Calwell Primary School - reading the climate

Collecting evidence with KidsMatter

One of the drivers in deciding to adopt KidsMatter Primary at Calwell was its structure as a framework and its capacity to connect and engage with parents and the community. The school recognised that the KidsMatter audits and surveys were useful ways to collect evidence about connectedness with parents, and were different from traditional approaches of collecting data about the school.

Feedback from parents

When the school sent out the survey for Component 1, the Action Team adapted the wording to make it 'parent-friendly'. The surveys engaged directly with parents and the school gathered important information. Renee Berry stated that: the school had previously offered formal parent workshop around areas such as NAPLAN and Home Reading and small numbers attended meetings.

"... We were keen to enhance communication between the school and the community. We knew that KidsMatter Primary would help us to focus on our school improvement goals and assist us to report progress against our four-year School Plan.

Linda Neeson, Principal"

Renee reflects: Parents now have the opportunity to chat informally with teachers and the Executive while their children participate in activities. This works! And as a result, we see an increased number of parents participating.

Reading the climate of the school

It was important for the Action Team to ‘read’ the climate of the school when it began implementing each component. The school has allocated considerable time to complete KidsMatter Primary.

"... We think you need to bring people along with you when you introduce whole-school change. It’s critical to give people time to unpack the idea; try out the new ideas; see if they are working and then make changes and improvements. The framework gave us the opportunity to test out different practices in the classroom and develop whole-school initiatives.

Linda Neeson, Principal"

Facilitating connections opportunities

It has been valuable for members of the Action Team to attend KidsMatter Primary breakfasts in Canberra. The breakfasts facilitate connections and it is possible for the Action Team to share attendance. They provide
an opportunity to have conversations with professionals and to learn from other schools and their experience of KidsMatter Primary. At one of the breakfasts, the Coordinator met a psychologist from the Australian National University Psychology Clinic, and as a result, three psychology students have run a ten week program to assist students to understand how to build positive friendships.

Linda Neeson thinks that: the longer the school works with the framework and learns from other schools, it enhances opportunities to see what other connections can be made to support students and their wellbeing.

Some challenges
The school has identified some challenges as it has implemented KidsMatter. Staff turnover has been an issue requiring ongoing professional development to maintain build the initiative. Resourcing the KidsMatter initiative includes staff time and physical items.

Community Room
How does a school provide a warm, welcoming and safe environment for parents and carers to gather, obtain information about mental health, and make connections with external agencies in the course of a day? It is necessary to create a space that is accessible for the parent community and for services.

At Calwell there was a gap for parents and the community. The school, and the Parents and Citizens Association identified the need to have an accessible space and successfully applied for a grant in partnership with Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre.

The Community Room was launched at the end of Term 2, and parents have accessed it for different purposes including meetings and informal gatherings. The Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre has run parenting courses in the community room, and assisted parents to take the step to access external courses. ‘Tea and talk’ sessions with executive staff have occurred, and the room has facilitated family connections with students commencing Preschool in 2013.

Changes at Calwell
Calwell Primary School has made significant changes because of its involvement with KidsMatter. Students across the school from Preschool to Year 6 participate in social and emotional learning through Bounce Back. It has found new ways to engage with parents because of surveys, events and the Community Room. Another example of change is the expression of school values which have been revised to become the Calwell CARES Culture. Rather than having a list of values the CARES culture focuses on building an ethos of CARING about each other, choosing a positive ATTITUDE, being RESILIENT and bouncing back, caring about the ENVIRONMENT and working towards SUCCESS.

… We’ve incorporated new qualities such as ‘resilience’ and ‘making a difference to the environment’. We want to integrate all five items in the Calwell CARES culture into all the everyday experiences of school. We’ve focused on student wellbeing, and this made a difference in 2010 when we proposed implementing KidsMatter Primary to the School Board. Erin Jordan, KidsMatter Coordinator

School Profile
Calwell Primary School Australian Capital Territory

- Is located in the Tuggeranong Valley about 17 kms south of the City of Canberra
- Enrols 350 students from Preschool to Year 6
- Promotes the Calwell CARES Culture: Caring, Attitude, Resilience, Environment, Success.
- The School Parliament is the vehicle for the student voice and leadership

www.calwellps.act.edu.au