



STUDENT WELLBEING RESEARCH Document 1 – Revised Edition

This research document has been developed by the Student Wellbeing Unit to assist Student Wellbeing Coordinators in the understanding of evidence-based research and literature about student wellbeing. It explores the links between student wellbeing and improved student learning outcomes.

The Catholic School

Pastoral care in Catholic schools affirms and gives expression to the belief that 'the person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.'

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Wellbeing is Central to Learning and School Improvement

Wellbeing refers to students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing and development. Evidence suggests that these elements are integral rather than incidental to learning. Learner will find it difficult to engage with learning programs if they are distracted by significant physical, social and emotional issues.

Staff play an important role in fostering engagement and wellbeing so that students are able to achieve their best and enjoy their educational experience (DECS *Statement of Directors 2005–2010*, p. 8 in the Working Paper South Australia, Dept of Education and Children's Services, 2005, p. 3).

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty First Century (MCEETYA, 2000) states:

Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, school contributes to the development of students' sense of self worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future (p. 1).

The Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) Student Wellbeing Unit Strategy provides the opportunity to develop a congruence between the CEOM Strategy Plan 2006–2010 and the evidence base related to student wellbeing. Emerging evidence in recent years promotes schools as key sites for the promotion of social emotional wellbeing emphasising the promotion of mental health. Through the development of a whole-school approach to wellbeing there is an opportunity to contribute to the School Improvement agenda through the development of an optimal learning environment for all students. This requires a prevention to postvention approach.

The strategy is designed to meet Federal and State government requirements and accountabilities in relation to the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF), National School Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) and Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), and align with the School Improvement Framework. These frameworks relate to the social, emotional and specific health-related areas of the curriculum.

The student wellbeing strategy is designed to support Catholic schools in the development of relevant policy that supports schools in maximising improvement in learning through the development of an optimal learning environment through the provision of safe and supportive schools.

CEOM Student Wellbeing Strategy 2006–2010

KEY DOCUMENTS



CORE WORK – STUDENT WELLBEING UNIT



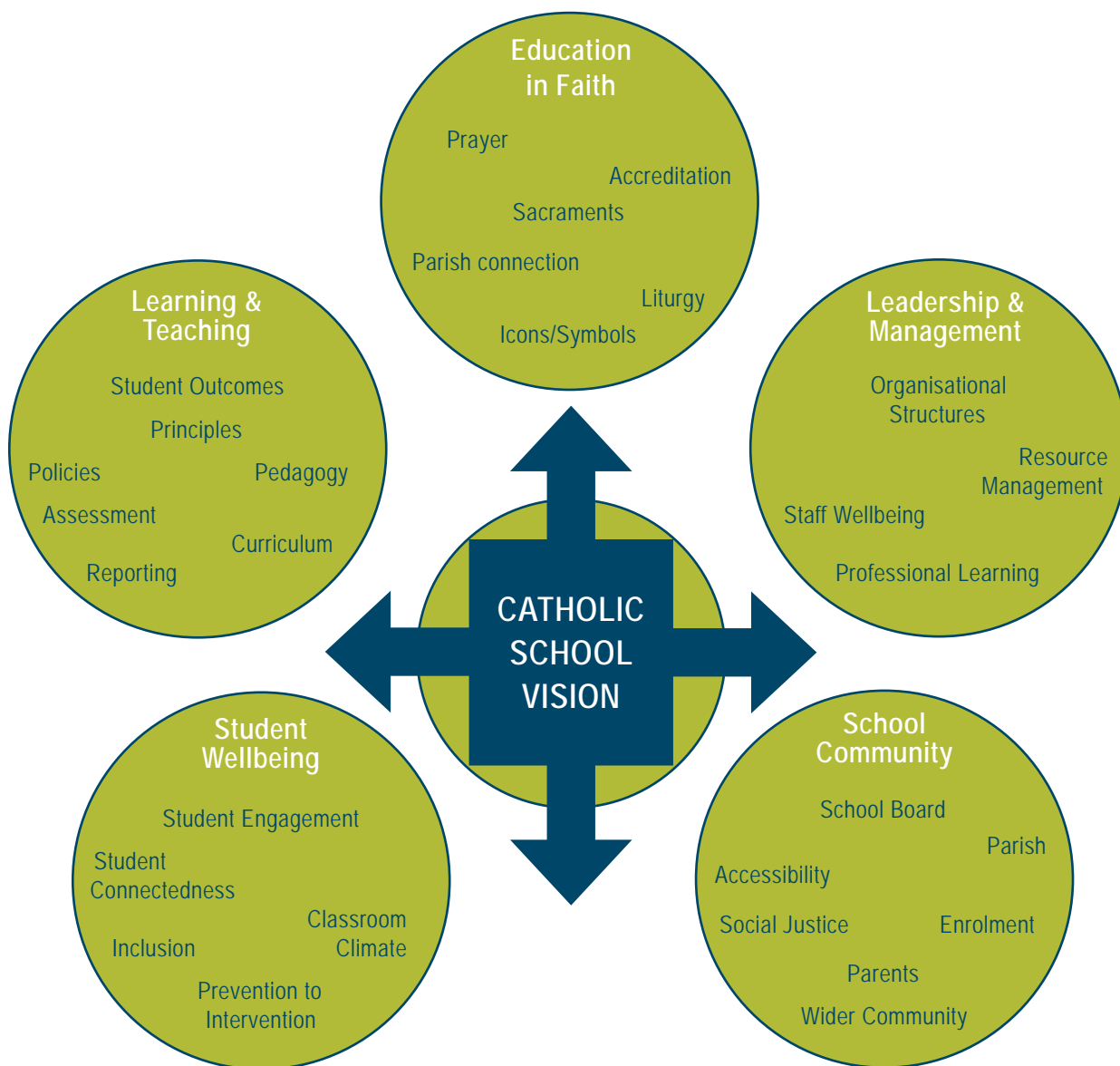
A full version of the Strategy Plan is available on the CEVN website (Documents/Archdiocese of Melbourne Student Wellbeing) at <<http://cevn.ceo.melb.catholic.edu.au>>.

School Improvement and Wellbeing

Catholic schools are rich places involved with young people during their most formative years and the research concerned with health and wellbeing emphasises the relationship between the academic achievements of students in Catholic schools and the promotion of wellbeing. Importantly, schools are seen as key sites for the promotion of wellbeing. The CEOM has an important role in supporting schools in the implementation of policy and strategic initiatives in the area of whole-school approaches to student wellbeing. Supporting

school leadership to build sustainable models with a focus on prevention and early intervention is particularly important.

Catholic ethos espouses the building of inclusive Catholic school communities informed by social justice and fostering strong partnerships with parents and the broader community to meet the needs of all young people. The CEOM School Improvement Framework provides a context for this work through the two key spheres of student wellbeing and school community.



Prevention to Intervention

It is clear that there are many issues in schools related to the wellbeing, welfare, health and pastoral care needs of young people and their families. It is understood that such issues impact upon learning outcomes and in recent years the range and breadth of issues has increased. This is reflected in the Introduction to *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997).

On the threshold of the new millennium education faces new challenges which are the result of new socio-political and cultural contexts ... (n.1).

Furthermore the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) commissioned Report (2004), *The Welfare needs of Catholic Schools* (Cahill, Wyn and Smith 2004) described a range of issues which impact upon schools in terms of the amount of energy, time, resources and emotional labour that is required to respond to the needs of schools.

The five key issues from a school's perspective were described as:

- Learning problems
- Student mental health
- Family problems
- Social health
- Staff wellbeing (p.1)

Importantly, the report included commentary related to the fact that traditional approaches to welfare needs tended to focus on the needs of the individual; more recent approaches in health promotion take an ecological approach (p. 3). Research in the fields of resilience (Bernard 2004, Fuller 1998), social capital (Cox and Caldwell 2000) and the structural determinants of wellbeing have led to an increasing awareness of the importance of an environmental approach to enhancing wellbeing.

This is an important distinction which underpins the strategic work of the Student Wellbeing Unit in developing a prevention to intervention approach to the promotion of wellbeing and in addressing issues and concerns related to young people at risk. The World Health Organisation (WHO) model of the Health Promoting School underpins the work of the Student Wellbeing Unit supporting schools to address ethos, curriculum and partnerships to promote wellbeing.

To address disparity in achievement and overall outcomes in achievement, student wellbeing strategies focused along the prevention to intervention spectrum are of paramount importance if School Improvement is to be a priority for the whole school population.

This is strongly supported by research in the fields of public health, resilience, social capital and structural determinants of health which has led to an increasing awareness of an

Developing a Positive School Culture

Helen Cahill (Australian Youth Research Centre) in a Report to DE&T (2005, p. 6) regarding their development of an evidence-based approach included the following:

School is the organisation of most relevance to young people and a sense of connectedness or belonging to school is in itself distinguished as a key protective factor for young people (Fuller 1998). School protective factors associated with positive school climate include the presence of caring relationships, high expectation messages and opportunities

for meaningful participation and contribution (Benard 2004) as well as required responsibility for helpfulness, opportunities for success and recognition, school norms against violence and pro social peer groups (Sawyer et al. 2000). School risk factors include bullying, peer rejection, poor attachment to school, inadequate behaviour management, deviant peer group and school failure.

This requires a focus on the development of a positive school climate, organisational health, policy review, teacher professional learning and effective partnerships with family and community.

environmental approach to enhancing wellbeing (ANCD 2001). This approach now informs Australian government strategies for enhancing the health outcomes of young people (p. 3).

The Australian Government has joined forces with State and Territory governments and non government school authorities to produce the *National Safe Schools Framework*. The Framework provides an approach to safeguarding the physical and emotional wellbeing of students in a cohesive, nationally consistent manner (NSSF Implementation Manual p. ii).

Social and emotional learning increases mastery of subject material, greater interest in learning and motivation to learn, commitment to school and morale in students and staff, and time devoted to schoolwork. It also improves attendance in both students and staff, graduation rates and prospects for constructive employment, while at the same time reducing suspensions, expulsions and improving retention (Hawkins et al. 1999, Malecki & Elliott 2002, Fraser and Walberg 1991, Wubbels et al. 1991).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that schools are ideally placed to have a significant impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for students, teachers and other members of the school community. The World Health Organisation 1996, through its Health Promoting

Schools Framework, supports the interconnectedness of teaching and learning outcomes, organisational ethos and environment, community and service partnerships and student and community wellbeing.

Research suggests that School Improvement needs to incorporate within its measurement instruments and processes a focus upon the more affective and social domains. It is claimed that:

School Improvement also needs to focus on the culture of schools, including values, interpersonal relationships and interaction processes, as well as structures.

Leonard, Burke and Schofield 2004

There is much importance in providing a safe and supportive environment conducive to mental health and learning.

This is again emphasised in the Reynolds and Packer (1992) research which demonstrated that many ineffective schools demonstrated deficiencies in personal relationships between staff and students and evidenced a staff culture which was not conducive to School Improvement.

A whole-school approach to student wellbeing

A growing consensus in the literature indicates that a whole-school approach to student wellbeing provides a model that enables the education of the whole person and that this includes the physical, emotional, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions of the person. (AEU 2001, Best 1999, Best et al. 1995, CECV 2004, Marshall et al. 2000, McGuinness 1989, Mindmatters 1999, The Gatehouse Project 2001.) Murphy (1988) provides a comprehensive definition of a

whole-school approach as: A comprehensive and coordinated system of student support which includes activities and arrangements integrated into many levels of the total school ... Support for students will be manifested within school philosophies, beliefs, attitudes and school organisation, links with parents, the community and outside agencies, classroom practice, teacher-student relationships and curricula (cited in University of Melbourne 2003). The social, emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical as well as academic needs of the student may be achieved through a whole-school approach to student wellbeing (Best 1999).

Anecdotally the terms 'welfare' and 'wellbeing' have been used interchangeably, however current research and literature prefer the use of the term 'wellbeing'. This term reflects the inclusive nature of schooling and a whole-school approach.

- Wellbeing has a prevention and early intervention focus and involves whole-school approaches with an emphasis on school organisation, ethos and environment, community links and partnerships, and curriculum teaching and learning.

The wellbeing approach emphasises primary prevention and early intervention. These are defined as:

primary prevention – building structures that facilitate belonging and promote wellbeing;

early intervention – programming and planning interventions that target students identified as 'at risk'.

This is supported by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV), Policy 1.14, 2008 (Revised) *Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools*.

A welfare approach places its emphasis on intervention and postvention. These are defined as: *intervention* – facilitating and accessing a range of support services for identified 'at risk' students; and *postvention* – managing 'out of the ordinary' circumstances that require specialist support, management of trauma and limiting impact, restoring relationships.

CEOM Student Wellbeing Coordinators Strategy

The CEOM Student Wellbeing Coordinators Strategy is supported through an annual \$5.2M investment by the CEOM and Victorian State Government funding. Under this strategy a Student Wellbeing Coordinator (SWC) has been appointed in every primary school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. Funding provides for time allocation matched to a school's student enrolment. This funding allocation is used to appoint a Student Wellbeing Coordinator within the school.

A primary goal of the CEOM Student Wellbeing Strategy Plan (2006–2010) is to work towards ensuring all SWCs will have completed or be in the process of completing credentialed learning under the provisions of the Master of Education (Student Wellbeing) offered through the Youth Services Strategy in partnership with The University of Melbourne.

The CEOM also provides two days of central Professional Learning for SWCs. This enables SWCs to network with each other, to share good practice and to develop skills and understandings relevant to their work. In addition, SWCs are also supported through clusters (see CEOM *Research Document 4, Clusters*, April 2008).

CEOM Student Wellbeing Publications available on

www.education.unimelb.edu.au/swap

- Student Wellbeing Research Document 1 (October 2006)
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Research Document 2 (June 2007)
- Restorative Practices Research Document 3 (October 2007)
- Clusters Research Document 4 (April 2008)
- Student Wellbeing Research Document 1 (October 2008) Revised Edition
- Restorative Practices in Catholic School Communities Audit Tools (September 2007)
- Schools as Core Social Centres Progress Report (July 2007)
- SWAP Postcard

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