

EDITORIAL

Spring edition of the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter

Welcome to the Spring edition of the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter.

As KidsMatter Primary continues its expansion we are looking at continually improving our communication with you. This edition includes a survey to help us understand our audience better and to hear from you about improvements we could make to this eNewsletter. We're also about to launch new KidsMatter Primary state and territory eNewsletters. These aim to provide schools with ideas, inspiration, strategies, tips and additional information to support them as they continue their KidsMatter journey in their state or territory. Please tell us your postcode so that we can include you on our mailing lists.

The theme of this edition is social and emotional learning. We have included articles highlighting the important role this plays in children's development and its close links with learning outcomes. As usual, we include links to our resources to support children's social and emotional development.

Our school stories for this edition include reflections from the Northern Territory where a number of schools share their thoughts and hopes as they commence the KidsMatter Primary journey. The stories from Queensland focus on schools which are further along their journeys and reflect on the work they have undertaken this year.

Another item of interest in this edition is an update on the KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative pilot. Many of the resources from the pilot are now available to download from the new KidsMatter Transition website. We encourage you to take a look at these useful resources.

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Lyn O'Grady

**KidsMatter Primary National Coordinator
Australian Psychological Society**

Jeremy Hurley

**KidsMatter Primary National Coordinator
Principals Australia**

Why social and emotional learning matters

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, it is important that we not only teach our kids to survive but to thrive in the face of life's challenges. To help children reach their full potential and be the best person they can, it has long been recognised that reading, writing and arithmetic is not enough. Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves children gaining awareness, skills and competencies so they can best manage themselves and get along with others. The Collaborative Association for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) aims to '...establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education' by promoting SEL research and best practice across the globe. As shown in the diagram below, CASEL has identified five core competencies essential for the development of mental health, well-being and academic success: **self-awareness, self-**

management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

Research indicates that the benefits of SEL are many. It has been found that SEL helps to protect students from developing mental health difficulties and improves their academic outcomes, well-being and ability to cope with problems. In a recent Australia-wide study of 100 KidsMatter schools, 92% of teachers felt that students who are socially and emotionally competent learn better at school. This commonly held belief was found to ring true when researchers compared KidsMatter schools on NAPLAN outcomes. Researchers grouped schools according to how comprehensively they put KidsMatter into practice by surveying parents, carers, teachers and KidsMatter project officers about the consistency and

success of the initiative. Schools were then grouped according to how well they implemented KidsMatter: low, medium-low, medium-high and high. For example, those schools classified as having high quality implementation integrated SEL into the curriculum and facilitated SEL programs to a higher standard compared to those schools classified as having low quality implementation. The NAPLAN results of students in the extreme high group were significantly ahead of those in the extreme low group. Interestingly these differences between the high and low groups increased throughout primary school with students in year 3 demonstrating NAPLAN scores 2.6 months ahead and those in year 7 demonstrating scores 6.2 months ahead of those in the low group. The findings of this research strengthen one of the core principles underlying KidsMatter: social and emotional learning matters for learning outcomes.

Social & Emotional Learning Core Competencies



[Read the full journal paper](#)

[View 'Why social and emotional learning is important' factsheet \[PDF, 792kb\]](#)

Everyone has a role to play in social and emotional learning: school, home and beyond

As human beings, we are constantly learning life lessons. The opportunity for SEL does not stop when we become adults; rather as we grow older and navigate new life stages we must continually learn how to cope and adjust. Parents, carers and teachers play a powerful role in modelling and practising SEL with children. Children learn best when they are encouraged to practise the skills they learn at school at home and in the real world. Component 2: Social and Emotional Learning for students focuses on how to encourage the development of these five competencies by teaching and modelling SEL across classroom, whole-school and home settings. Indeed, the competencies within Component 2 build on the focus of Component 1 to enhance students' sense of belonging and safety within school.

Tips on how to use the guide are on the KidsMatter website

SEL programs in schools typically aim to teach students specific social and emotional skills through structured activities and games. There are numerous SEL programs available and it can be difficult for schools to choose which one suits their needs. In order to assist schools with deciding which program is right for them, KidsMatter has compiled a Programs Guide for Component 2 which categorises SEL programs according to the extent to which they address the five core

competencies set out by CASEL: **self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.**

In addition, the Programs Guide for Component 2 classifies programs according to the structure of sessions, evidence of effectiveness and whether they are suitable to particular groups of students (for example, students with disabilities).

However, SEL programs are just the beginning. Opportunities for SEL are everywhere, all of the time; SEL does not stop outside of the classroom. The more parents and carers are aware of the SEL programs going on in their school, the better they can support SEL in the home. Parents and carers are in a great position to model, practise and guide the development of skills across a variety of settings. The Component 2 resources outline suggestions for parents and carers such as talking openly about feelings, leading by example, encouraging creative problem-solving and empowering children by giving children clear choices. What's more, teachers can incorporate SEL into other curriculum. For example, a student becoming frustrated with a maths problem can be an opportunity for a teacher to guide self-reflection about positive ways of coping, such as asking a friend for some help, versus negative coping strategies, such as distracting other students. Further information about how teachers can best support SEL can be

found in the Component 2 resources. Rather than one program, it takes the whole school community working together consistently to effectively teach SEL. Everyone in a child's life has a role to play in helping them to navigate new challenges successfully.

View 'Supporting children's social and emotional learning- Suggestions for parents and carers' factsheet [PDF, 615kb]

View 'Supporting children's social and emotional learning- Suggestions for teachers' factsheet [PDF, 615kb]

Tips for supporting children's SEL

Here are some general tips on ways adults can support children's SEL.

Further information can be found in the Component 2 resources.

Helping children learn to cope

- Acknowledge children's feelings of fear and worry. For example, "You're worried about going to school because you have a test."

- Encourage helpful thinking with positive self-talk. For example, instead of "I am terrible at spelling! I am going to fail!" try "Spelling can be hard for everyone, I am going to do my best."

- Use specific praise and encouragement when children demonstrate positive coping. For example, "I can tell that you were really nervous about the test. I am really impressed how you were able to go into it with confidence and give it your best!"

View the 'Helping children learn how to cope' factsheet [PDF, 621kb]

Helping children to manage anger

- Be a model by showing children appropriate ways of managing anger and letting other people know you are angry. For example, "I can feel my face getting hotter. I am getting too angry. I need some time to think this through before I do anything."

- Discuss feelings of anger and help children realise the difference between the experience of being angry and their reaction to it. For example, "I feel frustrated" versus "I feel like throwing this chair".

- Have conversations which explore the triggers to anger, for example,

"What makes you angry?"; alternative ways of responding, for example, "What else could you have tried?"; and different ways to calm down, for example, walking away, deep breathing, counting to ten.

View the 'Helping children learn how to manage anger' factsheet [PDF, 850kb]

Helping children with positive friendship skills

- Create opportunities for children to play with a wide variety of children so they can practise cooperation, sharing and establishing new friendships.

- Model and practise positive social skills such as friendly body language (for example, eye contact, smiling, walking and talking in a confident way), being considerate of others (for example, turn-taking, sharing) and effective communication (for example, listening and expressing wants/needs).

- Help children solve friendship problems by exploring possible reasons behind behaviours and solutions to conflicts. For example, "Why do you think she is being mean? How can everyone be happy?"

View the 'Helping children learn positive friendship skills' factsheet [PDF, 983kb]

Helping children to make good decisions and solve problems

- Introduce children to the method for making good decisions and solving problems:

- (1) Identify what decision has to be made. For example, "What topic

should I do for my animal project?" *(choice based on personal preference and how class is currently focusing on Australian animals)*

- (2) Think of possible options. For example, kangaroos, koalas, wallabies, wombats, echidnas, platypus *(options may be limited by child's knowledge of animals and teacher's restrictions)*

- (3) Evaluate options. For example, "I have more information on koalas, I saw a wombat at the zoo, most of the class are doing kangaroos and I want to be different" *(consider the relevance of things)*

- (4) Choose an option, try it out and see whether it works. For example, "I will try researching koalas and see if I find them interesting."

- Realise that children's ability to make good decisions develops with maturity and experience. Start by practising problem-solving for small decisions and gradually build up to more complex decisions as children improve.

- Support children to develop skills in autonomy and responsibility. For example, ask for their input in everyday decisions and give them tasks to complete like feeding an animal or cleaning their room.

View the 'Helping children make good decisions and solve problems' factsheet [PDF, 790kb]

Reflections from the Northern Territory

Recently four schools across the Northern Territory completed the first step on their KidsMatter journey. This diverse group of schools are located in Alice Springs and Darwin and each school has its own rich identity of place, people and stories.

Action Team members from each new school participated in the 'Getting Started' professional learning event to connect and gain the understandings, methods and tools needed to navigate and lead the way for KidsMatter at their school. To mark this important stage, Action Team members were invited to share their experience and hopes for building strong mental health and well-being in their whole school communities. Here are some of their reflections as they prepare for their next step.

Holy Family Catholic Primary School

Holy Family Catholic School is situated alongside the parish church and neighboring Catholic college in the northern suburbs of Darwin. Pastoral care and well-being are at the heart of what Holy Family School offers their school community, so the school KidsMatter Action Team are enthusiastic about the possibilities that KidsMatter will bring.

"(KidsMatter) ticks all the right boxes when considering our Committee of Management (School Board) visions for the future direction of this school. For example, we want happy families, quality teaching and learning, good NAPLAN results; we want staff and student retention and (our school) to be a happy place (for all) to be.

The main challenge I envisage will

be cultivating a sense of ownership amongst staff, students and parents. Assuring staff that this is not extra work, but a way of doing things differently, and convincing busy parents that it is worth taking the time to consider the benefits and join the journey. Going through the KidsMatter training gave me a sense that we will be well-supported in our journey".

**Cesarina Rocha, Parent
KidsMatter Action Team Member
Holy Family Catholic Primary
School**

Sattler Christian College

Sattler Christian College (formerly Litchfield Christian School) is located amongst beautiful bushland on the rural fringe of Darwin. The value of the school's sense of community and history is evident in conversations with staff and parents alike. With the recent name change to reflect the school's proximity to the nearby World War II Sattler Airstrip, the school is entering an exciting phase of change and rejuvenation.

"At Sattler Christian College the opportunity to engage with the KidsMatter framework is an exciting development for our whole community. The mental health and well-being of our students is of vital and obvious concern to our parents and staff. Having recently attended the first stage of training, our action team is greatly impressed by the implementation process and the wealth of support resources available. We are looking forward to seeing the positive results of implementing the KidsMatter framework in the future."

**Colin Smith, Principal
KidsMatter Action Team Leader**

Sattler Christian College

Larapinta Primary School

Nestled at the foot of Mount Gillen in Alice Springs, Larapinta Primary School's neat green grounds and bright play areas sit against the surrounding landscape of red desert soil and wildflowers. Larapinta Primary welcomes and values its diverse student population of which approximately 40% are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. The KidsMatter Action Team members are busy in preparation for their whole staff Component 1: Positive School Community day in September.

"I can't wait to get started on the whole school KidsMatter journey. I feel excited and re-energised by this project and am hopeful of how it will unite us as a staff and school community. Our school motto is 'Every child a success' and we work hard towards this goal. I feel certain KidsMatter is going to help us succeed in making sure our motto comes true for all our students".

**Karyn Downie, Senior Teacher
KidsMatter Action Team Leader
Larapinta Primary School**

These new KidsMatter schools are excited about renewing and reinforcing their focus on nurturing happy, balanced kids and it is evident from working with the staff and parents who make up the newly formed KidsMatter Action Teams that the children are their central motivation. It is from their individual contexts that each school will begin to navigate their way forward using the KidsMatter process to acknowledge, celebrate and plan for the next stage in their KidsMatter journey.

**Vanna Garrick
KidsMatter NT Coordinator**

SCHOOL SNAPSHOTS: KidsMatter school stories

Queensland

St Catherine's

Developing optimistic and socially competent children at St Catherine's

Over the last couple of years St Catherine's teachers have participated in KidsMatter Primary. St Catherine's is keen to use this framework to further develop, formalise and maintain their positive efforts in relation to children's mental health and well-being.

One of the focuses at St Catherine's this year has been to promote a positive school environment for students to enjoy. Academically, St Catherine's students have access to excellent teachers, curriculum and resources, but equally the school recognises the importance of catering for their students' social and emotional needs.

As a whole school St Catherine's has a number of practices in place to



build a positive school community. These include the school awards system and birthday blessings on Monday morning assembly, the whole school 'caregroup' program and classroom programs.

St Catherine's has also initiated a number of intervention programs this year. From special pastoral projects such as gardening, girls' group, radio club and school magazine to activities to make lunch times more interesting like Top Twenty Thursdays, lunchtime dress-ups and library craft and board games. All of

these activities have been designed to promote students' self-esteem, caring relationships and fun. St Catherine's has also instigated more formal small, targeted groups which deal explicitly with teaching coping skills, friendship skills and positive thinking. This year individual students have also had access to pastoral care through the school chaplain and in some cases the school has developed partnerships with local counselling agencies to provide a venue for students requiring the support of qualified therapists.



KidsMatter at St Anthony's



St Anthony's is a P-12 college situated in Deeragun which is in the fast-growing northern beaches area of Townsville. In 2010 the school decided to implement KidsMatter Primary at the Padua Campus (P-5). Shortly afterwards, staff members and parents began training days on the four components of KidsMatter Primary.

In 2011 so far Action Team members have completed professional development days, conducted

professional learning for other staff members, hosted monthly morning teas, published articles in the school newsletter, and created a display of brochures and flyers which cover a wide range of support services available in the region. In terms of social and emotional learning curriculum, teachers have decided to re-launch the very successful You Can Do It program which has been a part of St Anthony's for some years now. Changes in staff over the years, combined with updated resources from You Can Do It, meant it was time for an update in this area.

There is much more to be done in terms of implementation at the Padua Campus but St Anthony's is satisfied that they are well on

the road. The introduction of Mind Matters at the Assisi (6-12) Campus and Staff Matters across both campuses will continue to provide an exciting challenge into the future as St Anthony's strives to become an even more positive and supportive school community than it is today.



OTHER KIDSMATTER INITIATIVES

KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative

The KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative pilot is now coming to an end. Schools and families continue to tell us enthusiastically how useful the resources have been during transition and beyond. KidsMatter are excited to announce the launch of KidsMatter Transition to School: Parent Initiative website. Many of the resources from the pilot are available to download. Our page for families has downloadable booklets

that provide parents and carers with information and ideas for how they can support their child during transition. The staff page has a number of resources to support schools to plan and implement strategies to involve all the important stakeholders during transition and make transition easier for families.

The KidsMatter Transition team would like to thank all of the pilot schools and parent and carers for the time and effort they put in to being involved.

Visit our website and download some of our resources in time for transition to school 2012!

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/transition

Improving the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter

Your thoughts and feedback

We're keen to hear your thoughts and feedback about the KidsMatter Primary eNewsletter. Does the eNewsletter deliver what you are expecting? How can we better provide the information you need? Please take a few minutes to fill out an online survey to help us improve the eNewsletter.

Complete the survey

Launching KidsMatter Primary state/territory eNewsletters

Are you interested in finding out what's happening on the ground with KidsMatter Primary in your state or territory? If so, our new state and territory eNewsletters are coming your way soon!

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