

EDITORIAL

Minister launches KidsMatter Primary expansion

On Friday 24 June, after a week of volcanic ash, cancelled flights and rescheduled meetings, we had the pleasure of hearing the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon. Mark Butler, launch the expansion of KidsMatter Primary in the presence of around 400 principals and school leaders.

The launch took place on the final day of the Australian Primary Principals Associations (APPA) national conference in Adelaide. APPA represents principals from Government, Catholic and Independent primary schools from across the country. In his introduction to the Minister, APPA president Norm Hart described how the association began pushing for a primary school mental health and wellbeing initiative nearly a decade ago, and how he was 'delighted to be here today as KidsMatter comes of age'.

There are currently 400 schools at various stages along the KidsMatter journey. With the increased investment from the Australian Government of \$18.4 million, our new goal is to engage and support a further 1,700 schools. School principals are critical to this; without their engagement, advocacy and support, it would be almost impossible for a school to successfully take on KidsMatter Primary.

One of KidsMatter Primary's key messages is that 'successful schools start with healthy minds'. It provides schools with proven methods, tools and support to address the following questions that are so important in nurturing happy, balanced kids:

- Does it matter that I feel I belong at school?
- Does it matter that I have friends and can share my feelings?
- Does it matter that I have people who support and understand me?

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- Does it matter that I have someone I can turn to?
- Does it matter that my school believes in me?

All these questions point to the fact that positive relationships are key to 'growing up' mentally healthy and confident children. You can read more about this, and the KidsMatter Primary expansion, in this newsletter.

Jeremy Hurley

Principals Australia

KidsMatter Primary National Coordinator

Everyone has a right to feel safe

Promoting positive school communities has many benefits for children's mental health and their learning. Component 1: *A Positive School Community* focuses on three key inter-related areas to develop a positive school community: a sense of belonging, inclusion and collaborative involvement which draw from and build on each other. Research shows that feeling connected, being included and having meaningful involvement in school is a protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing. It also contributes to helping learning and reducing behaviour problems.



In a positive school community, children feel safe and secure, and show greater caring and compassion towards others as part of respectful relationships amongst all members of the school community. Respectful relationships promote a sense of belonging and connectedness that contribute to safer school communities, while promoting key factors that support children's mental health.

A positive school community is supported by ensuring policies and practices are inclusive of all school members. It is also enhanced when all community members are provided with opportunities to become involved in school activities, share their views and influence school decisions. This includes addressing important

whole school issues such as supporting schools to be safe places, preventing bullying and having effective policies and practices to respond if bullying does occur.

Bullying is defined as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the instigator/s and the victim. It can be direct such as; hitting, name calling or taking someone's belongings. Bullying can also be indirect, such as spreading rumours, leaving someone out of games or sending nasty messages. Cyber-bullying involves using mobile phones and the internet to bully others. Research indicates that bullying is particularly likely to occur in groups such as peer groups in schools. Estimates suggest that as many as 20 per cent of students in Australia have experienced bullying and harassment. Sometimes bullying can occur as a result of deeper issues in the broader community that affect children and families such as racism. Promoting respectful relationships and inclusion for the whole school community is one way to prevent and respond to bullying while also supporting children's mental health.

KidsMatter Primary provides a whole school approach to promoting safe school communities that is also in line with National and State education policies such as the National Safe Schools Framework.

- [Click for more information on a positive school community and inclusion \(PDF, 1.1MB\)](#)
- [Click for more information on bullying and responding to bullying \(PDF, 679KB\)](#)

HOW PARENTS AND CARERS CAN HELP WITH BULLYING

If your child is being bullied:

- Listen and provide support to your child
- Try to understand what has been happening, how often and how long
- Encourage social skills, like being assertive, telling the bully to stop and seeking help
- Support your child to think through different ways they could deal with the problem
- Talk with your child's teacher and ask for help
- Keep talking with the school until your child feels safe

If your child tells you about bullying he has seen or heard at school:

- Listen to your child and try to clarify what they have seen or heard
- Encourage your child to report what he or she has seen or heard to the teacher or principal. Provide support to do so if necessary.

If your child is bullying another child or children:

- Make sure your child knows the bullying behaviour is inappropriate and why
- Try to understand the reasons why your child has behaved in this way and look for ways to address problems
- Encourage perspective taking, e.g. "how would you feel if..."
- Help your child think of alternative paths of action

To help prevent cyber-bullying:

- Supervise children's use of electronic devices.

Everyone's good at something!

Supporting kids' confidence and self esteem

Confidence is a key element in the learning process of primary school children, and can have an important impact on their social and emotional development including developing relationships. Confidence is defined as the level of trust someone has on his or her own judgement, abilities, skills and capacities. A confident child is one who has a realistic and positive perception of his or her own capacities, enabling him or her to respond to novel situations in an adaptive, meaningful way.

In contrast, children lacking confidence in their abilities sometimes try to avoid certain activities that they consider to be challenging. This tendency to avoid challenging situations may not only frustrate parents and carers but also may stop children from developing skills required to tackle tasks confidently such as building friendships. Lack of confidence can be manifested in children through constant worries about their abilities and performance, reluctance to engage in new activities, and shyness.

Confidence can be built through social interactions between children and their peers. Children gain a sense of their own abilities when they compare themselves to others, learning their strengths and difficulties, and how others respond to these. In these ways, social interactions can influence a child's confidence levels and his or her willingness to approach novel and challenging situations.

Self-esteem is understood as the ability to recognise one's strengths, abilities and positive attributes and is considered to be an important

part of confidence. Self-esteem is a multidimensional concept describing the feelings children have about their performance in school, friends and peers, physical appearance, abilities, conduct and behaviour.

Children's self esteem is highly related to the degree to which they feel accepted and valued by peers and adults who are important to them. Thinking styles are also essential in building and supporting a child's confidence. Helpful thinking is particularly important in creating coping strategies that prevent children from being discouraged by failure. Children with a realistic and positive attitude can learn to enjoy challenges and tasks for their own sake and are more likely to challenge their own performance rather than compete and compare with others.

It is inevitable that at some point, children will fail to achieve some goal. At these times, parents and carers can provide helpful support and guidance by responding empathically and with encouragement. Parents can highlight previous situations and experiences that were successfully

managed by the child, and reflect on the strengths and strategies that the child can use to address situations.

To support the development of self confidence, parents and carers are encouraged to maintain meaningful communication with their children, including teaching children to motivate themselves towards high performance without requiring external support from others.

Some ways parents and carers can support children's confidence include:

- Explaining to children that skills develop with practice
- Encourage children to persist when they don't succeed straight away
- Praising effort, persistence and improvement
- Making sure that goals are achievable by breaking down large tasks or responsibilities into small steps
- Being ready to help when necessary, without taking over.

[Click here for more information on building children's confidence \(PDF, 808KB\)](#)



KidsMatter Primary linked to improved NAPLAN outcomes

An exciting new paper by Flinders University examining KidsMatter Primary's links with NAPLAN outcomes has been recently released. The Centre for Student Wellbeing and Prevention of Violence at Flinders University, has undertaken further analysis of KidsMatter Primary evaluation data (from the 2007-08 pilot) and found evidence that links high quality implementation of the initiative with improved NAPLAN outcomes, in addition to the improvements in students' mental health and wellbeing.

The links between students' mental health and wellbeing and their academic outcomes have long been reported by people working in schools and by parents. That is, happy, balanced kids have better learning outcomes. This new Australian research, headed by Dr Katherine Dix, now provides further

evidence to support this link. The research found that schools who implemented KidsMatter Primary well had improved student learning outcomes that placed their students' average NAPLAN results up to six months ahead, by Year 7. This is over and above any influence of socioeconomic background.

The results also support anecdotal reports by teachers during the pilot that the school's implementation of KidsMatter Primary had led to improvements in students' school work.

Read the full journal paper at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-3588.2011.00608.x/full>



Introducing new faces to KidsMatter Primary

The key contacts for the initiative can be found on the new state and territory pages of the KidsMatter Primary website.

Any further information on KidsMatter Primary or professional development events can be directed to state and territory coordinators and new project officers as well as specific support staff who are nominated on the key contacts pages.

Please welcome the following new people to Kidsmatter Primary for Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

- **VANNA GARRICK**
Northern Territory Coordinator
[Click to view NT key contacts](#)
- **OLIVIA FISHER**
Project Officer, Queensland
[Click to view QLD key contacts](#)
- **MARIA HART**
Project Officer, Western Australia
[Click to view WA key contacts](#)
- **SUSIE COAKLEY**
Project Officer, New South Wales
[Click to view NSW key contacts](#)
- **ROBERT MASON**
Project Officer, Victoria
[Click to view VIC key contacts](#)



Launching KidsMatter Primary state news pages

The new state and territory pages have been launched on the KidsMatter Primary website and can be accessed from the home page – see www.kidsmatterprimary.edu.au. The pages contain news on the expansion for each state and territory including information on professional development events, the areas across the state which are getting involved with the initiative and current participating schools. Below are highlights from New South Wales and Tasmania including key upcoming events and other new developments.

New South Wales highlights

KidsMatter Primary has officially welcomed more new schools to New South Wales, with School Action Teams, Implementation Support personnel and Professional Learning presenters all receiving their KidsMatter Training. Some schools in this cluster (Maitland Newcastle Diocese) have already undertaken their professional learning in Component 1: A Positive School Community and the feedback has been brilliant. Well done!

Term 1 also saw the localities of Lismore, Wollongong and Gosford host KidsMatter Primary briefings for principals. Attendance rates at each venue were impressive and

it is greatly satisfying to know just how many principals and school executive members not only understand the importance of student mental health and wellbeing and the links to learning, but wish to take proactive and coordinated steps to address such issues within their school. A number of briefings and KidsMatter Primary professional development events were also held in term 2 and we are expecting New South Wales numbers to steadily increase as more and more schools express interest in implementing this initiative. Current KidsMatter schools within the state reflect a good mix of rural and regional

schools of varying sizes.

In term 3 KidsMatter will be busy not only holding more events, but strengthening its relationship with health departments and attending several education conferences as a special guest. We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible before the year's end.

Remember, *successful schools start with healthy minds*.

Click here for information on what's happening in NSW

Heidi Erickson
KidsMatter Primary NSW
Coordinator

Tasmania highlights

KidsMatter Primary expands in Tasmania

KidsMatter Primary is being implemented by a wide range of primary schools across all sectors and regions in Tasmania with a total of 55 schools implementing KidsMatter across the state. This includes 19 schools which have started this year. Whether a school has 40 students (like Kempton) or 600 students (like some of the urban schools), KidsMatter Primary is flexible enough to fit with different contexts.

Over 20 interested schools have attended KidsMatter Primary brief-

ings in the north and north-west of Tasmania, to hear more about KidsMatter and reflect on how it would fit with their context. Many schools have been working with the Positive Behaviour Support program to address student behaviour issues. Some have identified that KidsMatter Primary would complement this work by guiding comprehensive teaching of social and emotional learning and building the schools capacity to address mental health and wellbeing needs.

On 7 April a KidsMatter Primary roundtable meeting was held in Ho-

bart with a range of key education, health and community stakeholders in attendance. The expansion of KidsMatter Primary and the new strategic directions were discussed and participants shared ideas about state wide promotion and opportunities for working together.

KidsMatter Primary and the Tasmania State Government mental health agenda

The state government's new Agenda for Children and Young People provides a vision for integrated, seamless service provision and collaboration to achieve »

Tasmania highlights *cont.*

best outcomes for children. KidsMatter submitted a paper to inform the agenda and it is clear that the initiative can have a role to play with other agencies to build the capacity of school communities.

Collaboration between KidsMatter and MindMatters: a k-12 approach to mental health

Tasmania has the advantage of being a small state which presents

a great opportunity for KidsMatter Primary and MindMatters to work together to create a k-12 approach to student mental health for all schools. When KidsMatter Early Childhood (currently in the pilot phase), is added to the mix Tasmania can potentially provide an evidence based approach for all children from birth to grade 12. We are currently in discussion about holding a one day forum or

conference to celebrate the achievements of schools across all three initiatives. More information about this will be available on the KidsMatter Primary Tasmania state page soon.

Click here for more information on what's happening in Tasmania

Helen Barrett
KidsMatter Primary Tasmania
Coordinator

SCHOOL SNAPSHOT: New South Wales and Tasmania

New South Wales

KidsMatter Primary at St Benedict's

KidsMatter Primary first came to my attention through the school principal who expressed his interest in the initiative. He then referred much of the material on to me. As a newly appointed assistant principal I immediately thought that I could be the main driving force of such an important and relevant project. I understand that mental health is a real issue and that it does apply to primary aged children. Statistics supported my realisation of this.

I approached the staff and explained what KidsMatter was about. They immediately saw the importance and relevance of the initiative and gave a commitment to become involved. A number of teachers were keen to join the Action Team when asked while one was eager enough to volunteer.

The Action Team administered the staff survey of Component 1: A Positive School Community and when analysed, it was felt that everyone seemed quite positive about the school environment. During Component 1 staff training, many

worthwhile suggestions were listed on how to improve the school environment and how to make all members of the school community feel included and valued. These suggestions were compiled and presented to staff. Through staff discussion an agreed action plan was devised. Both teaching and support staff commented on how interesting it was to look at the school from a different perspective. Within the first week following the Component 1 training, school signage was improved and the foyer cleared and rearranged. Pin boards displaying children's work were erected. Many other simple changes and initiatives are planned over the coming weeks.

The Action Team erected a stand-alone KidsMatter pin board in the staffroom where KidsMatter posters, survey results and the action plans for 2011 are displayed. KidsMatter initiatives will now be regularly discussed at staff meetings.

Parents have also been informed of the initiative through regular

newsletter updates and presentations at Parents and Friends Meetings.

The staff acknowledge that there are many positive practices in place at St Benedict's but realise that there is always room for improvement and a place for new initiatives. Change will be ongoing through the leadership of a committed and enthusiastic School Action Team and with the support of the Principal and staff. The School Action team is genuinely excited by the challenges that lay ahead.

Des McCosker
Assistant Principal St Benedict's
Primary



School snapshots: New South Wales and Tasmania *cont.*

Tasmania

Our Lady of Lourdes School

You feel welcome as soon as you walk into a KidsMatter Primary school.

Our Lady of Lourdes School is a Catholic, co-education primary school in Devonport, Tasmania. The school began its journey with KidsMatter Primary at the end of 2009 by



Parent Matters space – where parents can sit and share ideas, read information or just relax.

Molesworth Primary School

Molesworth Primary School is a small rural government school, approximately 30 minutes drive north-west of Hobart. Molesworth has an environmental centre on site, which provides an excellent opportunity for students across the state to learn in and about our environment. The school has been involved with KidsMatter since the beginning of last year as a way of complementing both physical and mental health. As soon as you walk into the school this involvement is evident with lots of engaging and colourful KidsMatter displays and a welcoming school environment. The school has a strong School Action Team to coordinate KidsMatter but also strategically engages all staff in the ownership of KidsMatter. For example there is a roster for all teachers to be involved on a fortnightly basis in both providing

sending a team along to the North-West School Action Team training. Since then, the school has been actively engaged in implementing KidsMatter – particularly Component 1: A Positive School Community and Component 2: Social Emotional Learning for Students. As soon as you walk into this school, the sense of pride in being a KidsMatter Primary school is obvious. There are colourful displays of children's social and emotional learning and there is a Parents Matter space where parents are able to sit and relax, read information and share ideas. Pamphlets about parenting information and local services are easily accessible.

samples of students Social Emotional Learning work for the front of school display and items for the school newsletter.

Molesworth Primary School has recently created a parent area which includes a display of KidsMatter parent information which the librarian keeps up to date. The original information sheets have been laminated for safe keeping and behind each one there are free copies for parents to take away. The school is now looking at expanding its library resources to include parenting and wellbeing books for parents to borrow.

Social and emotional learning is being taught across the school. The positive benefits of this are already being noticed with parents and staff at the school recognising the social skill development of students. The

On Friday 27 May, Our Lady of Lourdes School held a KidsMatter red shirt day. All students from the school wore a red shirt over their uniform to celebrate being a KidsMatter Primary school and their work around component 1. Inspired by the KidsMatter poster, this aerial photo was taken to show that they are a positive school community where 'every face has a place'.



school has a significant number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and has found that this explicit teaching has been of particular benefit to those students. Molesworth Primary School has just started implementing Component 3: *Working with Parents and Carers* and look forward to where this takes them.

Helen Barrett
KidsMatter State Coordinator
Tasmania



Social and emotional learning display (school entrance)

UPDATE ON OTHER KIDSMATTER INITIATIVES

KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative

The KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative pilot is reaching its final stages. To date, feedback on the Initiative has been very encouraging from both school staff and the parents and carers who attended the sessions. The Initiative has not only provided valued resources for supporting children during transition but also opportunities for parents and carers to share their experiences and ideas with each other.

Having conducted the first three sessions, pilot schools are now running the final parent and carer information session 'Looking forward'. As the title implies, this session begins to look beyond transition and focuses on social and emotional learning and how schools and families can continue to work together to support children's social and academic learning.

Meanwhile the KidsMatter Transition

to School team has recently published, *Transition Matters: A Resource for Schools*. The resource provides schools with background information on transitioning to school as well as practical strategies and ideas that schools can use to put these theories into practice. The resource can be used to create and implement formal transition policies and practices or to add to

what schools are already doing well. Accompanying *Transition Matters* is a planning tool to assist with evaluation and developing an action plan, and a communication resource to facilitate communication between schools and families.

We look forward to bringing you more news about future developments of the initiative in the near future!



KidsMatter Early Childhood Initiative

The latest issue of the KidsMatter Early Childhood eNewsletter provides information about how to build resilience in young children, the benefits of early childhood staff working well together, and the implementation progress of

Component Three: *Working with Parents and Carers*. The feature story brings news from Tasmania and Australian Capital Territory facilitators.

Click here to read Issue 4, the first for 2011



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