, try new strategies, and give and receive feedback. School leaders play a vital role by modelling vulnerability and framing mistakes as opportunities to grow.

For learners, classrooms must be spaces where questions are welcomed, and failure is treated as part of the learning process. Teachers can nurture this by emphasising effort, encouraging respectful dialogue, and addressing exclusion or bullying immediately.

Creating a positive school culture takes ongoing commitment. By prioritising trust, recognition and safety, schools invest in their people – and secure a legacy of shared growth and achievement.



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