Coolaroo South Primary School: Letters from the heart

KidsMatter Primary gave us an opportunity …
The staff at Coolaroo South had had a lot of experience with building a positive school environment, and knew what it was like to have one-off events to build community. While there was progress, the links with the community did not necessarily deepen and grow.

The Principal saw that KidsMatter Primary was a new opportunity to have a structure that would integrate wellbeing into the school experience of students, and also build a sense of community.

In 2010 the whole staff completed training for Component 1.

Ticking all the boxes
For Component 2 the KidsMatter Team looked for a program that would focus on values. The school chose Bounce Back for all students from Preparatory to Year 6. The whole school now spends one hour per week in classrooms on social and emotional learning.

We wanted a program that would enable all students from Preparatory to Year 6 to discuss; share; ask questions; explore themselves. We didn’t just want students to fill out questionnaires. We knew it would work better if they actually engaged in conversations about understanding themselves and the range of their feelings.

Karen Nicholls, Principal

Who is on the KidsMatter Action Team?
Members of the Action Team include: the Principal, Assistant Principals; a staff representative; an Educational Psychologist; Community Liaison person. The Team meets twice per term.

Involving students in promoting KidsMatter
When the school was planning to launch KidsMatter Primary, a group of parents suggested that it would have more appeal if students introduced the concept of mental health and wellbeing to the community.

Students designed invitations; each class prepared interactive presentations on social and emotional learning; and the number of parents who attended the event was larger than expected. At the launch, parents walked through the school observing how students were involved with learning about emotional health.

Bringing parents into the classrooms: ‘Twilight school’
During Education Week the school community celebrates learning and education in its context. The school wanted to invite parents to see the achievements of students and activities that build on learning in the
classroom. The school changed the hours of the school day to 12.00 – 7.00 pm to have twilight hours. This extension of the school day allowed as many parents as possible to participate in the showcases in each classroom.

‘Letters from the heart’
Teachers at Coolaroo South encourage students to explore social and emotional learning through different ways. The school’s annual Writers’ Festival became a focus for this exploration at the beginning of Term 3 in 2011.

Teachers supported students to craft and develop their writing for the theme of the festival, Letters from the Heart. Every student wrote and illustrated a text based on the theme.

This activity provided students with the opportunity to express their feelings of appreciation and gratitude to a significant person in their lives. Students selected parents, friends, grandparents and other relatives as the recipients of letters. The finished copies were displayed at an exhibition which drew large numbers of parents and relatives into the school to view the work of students.

“Parents had to come and pick up their children as it was dark when Twilight School finished. Every grade gave a Bounce Back presentation and during Circle Time, adults joined in the discussions. All families received a show bag with Bounce Back resources and an item that students had made in class. This meant that families could talk about social and emotional learning at home as they unpacked the show bag.”

Karen Nicholls, Principal

Coolaroo South Primary School:
Victoria

- Is in the northern suburbs of Melbourne about 19 kilometres from the CBD
- Has a diverse community – over 75% of students speak a language other than English at home
- Has an enrolment of 270 students
- Has a strong focus on bringing the community into classrooms

www.coolaroosouthps.vic.edu.au

Celebrating International Women’s Day
The school community planned an event to celebrate International Women’s Day. It was another occasion that brought the community into the school. The aim of the event was to celebrate the achievements of women in the Arts. It was evident by the number of women who attended that the links with mothers had been forged in a new way.