St Brigid’s Catholic Primary School, Bridgetown

- Giving a name to what we do

A new Principal and KidsMatter initiative
What happens when a new Principal arrives at a school and decides to implement KidsMatter Primary in Term 1? This is a school story about the first steps at St Brigid’s Catholic School. The Principal analysed the results of the Quality Catholic School Survey of staff, students and parents which assisted Catholic schools to gain a deeper insight into their culture. He wanted to do something to improve the experience of students and their experience as members of the school community.

Response from the community
As a first step, Andrew explained the concept of KidsMatter Primary being an umbrella that brings together actions for wellbeing rather than a program. He asked staff members if they were interested in attending a professional learning session.

There was a very positive response. Sharing the workload in a single stream school is important, so two staff travelled to participate in the session at Bunbury at the end of February.

Action Team focus
The Action Team members include Andrew, Loretta and Sue Turner, Education Assistant. The parent on the Team is a doctor with a strong interest in mental health. They have followed the steps involved in implementing Component 1. All staff, including cleaners and gardeners, and parents completed the survey. The results will be presented to a staff meeting at the end of Term 4.

Staff have participated in professional learning for Component 1. The Action Team has involved staff members in discussions of what is already being done at St Brigid’s.

As Sue Turner says, ‘the list of the small daily actions that encourage good communication continues to grow.’

“... I wanted a greater child-centred focus around all decisions, planning and budget considerations. I had been in two schools that had worked with KidsMatter and it seemed a logical decision to ask staff to consider implementing it. And the school community was engaged with the idea and appreciated the need for stronger relationships.

Andrew Kelly, Principal

“Andrew encouraged us and we understood that we’d all benefit from the work of rebuilding the community in our school. Being a Health and PE teacher, I could see that social and emotional learning underpins everything else for our students.

Loretta Kerse, Year 5/6 teacher
Some early initiatives
One of the first actions to rebuild the community was to introduce a buddy program. The aim is to support students to make connections with each other across age groups.

The Action Team promoted the message of KidsMatter through posters, an explanatory letter to parents, and the school website.

A large mural of an umbrella with droplets signifying the programs and activities that fall under the KidsMatter umbrella is planned - ‘a picture that will tell a thousand words’ about the power of KidsMatter.

And what about the challenges?
Who would believe that time is perhaps the biggest challenge in implementing KidsMatter? For the Action Team, it is the need to limit the number of school/community events that they would like to include in the school calendar.

As Andrew says, ‘once you get the initiative started, it is a challenge to contain the enthusiasm!’ The Team is pleased that they will complete Component 1 by end of the year.

Comments from Action Team members

Sue Turner: Education Assistant
I have been at St Brigid’s for 14 years and have worked with many parents and students. I can see that KidsMatter is a great opportunity to highlight the various activities that encourage parents to be a part of our school. I have seen an improvement in the students’ literacy and numeracy skills. This is a great boost to their confidence and sense of having a go.

Loretta Kerse, classroom teacher
I love seeing the buddy classes that we’ve introduced. We have a timetabled session and cross-age partnerships play ‘Numero’ and learn together and connect. It’s making a difference to have activities that are focused on strengthening our community. And it reflects my passion for social and emotional learning as a foundation for other development. We love the parent involvement and know that it assists learning.

Andrew Kelly, Principal
KidsMatter has helped our school community give a name to what we are already doing – we’re not reinventing the wheel. In building a stronger school community we have held a Fathers’ Day Breakfast, School Feast Day, a tree planting day, and parents are involved in organising the vegetable gardens and assisting sports. We want to have a welcoming feel where the children, staff and parents can also feel very proud to be part of St Brigid’s School, Bridgetown.

Sarah Youngson, parent
As a parent and health professional with a strong interest in mental health, I am pleased and excited that our school is committed to work with the school and wider community to support connectedness and a sense of belonging for our children. We want every child to experience the benefits of strong self-esteem and confidence, which enables each child to reach their individual potential.

St Brigid’s Catholic Primary School, Bridgetown Western Australia
- Is located in a town about 270 kilometres south of Perth with a population of around 3,000
- Will have an enrolment of over 150 students aged from 3 to 12 year olds in 2014
- Emphasises the need for a respectful, nurturing and happy environment in the school vision
- Fosters in all students acceptance and inclusiveness

http://web.stbrigidsb.t.wa.edu.au