Four significant features

1. Benalla East Primary School is the only Indonesian bilingual school in Victoria. Indonesian is embedded in the culture of the school, and half the students are bilingual by the time they are in Year 6.
2. The school currently teaches the Rock and Water Program to all Middle and Senior classes. The sessions are timetabled every week and the skills are practised in classrooms. Parents and carers are also invited to participate. The Program teaches awareness of self, body and emotions.
3. The school has a strong community links program. Students are involved in Anzac and Remembrance Day, Benalla Festival Parade and Junior Rotary awards. Many students participate in woodworking activities with the local Woodies group. Grade 6 students take part in an inter-generational program in Benalla. The students regularly visit elderly people in a nearby aged care home and invite them to school functions.
4. Benalla East is part of the Benalla Regeneration Program which will result in the amalgamation of three government primary schools and the secondary school in 2013. The Principal and Coordinator acknowledged the influence of KidsMatter Primary Initiative in articulating effective school practices in the ongoing processes of merging into one learning community.

Getting involved with KidsMatter Primary

The school became involved with KidsMatter Primary in 2010. Up to the end of 2011 teachers had completed the first three components. In early sessions teachers explored the context of developing respectful relationships in the school community. Each term the KidsMatter Team conducts parent surveys. The data provides details about what parents want and need from the school.

Staff commitment to KidsMatter Primary

When KidsMatter was first introduced there was concern that it might become another load for teachers. The Action Team includes: the Principal; the Coordinator; a classroom teacher; and a Health Worker who delivers the Rock and Water Program.

“" We were clear that we did not want to increase teachers’ workload. Teachers understood that we would do things differently with KidsMatter but it would not be in addition to what we were doing.

Louise McCloskey, KidsMatter Team Coordinator

Communicating across the airwaves

Survey results showed parent and carer satisfaction increased from 25% in 2010 to 75% in 2011. Through the KidsMatter processes teachers focus
on strengthening connections with families, and the number of interactions increased during 2011. Teachers consciously build relationships and use a number of ways to communicate with parents and carers. These include:
- Text messages
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Face-to-face meetings.

The survey highlights that parents and carers are more likely to respond to text messages and emails than other forms of communication. Some changes in communication include teachers texting parents and carers when students achieve personal goals or complete a project successfully. Class teachers send texts to parents or carers the night before the school assembly when students receive a ‘Student of the Week’ award.

**What parents asked for ...**

When the staff began working with Component 3, a phone survey was conducted with 50 parents selected at random. A staff member asked what kind of information did parents and carers expect from the school.

The top priority identified by parents/carers in the survey was about bullying. They wanted to stop any incidence of bullying. We ran an information session about the issue of bullying, and we asked a health worker to facilitate it. We know that this initiative made a difference to the way parents felt about the services we can offer through our school.

Louise McCloskey, KidsMatter Team Coordinator

**What’s next?**

The plans for Benalla East in 2012 are to:
- Introduce Component 4: Early intervention for students experiencing mental health difficulties
- Develop processes for teachers and parents to support students at risk
- Host a cybersafety session for staff, parents and carers
- Provide information about mental health services on its website
- Review school behavioural policies and practices in relation to mental health and wellbeing

Rick Martin, the Principal says that teachers now feel more involved and the school is connected to all parents through technology ... there is positive ongoing communication rather than contact with families only when things are not going well.

We’ll continue to raise the profile of mental health in our school in 2012. It is sobering to hear statistics for primary school aged children who experience mental health difficulties. We now know that a school can be part of the processes to support children in their emotional growth.

Louise McCloskey, KidsMatter Team Coordinator

**Benalla East Primary School**

Victoria

Benalla is approximately 190 kilometres North East of Melbourne

The population is 9,000

Enrolments at Benalla East Primary School are around 250 students, from Preparatory to Year 6

The school motto is The family school where the individual counts

[www.benalleastps.vic.edu.au](http://www.benalleastps.vic.edu.au)