Northern Suburbs Christian School
Bridgewater, Tasmania

Profile of the school
Eighty students are enrolled at Northern Suburbs Christian School located in Bridgewater about 22 kilometres from Hobart. The school motto, Equipping, Encouraging, Enriching, provides an image of the way that the teachers support students in their learning and development. Northern Suburbs Christian School explicitly integrates social and emotional skills into the curriculum. From the moment parents walk into the school, resources in the KidsMatter stand, and the signs in the front office indicate the focus on wellbeing of students.

What are we doing differently because of KidsMatter Primary?
Teachers and students are using the language of social and emotional learning, and exploring feelings has become a familiar process in the classroom. Students use problem-solving skills to explore how to make good decisions.

One of the changes I’ve noticed is the openness of the students. They are not hiding away their thoughts and concerns… through talks and role plays students can openly express their feelings and experience and others can empathise… they can talk about who is being affected and how… Giving instant feedback can help students understand why and how they can learn. This kind of emotional support allows kids to get on with their learning.

Ed Moroni, teacher and Coordinator, KidsMatter

Encouraging student leadership
At Northern Suburbs Christian School, students are encouraged to be involved in a range of activities that develop their skills and confidence. Peer mentoring assists students to solve problems in the playground. A group of senior students look after the school ground’s garden and water, and organise the rock borders. These tasks give students a sense of pride, and encourage their connectedness to the school and the environment. Parents and grandparents work with students in the garden too, and have participated in tree planting events.

Non-negotiable class time for KidsMatter
Staff members collaborate to integrate social and emotional learning in the classroom and in the playground. At staff meetings teachers focus on monitoring how the school is progressing in the support of students and families. The decision to allocate non-negotiable time for KidsMatter each week has expanded the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills development to students in every class in the school.

Introducing KidsMatter Primary
The school introduced KidsMatter in 2010 after hearing that it was a framework to assist schools to develop mental health and wellbeing in students. Teachers thought that it would complement the approach to teaching and learning that already existed at the school. We were interested in KidsMatter because it is a well-rounded framework that focuses on social and emotional learning. We knew that it supports students to learn about emotions and it also supports families. We believe that social and emotional learning is the crux of learning… almost as important as the three Rs.

Ed Moroni, teacher and Coordinator, KidsMatter

Grandparents connect to the school
Our Grandparents Day is unique … we get the grandparents working with the kids not just looking at their classroom or listening to a choir. We have been told by grandparents who have grandchildren in other schools that ours is special and they look forward to it. We are proud of it!

Christine Woolley, Principal

Partnership with parents/carers
The school is strongly committed to partnering with parents, and has initiated different ways to encourage parents and carers to participate in the everyday life of students. Parents are also invited to participate in school activities and programs which form part of the approach to the wellbeing of students and their families.

In 2011 initiatives have been held as part of the KidsMatter focus, and these include: a parenting night, Dads’ playgroup, skate n play event; and a parent presentation for the Healthy Lunches Program.

Although I initially came to the parenting night more with a desire to support the school than anything else, I was given advice on the night which made a real difference to my interaction with my child and helped resolve issues that I’d had trouble with for some time. As a result, I’d certainly recommend the parenting nights as well worth the time to attend, and will continue to attend them in future.

Christine, parent

At the behaviour forum I was able to learn how I could discuss issues better with my children. Hearing that other parents have similar issues makes you feel more ‘normal’! It was also a great opportunity to speak to parents outside of school.

Adrian, parent

Right: Grandparents Day 2011
Below: A Dads Day Out at Bonorong Wildlife Park
Left: Dads’ Playgroup