We wanted to focus on resilience

When staff at St Joseph’s were concerned about increasing numbers of students showing signs of anxiety, they wanted a broad approach to building resilience in students, and assisting parents to understand their children.

At the end of 2010, the decision was taken to implement KidsMatter.

… We thought it was important to have a philosophy that would fit with the positive ways we worked with children in our classrooms. We wanted to focus on resilience and it was clear that if we introduced Kids Matter, it would be more than buying a kit and using it in the classroom. It would help students to explore and understand their feelings.

Jennifer Edstein-Boyes, Principal

Everyone on board

After attending a Briefing, the Principal introduced the concept of KidsMatter. Staff were enthusiastic about it, and within a short time, time was set aside for training in Components 1 and 2. Parents were informed about KidsMatter through the newsletter. Four parents responded to the invitation to join the Action Team, and a large number completed the survey. As Jennifer said: It was essential to get everyone on board at the start of implementing KidsMatter.

The members of the Action Team include: the Principal; Primary Coordinator; classroom teacher; school psychologist; and two parents. They meet twice a term to plan the steps for implementing KidsMatter. The breadth of experience of the Action Team has been a great bonus in establishing the framework and analysing data from the surveys for Component 1.

Using the data from the survey

Parents were generally positive in their responses to the survey for Component 1. The results confirmed the approach that staff felt they promoted – that students are the centre of their actions. However, the school identified some areas that would improve the sense of community and belonging.

Actions taken

A number of actions taken after the survey, reinforce St Joseph’s as an inclusive school. One example was to find a way to present student artwork in the school. Now, in the room where parents are interviewed for
enrolment, 11 picture frames line a long wall to exhibit student paintings and drawings, and they are changed every few weeks. Another example is the placement of a tub with toys for smaller children to play with while their parents participate in enrolment interviews. Recently when a Muslim family enrolled their child, it was an opportunity for the school to ask the parents about significant celebrations in their community so that they could be acknowledged in the school calendar.

Further examples were about a new focus on inclusion and being a welcoming environment. For example, a sign that excluded casual teachers from parking in a particular area was removed. After an audit of the Library, new resources that were more inclusive of different cultural groups were purchased. The wording for a new school sign to be created is: At St Joseph’s, kids matter.

‘Community Builders’ awards
At the end of each year, a Community Builders Award is presented to a student in each grade who shows that they care for, and include other people. The school believes that community building links to its focus on wellbeing and inclusion. The idea of the awards is to highlight the importance of individuals who contribute to the community by their actions.

Throughout the year, teachers observe the activities of students who take responsibility and show awareness of, and respect for others in groups. Their actions and initiatives as community builders might take place in the school or in the wider community in groups such as the Scouts or involvement in activities such as the local Anzac Day procession.

Advantages of introducing KidsMatter
The Action Team members agree that there have been significant benefits to having KidsMatter at St Joseph’s. They say it has raised awareness of the needs of students. It has increased community involvement.

Time is now taken at staff meetings to reflect on how to support students who experience difficulties in the playground. KidsMatter has also enabled teachers to encourage parents to be aware of their children’s needs.

The school is building a range of resources that assist parents to support their children. The strategies to promote inclusion have strengthened the community.

“…It is not a quick fix. KidsMatter takes time and planning. It is critical to involve all staff, and ensure that they are aware of the reason to implement a framework that builds wellbeing and resilience in students.”

Jennifer Edstein-Boyes, Principal

School Profile
St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School Charlestown
New South Wales

- Is located 10 kilometres south west of Newcastle
- Has an enrolment of 280 students
- Has a community made up of ten different cultural groups
- Has the motto: At St Joseph’s we celebrate, we hope we pray, in a nurturing environment of love, learning and service

http://chlstn.mn.catholic.edu.au