



University of
South Australia

THE WELLBEING CLASSROOM AS A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

Impact Evaluation - April 2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report on the evaluation of a school-wide wellbeing approach in a South Australian primary school, implemented over four years. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach is a positive action framework implemented in care and education sites in South Australia for children aged 5-12 years. It involves teacher professional development in trauma-informed pedagogy, explicit teaching of wellbeing, social and emotional learning resources for children, and family involvement in social and emotional learning activities. It has been implemented in over 50 primary school classrooms across South Australia since 2012.

The approach was developed in a partnership between a public primary school in suburban Adelaide, Schools Ministry Group, Salisbury Communities for Children and a research team from the School of Education, University of South Australia. A report documenting the processes of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach was published in 2014 (McInnes, Diamond & Whittington 2014).

A South Australian public primary school which had one classroom engage with the Wellbeing Classroom Approach resolved to implement it on a whole school basis commencing in 2015. The research detailed in this report examined the impacts of the school-wide Wellbeing Classroom Approach implementation. The evaluation research was conducted by a research team from the Education Futures Unit of the University of South Australia; the team which conducted the original research into WBC. The researchers' partners were Salisbury Communities for Children, the Schools Ministry Group and the public primary school leadership.

In 2019, when data for this report were collected, the school was a Category Three school, indicating relatively high levels of disadvantage in the school population. Sixty percent of students spoke English as an Additional Language or Dialect. Fifty percent of students received School Card benefits for low-income families.

The school NAPLAN data indicated the Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities were having positive impacts on academic achievement and on the school's socio-cultural environment, enabling students to enjoy attending school, and experience considerable advances in their development and learning. There was also rapid growth in EALD parent engagement with the school and health and family support services. Bullying rates in the school declined over time and attendance rates rose.

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach has been found to have positive outcomes for the whole school, its staff, students and families. This transformation of school culture was achieved over time through:

- committed leadership,
- flexible and adaptable use of strategies and resources,
- a shared language, and
- authentic partnerships with staff and students.

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach has demonstrated the possibilities afforded by a persistent focus on wellbeing.

Two years after commencing the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, the school introduced a Student Wellbeing Agent role to involve students in selecting, planning and delivering peer education in wellbeing activities, as well as presenting to parents and to education stakeholders. A range of positive impacts was found for students who took on Wellbeing Agent roles in the school. Their self-knowledge and awareness improved, and some commented that their behaviour and reactions had changed for the better since taking on the role.

The research showed these students were able to articulate a range of wellbeing strategies they had been involved in teaching to their peers and junior primary classes and had developed language to discuss various roles of students in bullying situations. They identified that positive actions which helped others made them feel good and helped to spread kindness and helping actions throughout the school. They reported that their leadership and presentation activities had boosted their confidence and self-esteem and they encouraged other students to take on Wellbeing Agent roles.

Children provided drawings of themselves at school and their feelings about school. The drawings, representing over one third of the school's student population, provided a means to assess students' self-image at, and experience of, their school. A clear majority of students depicted themselves and described having a positive experience. This was a clear endorsement of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach by the student population, and an indicator of its efficacy. Whilst 35 percent of drawings were identified as being of possible concern, there was a relatively low threshold of inclusion in this category which ranged from students' explicit negative images and statements, through to interpretation of meaning which may raise questions about their wellbeing and self-esteem. Age Group, English as an Additional Language or Dialect and Disability variables were found to be significantly correlated with indicators of concern. The Age Group variable indicated that the students who had been exposed to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach since commencing school were less likely to have a drawing of concern than those older age groups who started school before the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced, or those who were still in their junior primary years, with less exposure to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. English as an Additional Language status students were less likely to have a drawing of concern than their English-speaking peers, reflecting the reported increasing engagement and satisfaction of EALD families since the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced. Most of the drawings by students with a disability were coded as being of concern, indicating a need to specifically attend to the experience of students with a disability at the school. The drawings data affirmed the overall efficacy of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, providing evidence of high levels of student happiness and self-esteem at school, the cumulative benefits for students of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach over time, and the efficacy of the WBC Approach in engaging and supporting children with an EALD background.

Key messages from this research indicate the importance of:

- having a wellbeing approach which is flexible and adaptable, tailored to school needs
- direction and support prioritised by school leadership, leading a coordinated school response
- staff access to applied professional development in trauma-informed pedagogy over a period of time and a suite of effective resources
- authentic structured student voice to develop, plan and implement wellbeing activities
- a whole of school commitment to authentic engagement with wellbeing values, language and relationship dynamics to create a safe, nurturing, respectful community
- the cumulative benefits over time of a consistent focus on wellbeing, attuned to the practical contexts of staff and students

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach is the emphasis on universal practice and collective collaborative work to sustain a wellbeing culture. Individualised responses to children with learning and behavioural difficulties are important to addressing specific needs arising from each child's specific circumstances, however social relationships and social-emotional learning take place in the communities in which each child belongs and lives. School is the community where children spend most time outside their home life. If the relationship dynamics and contexts which stimulated a child's disruptive and distressed behaviour can be changed, the individualised therapeutic gains can be preserved and enhanced. In struggling

to succeed in their school community children can become labelled and excluded. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach fosters a sustainable culture of being respectful of feelings of oneself and others, finding character strengths, taking time to calm down, forgiving and re-doing difficult encounters, relationship repair, spreading the joys of kindness and taking responsibility for behaviour as a valued member of their community.

This study has not explicitly included data on the costs and benefits of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach; however, the resource expenditure has been contained within normal school funding and operation provisions of the South Australian Department for Education. Expenditures on pedagogy resources, such as *Kimochis* and wellbeing mentors, align with school budget and operational structures. Commitment and coordinated, cooperative effort over time has been the principal investment by all members of the school community. Across the school community, an estimated 25,440 person hours have been focused on wellbeing activity over the school year. The study has not identified any other forms of increased risk, loss or cost arising from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach.

The research identifies that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has been successfully translated from individual junior primary classrooms into a whole school approach with manifest benefits distributed across the school community.

1

INTRODUCTION

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach (WBC) is a positive intervention framework implemented in care and education sites in South Australia for children aged 5-12 years. It involves teacher professional development in trauma informed pedagogy, explicit teaching of wellbeing, social and emotional learning resources for children, and family involvement in social and emotional learning activities. It has been implemented in individually relevant ways in over 50 primary school classrooms across South Australia since 2012.

The approach was developed in a partnership between a public primary school in suburban Adelaide, Schools Ministry Group, Salisbury Communities for Children and a research team from the School of Education, University of South Australia. A report documenting the process of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach was published in 2014 (McInnes, Diamond & Whittington 2014). The report identified positive changes over a school year in children's mutual friendships at school and their knowledge of words to describe their emotions. Similar gains for children have been anecdotally reported in the classrooms which have since taken on the approach.

The implementation of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has previously, in practice, relied on the willingness of individual classroom teachers to engage with the pedagogies and content, rather than an externally imposed directive. Teachers who adopted this approach accepted a mentoring and implementation coach in their classroom, adapting to new ways of thinking about children's behaviour, and incorporating new strategies, routines and resources into classroom activities.

The process of implementing the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has been taken forward by Schools Ministry Group, who have provided teacher professional learning in trauma informed pedagogy, class planning and timetable design, social and emotional learning resources, as well as classroom-based implementation coaching and teacher support. The adoption of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has relied on the initiatives of school staff in response to identified needs, particularly the proportion of children who have had experiences of trauma or chronic stress.

Common contributors to trauma and chronic stress for children can be mapped against the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Framework (Anda et al. 2010), which collects adult population data on the incidence of experiences of child neglect and maltreatment, domestic and family violence, parental addiction, mental illness, imprisonment and divorce. Recent South Australian research has identified that around seven percent, or more than 27,000 South Australian children, are suffering 'very high to extreme levels of psychological distress,' placing them currently at considerable risk of long-term mental health problems (Segal et al. 2018).

In 2015 a public primary school in a northern suburb of Adelaide resolved to implement the Wellbeing Classroom Approach on a whole school basis in a bid to improve children's social and emotional capacities at school.

The primary school, located in a low-income area, was rated '3' in 2017 on the South Australian Schools Index of Disadvantage, where one is most disadvantaged and seven is least disadvantaged (Department for Education 2017). This rating has since been revised to '2', indicating subsequent additional risk factors in the school population.

This report provides an evaluation of the impacts of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach on the school population over the years 2015-2018, with data collected in 2019. The evaluation draws on school statistical data on key indicators over the period including child readiness for school (Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)), parent satisfaction, academic achievement and bullying behaviour. Another data source comprised a collection of children's drawings on the topic '*Me at School*', with a statement about their feelings about themselves at school, from a class activity conducted across all year levels.

Further data sources were interviews with Wellbeing Classroom Approach community organisation leaders from Schools Ministry Group and Salisbury Communities for Children; interviews with the School Principal and Wellbeing Coordinator; and focus groups with schoolteachers and with student 'Wellbeing Agents'.

The introduction and development of the role of Student Wellbeing Agents was an innovation arising from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach at this school. It is discussed in more detail in the qualitative data section of this report. At the time of the report, the Wellbeing Agent role had been in place for three years. In its current form¹, the school's Wellbeing Coordinator invites students from middle- and upper-class years to participate as wellbeing agents. These students attend and contribute to wellbeing discussion and planning sessions with the Coordinator to workshop the selection of wellbeing topics, and the resources and strategies for presenting the topic with their own year level, as well as their junior primary 'buddy' class. The group also plans and delivers parent learning events on wellbeing at the school, and has presented information to external stakeholder audiences at conferences, seminars and workshops.

The evaluation research was conducted by a research team from the Education Futures Unit of the University of South Australia; the team which conducted the original research into the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. The researchers' partners were Salisbury Communities for Children, the Schools Ministry Group and the public primary school leadership.

The research process was approved by the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee. School staff arranged with families and children to obtain consent for students to contribute to the research process. This approach ensured that school-based language translators were able to effectively communicate with families who were not able to provide consent in English. Classroom teachers also managed the execution and collection of children's drawings of themselves at school. This ensured that children were able to undertake their drawing in a familiar environment with a known educator. The design of both consent and data collection processes was guided by school leadership and ensuring evaluation processes were appropriate and felt safe for their students.

The report's following sections begin with an orientation to the school's context and demographic aspects of the school population, before providing details of quantitative data from the school since the commencement of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. These data include AEDC school records 2015-2018, NAPLAN literacy and numeracy results 2014-2019, School Wellbeing Audit 2018 and Parent survey 2018 results. The report then details interview and focus group data from community organisations, school leaders and school staff. This section begins with a brief overview of the genesis and establishment phase of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach in the school, then presents an outcomes analysis variously detailing identified outcomes for the whole school, its staff, students and families. The report also focuses on children's voices through the data from the Student Wellbeing Agent focus group and from student drawings of '*Me at School*' and an accompanying feelings statement.

¹The Wellbeing Agent role is dynamic and evolves with the thinking and the requirements of the school's community.

2

SCHOOL CONTEXT

In 2018 the school enrolment was 366. Table 1 provides a breakdown of percentages of students against key indicators of complexity.

Table 1: Percentages of Students' Key Indicators of Complexity

STUDENTS	%
English as Additional Language or Dialect students	61
Students on school card (low income)	49
Students with refugee status	23
Students with a disability	12
Students identified as trauma affected	8
Students who have had Department for Child Protection intervention	5
Students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	3

Three in every five students had home languages other than Standard English. Nearly half the families lived on a low income and nearly one in four children were from refugee families. The school has relatively high levels of complexity, with linguistic diversity alone presenting challenges regarding creating a sense of belonging for students, and in communicating with families who do not easily communicate in English.

Congruent with the Wellbeing Classroom Approach of co-design and flexible adaptation to site needs, the school has been innovative. It resolved to adopt a whole school approach, extending from individual classes. It also developed the role of students as 'Wellbeing Agents' who undertake peer leadership roles in supporting fellow students, both formally and informally, and in planning wellbeing activities. The development and contribution of students' Wellbeing Agent leadership is investigated in the qualitative data.

The following section provides quantitative data from the school's records, beginning with the Australian Early Development Census data, followed by changes in annual NAPLAN data, school wellbeing audits and a survey of parents in 2018.

3

SCHOOL DATA RECORDS

3.1 AEDC Data

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) provides three yearly reports based on teachers' assessment of five-year-old children's development in all domains, collected in their first year at school. The surveys document children's development on a 10-point scale across five developmental domains, providing population level data on the percentages of children who are vulnerable (<10th percentile), at risk (10th - 25th percentile) or 'on track'. School AEDC data can be compared across census rounds to identify changes in the percentage of children in their first year of school being identified as vulnerable.

Table 2: 2015-2018 Change in AEDC Domains at the School

■ Positive outcome ■ Outcome of concern

		2015		2018		SIGNIFICANT CHANGE
		n	%	n	%	2015 vs 2018
Physical health and wellbeing	On track	22	52.4	28	70	Significant increase
	At risk	8	19	6	15	No significant change
	Vulnerable	12	28.6	6	15	Significant decrease
Social competence	On track	23	54.8	27	67.5	Significant increase
	At risk	14	33.3	7	17.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	5	11.9	6	15	No significant change
Emotional maturity	On track	23	54.8	26	65	Significant increase
	At risk	13	31	7	17.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	6	14.3	7	17.5	No significant change
Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	On track	27	64.3	28	70	No significant change
	At risk	8	19	6	15	No significant change
	Vulnerable	7	16.7	6	15	No significant change
Communication skills and general knowledge	On track	23	54.8	31	77.5	Significant increase
	At risk	9	21.4	3	7.5	Significant decrease
	Vulnerable	10	23.8	6	15	Significant decrease

The data shows significant increases in the proportion of children assessed as being 'on track' across four of the five domains between the 2015 and 2018 AEDC, with no significant change in the Language and Cognitive Skills domain. This shows is likely an indicator of the linguistic diversity of the school, with children grappling with the transition from speaking a home language other than English and commencing school in English. These outcomes may in part be attributed to children's experiences prior to commencing school, however the generalised trajectory of positive change supports an interpretation that the school's wellbeing activities are having a positive effect since the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commencement in 2015.

3.2

School Academic Achievement NAPLAN 2015-2019

Australian students are assessed in standardised literacy and numeracy tests known as NAPLAN in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, the latter in secondary school so outside the scope of this research. NAPLAN tests whether students are achieving at or above the national minimum standard for literacy and numeracy.

3.2.1

Student Cohort Progress (Year 3 in 2014, Year 3 in 2015, Year 3 in 2016)

The proportion of students achieving at or above the South Australian Standard of Education can be tracked in cohorts across the two-year intervals between NAPLAN tests (see Table 3).

Table 3: Student Year Level Cohort % at or above required standards: Reading & Numeracy

COHORT 1	READ	NUM	COHORT 2	READ	NUM	COHORT 3	READ	NUM
2014 Y3	70	48	2015 Y3	66	39	2016 Y3	81	71
2016 Y5	68	51	2017 Y5	68	62	2018 Y5	63	61
2018 Y7	65	69	2019 Y7	60	75	2020 Y7		

Figure 1 below represents NAPLAN data about Cohort One, students who were in Year 3 in 2014, Year 5 in 2016 and Year 7 in 2018. The school wide implementation of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced in 2015, as this cohort entered Year 4. Cohort One's NAPLAN Reading score trajectory between Year 3 and Year 7 shows a five percent decline in the proportion of students achieving at or above the South Australian Standard of Education.

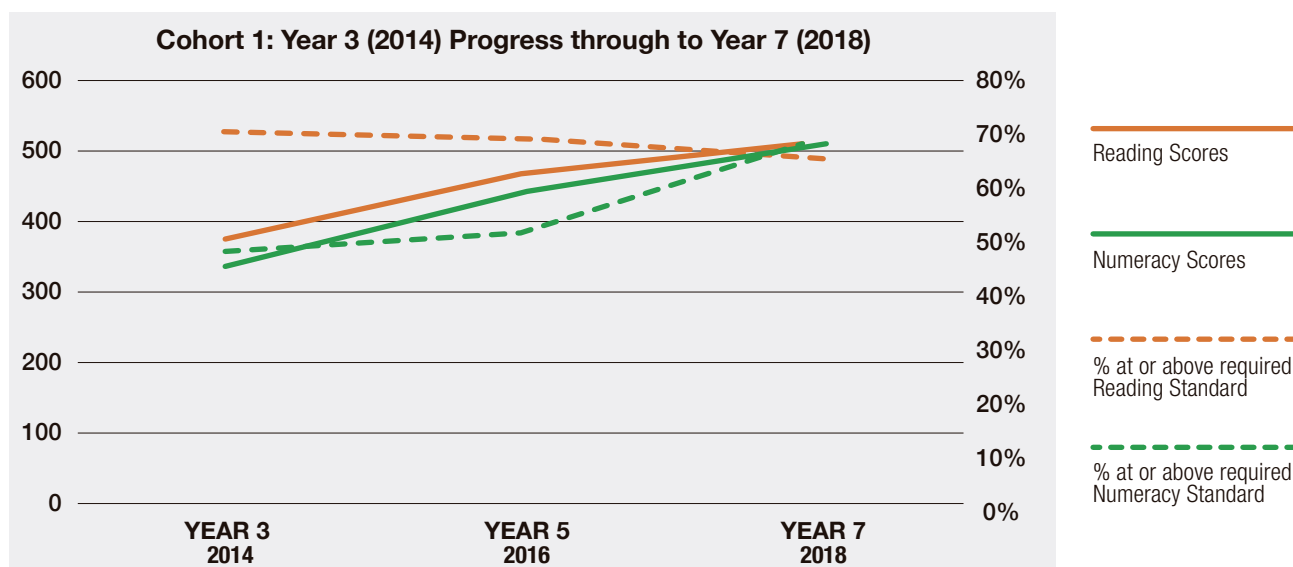


FIGURE 1: Cohort 1 Reading and Numeracy Scores and % Students Achieving at or above Standard

Figure 1 also highlights that the slight decline in Reading scores contrasts with the 21 percent gain in the proportion of students achieving at or above the South Australian Standard of Education in Numeracy.

Cohort Two represents the students who were in Year 3 in 2015, Year 5 in 2017 and Year 7 in 2019 (see Figure 2). The school wide implementation of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced in 2015, as this cohort entered Year 3. Cohort Two's NAPLAN scores follow the pattern of Cohort 1, with a six percent decline in the Reading score trajectory between Year 3 and Year 7 but a huge 36 percent gain in the proportion of students achieving at or above the South Australian Standard of Education in Numeracy.

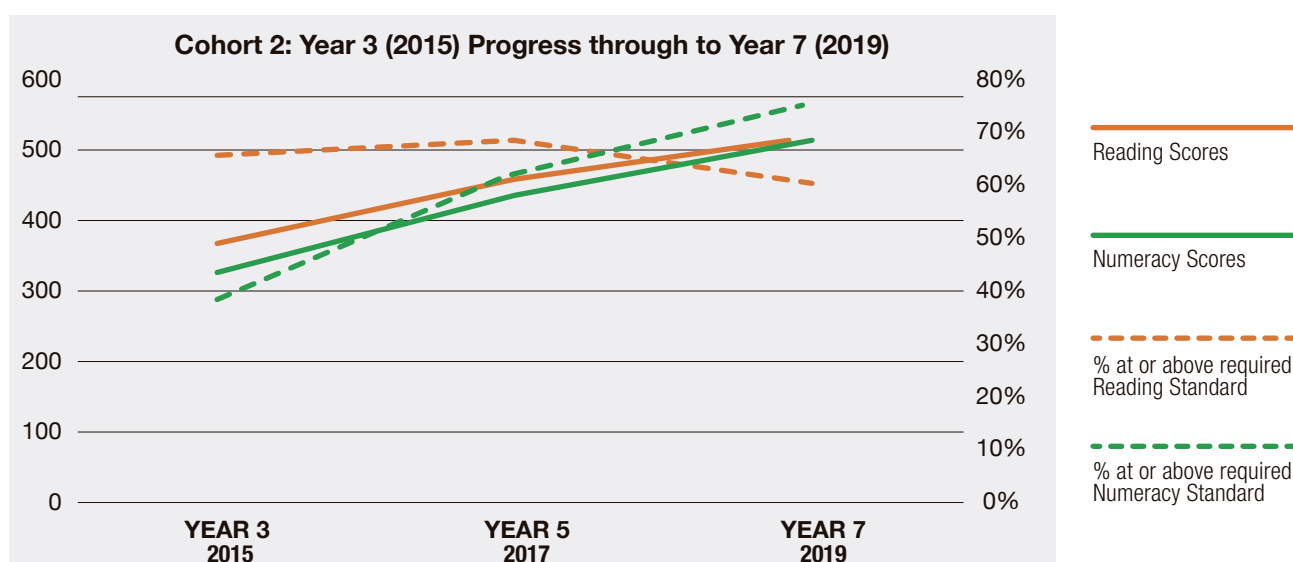


FIGURE 2: Cohort 2 Reading and Numeracy Scores and % Students Achieving at or above Standard

NAPLAN data about Cohort 3 represents the students who were in Year 3 in 2016 and Year 5 in 2018 (Figure 3). For these students, 2018 NAPLAN testing occurred online. The 2020 NAPLAN tests had yet to be collected for Year 7 of this cohort and were later cancelled due to COVID-19. The Year 3s in this group featured the highest reading and numeracy scores of the three cohorts but the proportion achieving at or above the Standard of Education (SEA) had fallen by 18 percent in reading and 10 percent in Numeracy by Year 5.

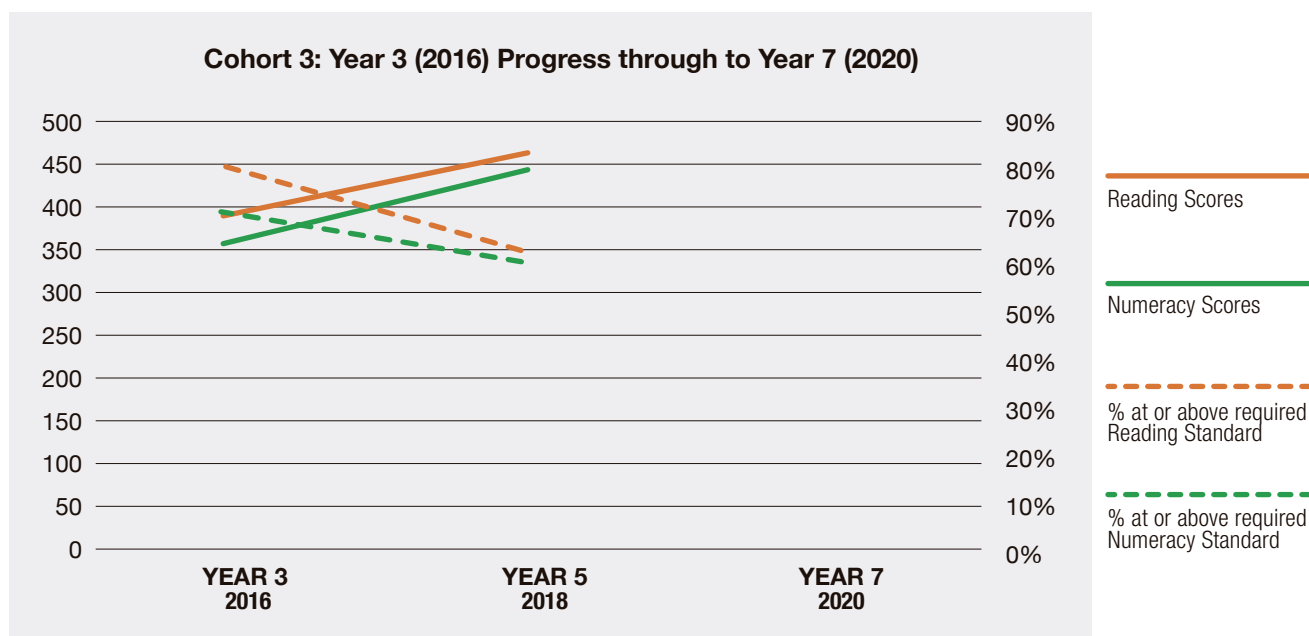


FIGURE 3: Cohort 3 Reading and Numeracy Scores and % Students Achieving at or above Standard

The apparent drop in literacy performance between Years 3 and 7 on the trajectory of cohort NAPLAN tests echoes the findings of two longitudinal studies, '100 children go to School' (Hill et al. 1998) and '100 Children turn 10' (Hill et al. 2002). These longitudinal studies examined the trajectory of children's literacy development from age four to 10 years. The extensive studies took place across three states and spanned five SES diverse urban and rural settings. They found that family financial poverty was an important factor in children's achievement in literacy, and that for many, but not all such children, the disadvantage widened dramatically over time. The researchers found that a few children living in low-income circumstances were able to catch up in their literacy achievement, however this was not evident for the majority. They also observed that differences in families' social capital were factors in literacy achievement. Where children living in low SES circumstances were found to do well, they were learning in classrooms that provided what the researchers called 'emotional security' (Hill et al. 1998; Hill et al. 2002), within a whole school approach that set high expectations and peer support, with teachers who created emotionally supportive learning spaces. These studies emphasise the importance of wellbeing activities underpinning academic achievement in schools serving low-income communities.

Despite the downward trends in the proportion of students achieving reading standards, comparing the scores with other schools with similar student characteristics shows the school's positive achievements in NAPLAN data.

3.2.2

School Progress 2014-2019 (Year Level Results)

The following figures are extracts from the Australian Government's NAPLAN data, as presented on the MySchools website representing average scores (reading and numeracy) for the school site and comparable schools with students of similar backgrounds. The extracts have been chosen to demonstrate the school's progress (or improvement in learning outcomes) between 2014 and 2019 by comparing of Year Level results over time.

Figure 4 provides a view of the school's Year 3 average NAPLAN Reading scores between 2014 and 2019, in comparison with other school's with students with similar backgrounds. Figure 5 provides a view of the school's average NAPLAN Numeracy results compared to other schools with students with similar backgrounds.

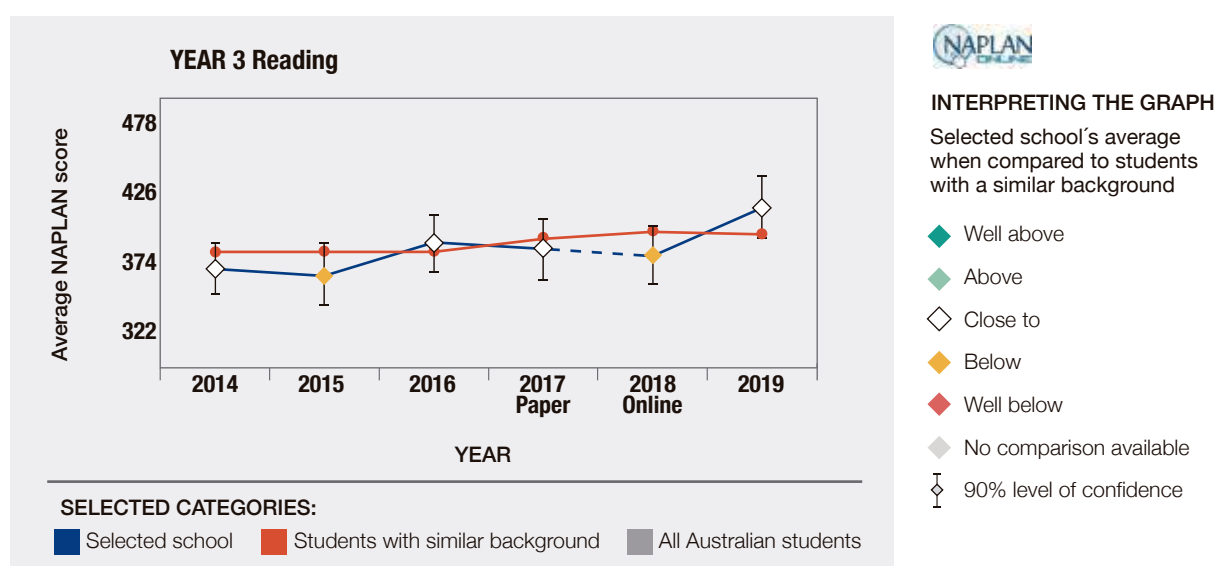


FIGURE 4: Year 3 Reading Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

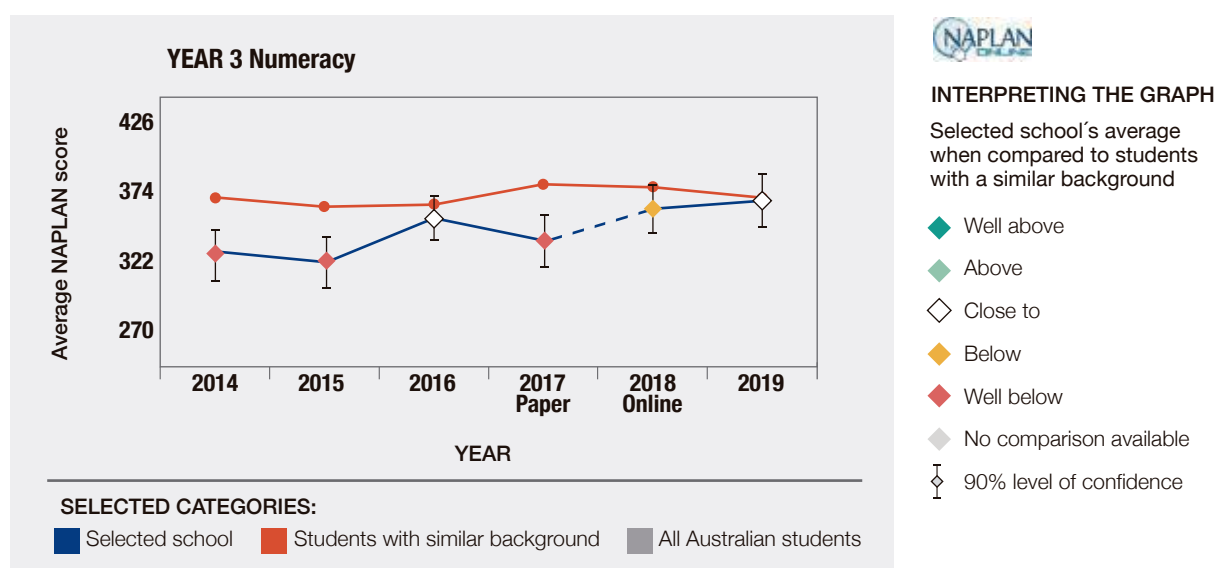


FIGURE 5: Year 3 Numeracy Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

These two figures highlight that over time the school's average Year 3 NAPLAN results for Reading and Numeracy are not only increasing, but are also increasing compared to the average results from other schools with students from similar backgrounds.

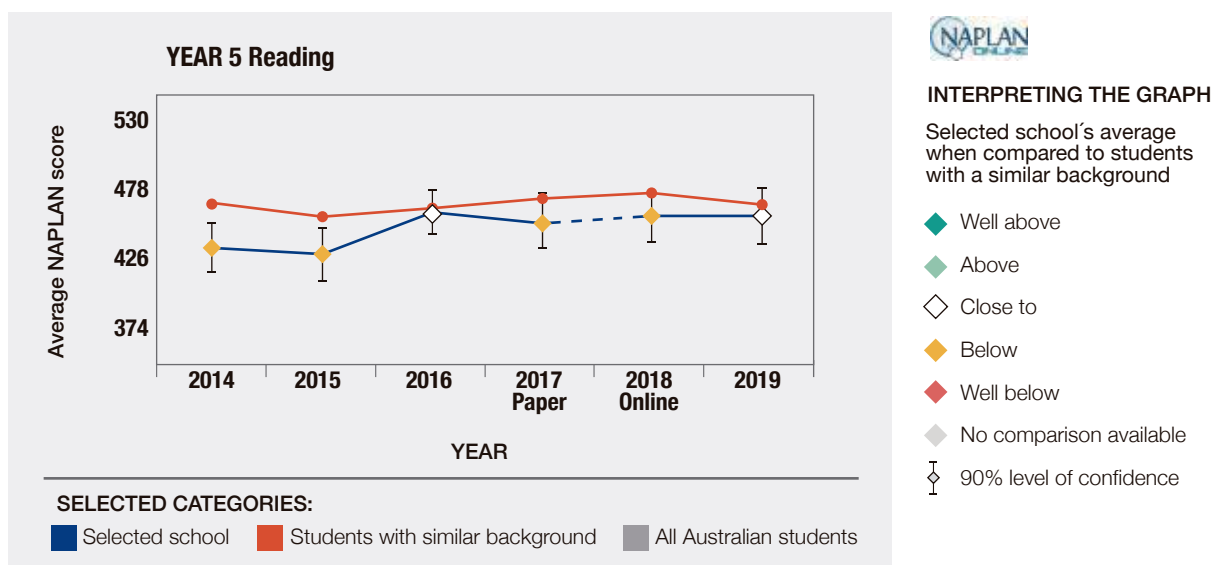


FIGURE 6: Year 5 Reading Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

Similar patterns of improvement are seen in the Year 5 data presented in Figure 6 and Figure 7 which highlight that the school's average NAPLAN reading and numeracy scores have increased over time, and have also improved from well-below, or below average, to close to the average of schools with students with similar backgrounds, noting that the average NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy scores of all other similar schools decreased between 2018 and 2019.

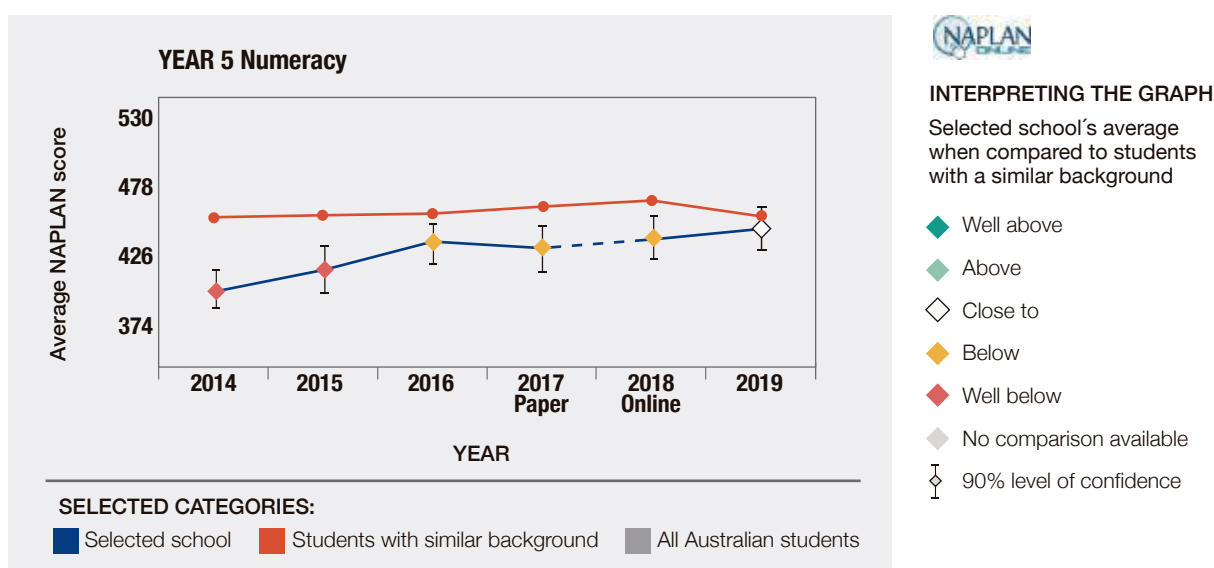


FIGURE 7: Year 5 Numeracy Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

Figure 8 and Figure 9 highlight that whilst Year 7 average scores also show improvement over time, the increase is less for both Reading and Numeracy compared to the improvements seen in equivalent Year 3 and Year 5 scores between 2014 and 2019. Whilst the school's average Year 7 Reading and Numeracy scores have also improved compared to other schools with students from similar backgrounds, it should be noted that the comparison average has decreased from 2017 onwards.

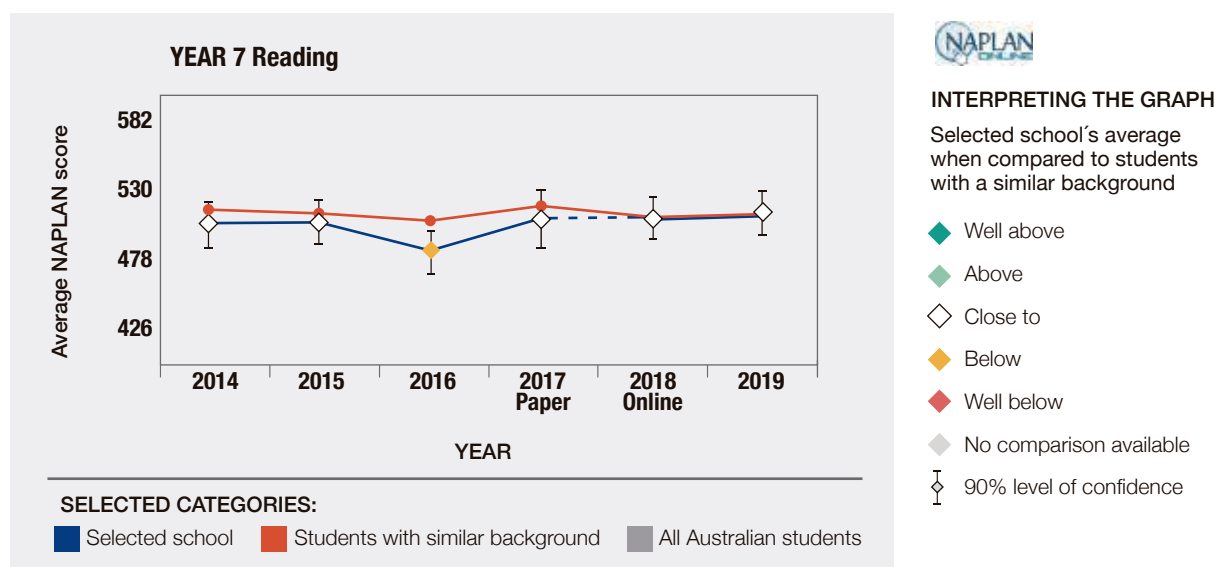


FIGURE 8: Year 7 Reading Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

In interpreting the data presented in these figures it is important to note that the average scores in any given year are influenced by the particular cohort of students completing the testing, as discussed in the previous section. For example, the 2014 Year 3 (Cohort One) scores were close to the average of similar schools, close to average again in 2016 as Year 5s and remained close to average in 2018 when they sat the tests as Year 7 students.

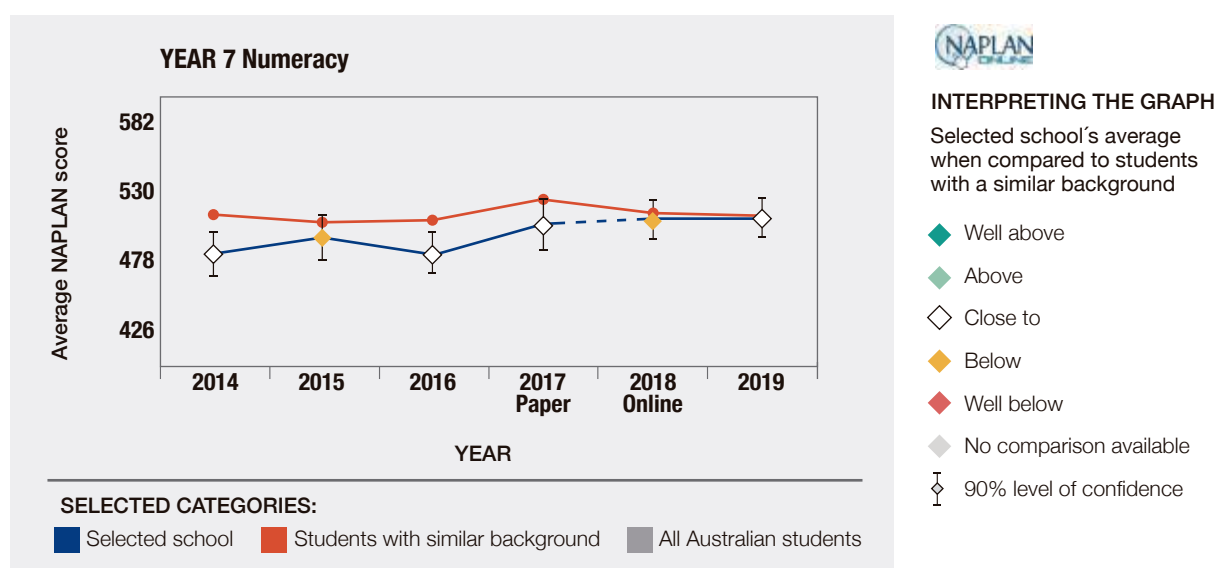


FIGURE 9: Year 7 Numeracy Results Across Time Compared with Schools with Students with Similar Backgrounds

The NAPLAN data indicate that the school's academic results have not been adversely affected by the introduction of a school-wide Wellbeing Classroom Approach and have improved in some areas.

3.3

School Wellbeing Audit 2018

The School has monitored the impacts of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach with biannual audits of staff and student experience, as well as monitoring behavioural data on a whole school basis. Behaviour data indicated that reported bullying and harassment incidents decreased by 14 percent between 2017 and 2018. The number of students referred to the principal's office for problem behaviour decreased by seven percent. In the September 2018 audit, 22 students indicated that they had been bullied, down from 43 students in 2016. The positive trend in behaviour data was also reflected in students' attendance which increased to 91.8 percent in 2018, up from 89.06 percent in 2016 and 90.9 percent in 2017.

The audit surveyed student Wellbeing Agents about their role. Every student leader reported they enjoyed the work and found the role helped them develop knowledge and confidence as leaders in their classrooms. They identified that students' learning and mood had improved in class, with less bullying behaviour and more understanding of ways to support their own wellbeing and that of others.

Teaching staff feedback was similarly positive, identifying universally high satisfaction with the process of embedding wellbeing strategies into their classroom practice, working alongside student Wellbeing Agents.

Parent involvement data comparing 2017-2018, showed a 70 percent increase in the number of families with English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) attending family learning events, and a 50 percent increase in the number of EALD families accessing family support and health services.

3.4

Parent Survey 2018

One hundred parents (44 percent) responded to a school survey in 2018 regarding their experiences of their child's school engagement. The responses in Table 4 are presented in descending order, featuring a mean score of 84.5. The survey indicated highest levels of parent satisfaction with respect for cultural diversity and children's enjoyment of their school.

Table 4: 2018 Parent Survey regarding their experiences of their child's school engagement

QUESTIONS	YES	NO	COULD IMPROVE	NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION	DON'T KNOW	NO RESPONSE
The school respects and celebrates different cultures.	97	1	0	0	2	0
My child likes being at this school.	94	0	4	0	2	0
Teachers at this school expect my child to do their best.	92	0	3	0	4	1
This school looks for ways to improve.	87	1	8	0	4	0
I am satisfied with the overall learning programmes offered at this school.	83	0	10	3	4	0
My child's learning needs are being met at this school.	83	1	9	2	5	0
I know the standard of learning that is expected of my child e.g. reading level.	82	0	14	2	2	0
My child is making good progress at this school.	81	0	15	0	1	3
I can be involved in making decisions about my child's learning.	80	2	11	1	5	1
I am offered regular and frequent opportunities to talk about my child's progress.	79	1	14	0	5	1
There are opportunities for me to develop my own skills in supporting my child's learning.	72	5	18	0	5	0

n=100

3.5

Summary overview of school quantitative data 2015-2018

The statistical data indicated the Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities are having overall positive impacts on students' academic performance and the school's socio-cultural environment, enabling students to enjoy attending school, and experience considerable advances in their development and learning. This result is significant in a school with relatively high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity and complex social contexts including low incomes, refugee backgrounds and disability. The rapid growth in EALD parent engagement with the school and health and family support services indicates that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach is fostering school-family-community relationships alongside children's improved sense of safety and reduced levels of bullying.

The following section presents qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with the Wellbeing Classroom Approach community and school leaders and educators. The final data section will centre on data from students using the focus groups with student Wellbeing Agents and drawings of 'Me at School' by 125 students.

4

QUALITATIVE DATA

4.1

Methods of Data Collection

The research team collected qualitative data from key informants in the school community. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leadership of the community sector partners, Salisbury Communities for Children and Schools Ministry group, as well as with the school Principal and Wellbeing Coordinator.

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with a group of 5 teachers and separately with a group of 8 students who were Wellbeing Agents in the school, who were providing peer leadership in wellbeing activities.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis using a key themes approach (Braun & Clark 2006).

4.2

Qualitative Data Analysis Processes

The interview and Teacher Focus Group data were analysed to identify themes of:

- the processes of implementing the wellbeing classroom approach in the school and
- the outcomes variously for:
 - the school as a whole,
 - for teachers,
 - students, and
 - their families.

The Student Wellbeing Agent Focus Group data were analysed to identify the key personal and school wide impacts they saw arising from their role.

The data analysis of children's 'drawings of *'Me at School'* involved a mix of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Statistical software SPSS v26 was used to analyse frequencies and significant relationships between coded variables. Qualitative analysis provides detailed content description and discussion of textual signifiers (including visual codes) and meaning (McInnes 2019).

5

ESTABLISHING AND EXTENDING THE WELLBEING CLASSROOM TO A WHOLE OF SCHOOL APPROACH

The limits of conventional exclusion responses in schools to children's difficult behaviour were the prompt for thinking by the Wellbeing Classroom Approach lead developers – Salisbury Communities for Children – about ways to provide a more holistic approach to the trauma experiences which children bring to their school classrooms. Salisbury Communities for Children works with Schools Ministry Group (SMG) to implement the Wellbeing Classroom Approach in education sites.

A key element was the need to create a safe classroom environment, rather than an individualised response to remove children who were struggling from their class and attempt to 'fix' their behaviour. Individualised responses can stigmatise children who are struggling, serving to reinforce their failure to conform to expected norms. The challenge of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach is to create a safe supportive space for children to develop a sense of belonging and success. Extending the concept from individual classrooms to a whole school approach provided opportunity to change the school culture through the year on year embedding of staff and student knowledge-sharing of social and emotional skills.

5.1

Processes of Developing and Implementing the Wellbeing Classroom Approach in the School

The flexibility of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach meant that different elements could be adopted according to the dynamics of the classroom, the needs and characteristics of students and their families and the teacher's orientation to the class. The SMG Leader noted that wellbeing programs with branded and defined steps and resources were often used then discarded over time leaving little trace beyond a poster or two. The flexible co-design and student involvement elements of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach ensured that staff and students were continuously engaged in developing the strategies and resources which were relevant to the school community.

The Principal noted that a flexible integrated approach was much more effective than branded programs.

The focus was on the program and getting through topics rather than building skills and dispositions. That was why I was ... wanting to try this approach, because it was framed as an approach to me. Not a 'come in fix them up'. Often those programs have a bit of deficit view (Principal).

Having an approach to wellbeing which uses multiple strategies and resources, rather than a prescribed step by step program provided the flexibility to adapt to the needs of students and staff.

You have to tweak it every year. Ah, that didn't work and what can I do. And it's frustrating - but then I look back and say well you know, four or five years down the track, it has to take time to evolve because it's not a program; because it's a strategy, it has to evolve - it's still probably going to be tweaked next year (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

There's been a shift in the way teachers and staff think about the whole notion of wellbeing. That's there's not a program, it's an ongoing process. And teachers looking more broadly and deeply at a child. Teachers now ask 'So they come with this behaviour, how can I help them to make a better choice or to self-regulate more?' (Principal).

The leader of Salisbury Communities for Children expressed that critical factors in initially establishing the Wellbeing Classroom Approach were the support of experts (SMG Wellbeing Practitioners) in using resources such as *Kimochis* (Wellbeing Classroom 2017), the active support of school leadership and teachers' acceptance of Wellbeing Classroom Approach mentor-coaches in the classroom.

It really does have a focus on a Wellbeing Practitioner being in the classroom working with the teacher in terms of what it looks like in practice to model engagement with students - which enables them to identify their emotions and it enables them to work through issues around how they are relating with other students and finding better ways to relate that are not traumatising for other students and in fact are therapeutic for other students (Salisbury C4C Leader).

The SMG led the process of placing Wellbeing Practitioners in classrooms to support educators to implement social and emotional learning. The SMG leader noted that having a Wellbeing Classroom Approach coach in the classroom was key to educators translating theory into practice with children and families.

To talk through the specific examples and specific students throughout the day. There was someone to go alongside those educators and try and make sense of the theory and understand what that means for the students and the families... When the teacher is very busy obviously with their priorities, I was able to have a focus on what was ongoing for the kids and what feelings they had, and what behaviours were a result of them. Then we were able to sort of collaborate and talk about that and come together with the plans and strategies that were required to make their time better at school (SMG Leader).

SMG had begun working with one reception class in the school when the Principal noticed changes in student behaviours.

I explained what we've been doing, and she said, 'right, we need to have that across our whole site.' What we've learnt is that none of this happens unless one of the site leaders is on board. That's the real key (SMG Leader).

I remember having the conversation around how would it look across the school R to 7. The Wellbeing Classroom hadn't been used for older students before. It was a junior primary focus. And there was a lot of talk ...with leaders from the school and teachers around what that might look like (Principal).

Whereas the Wellbeing Classroom Approach had previously operated as a classroom by classroom invitation by individual teachers, the extension of the approach to the whole school by the leadership meant that all staff were expected to participate. Teaching staff initially began working with a Wellbeing Practitioner from the SMG in their classrooms. This was a big change for teachers.

I think it's a very sacred and personal space for an educator. It's kind of their turf, and so to have someone come in to, not necessarily tell them what to do, but to help them along the journey, was new for all of them. As time goes on, they realise, 'I never saw that' or 'that's really helpful', or 'okay I can see how we can actually work well together'. It didn't take long, but certainly the initial reaction was quite apprehensive (SMG Leader).

...[when] a teacher is really motivated to do something or to try something ...they're the things that tend to grow because it's driven by people who are highly motivated ... in the school. And that was the same with the group who grew this idea. They were motivated to do it... and then they influence others (Principal).

Responsibility for the development and conduct of the school's implementation of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach was focused with the Wellbeing Coordinator. The School Wellbeing Coordinator role includes working with the student Wellbeing Agents and keeping staff informed of latest developments and current activities to embed into classroom practices.

I send out many emails focussing on wellbeing. Teachers read the emails and action the suggested ideas and so it's the whole staff being onboard with it, that's made a difference (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

Having SMG Wellbeing Practitioners working with teachers in their classrooms had the advantage of working within the usual classroom environment and responding to the specific challenges for teachers, in preference to the common professional development process of teachers attending off-site training sessions and returning to classroom demands.

They [teachers] go to these wonderful PDs and wonderful trainings with excellent content but it's 'what does that mean for a 6-year-old'? (Salisbury C4C Leader).

Developing a school-wide approach to trauma-informed ways of teachers relating to students meant inducting new staff into the Wellbeing Classroom Approach principles and processes.

As new people come into the school, I guess it's the ongoing resourcing and being able to provide orientation and skills for new people. The ideal would be that teacher training institutions will have it embedded in their training and hopefully that's what will happen down the track (Salisbury C4C Leader).

I think as the Principal the challenge is to keep a number of school priorities going well. And when you think you've got it you've got to keep going and checking. And that's the same with the wellbeing. What the Principal pays attention to is often seen as the important thing (Principal).

Over time the classroom-based training inputs became self-sustaining.

The staff, the Wellbeing Coordinator and the Principal have really owned the whole concept and implemented it within the school so that they are virtually self sustaining in terms of implementing the wellbeing classroom (Salisbury C4C Leader).

...you have to be committed and so [the Principal] is committed and then I'm committed, and the kids are committed, and the staff are committed as well (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

5.2 Summary

Implementing the Wellbeing Classroom Approach across the whole school has been a dynamic process which continues to evolve with the school environment and population. The flexibility of using an 'approach', rather than a 'program' of specified steps and resources, allows for social and emotional learning resources and strategies to be tried and tested, adapted or abandoned according to their utility and fit with the school.

Leadership has been a critical element in embedding the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. As the school leadership made clear their interest and commitment, staff participation and engagement developed beyond the initial volunteer teachers working with the approach. Rather than positioning wellbeing as an extra 'task' for teachers, the Wellbeing Classroom Approach informs how students and staff interact and develop relationships and is thus woven into language and learning across all curriculum areas. Teachers receive information about trauma-informed pedagogy and practical guidance *in situ* in relating to children who are having behavioural difficulties in their classrooms.

The school's Wellbeing Coordinator provides research and development leadership with staff and students in partnership with SMG and Salisbury Communities for Children. New staff are inducted into the approach when they come to the school.

The common language and relationship strategies of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach support the manifestation of a wellbeing culture at the school. This means that children who have experienced trauma and chronic stress were able to experience a social environment of positive interaction and learn how to identify their own and others' feelings and explore new ways to support their social skills, development and emotional wellbeing. Individualised therapeutic responses to children experiencing behavioural difficulties are limited when the culture of their social environment remains hostile, stigmatising and exclusionary. By working to actively model and value pro-social qualities, children and staff were able to develop positive relationships based on mutual trust. The following section draws on the views of school staff and leaders and partnering community organisations to identify some of the outcomes of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach variously for the school, the staff, for students and their families.

6

OUTCOMES OF THE WELLBEING CLASSROOM APPROACH

6.1

Whole School outcomes

Over time the school achieved measurable changes in key indicators of wellbeing to create a tangible change in the culture of the school involving staff and student relationships.

[It is] a whole school having transitioned over a period of about three years to creating a different culture that is seeing significant reductions in bullying behaviours. It's noticed by people when they come into the school that the way teachers are actually responding to children is different. Instead of adversarial conflict situations, you have a much more sophisticated response to the issues children are experiencing when they are acting out - and that's really encouraging to see (Salisbury C4C Leader).

I'd like to see it just it's an embedded part of what we do. When you're at the school this is how you talk, this is how you think about people (Principal).

Having a common language about wellbeing throughout the school meant that staff and students were able to communicate effectively about wellbeing concepts.

It's just part and parcel of the culture of the school. So if it's working really well you're not saying 'we're doing well-being'. It's just the culture of the school – it's the language of the school. It's how we act in the school (Principal).

We've got a familiar way to talk about these things and that's across the school so kids coming up from the last grade will understand what we mean, like Kimochis, and into reception they will all have the same thing, so we are getting consistency (Teacher Focus Group).

The common language is probably the one of the most important things. Everyone talks about feelings. Everyone, when there's a problem, instead of just saying, 'go to the office,' it's more 'let's talk about how that person felt'. So, it can be de-escalated in the classroom. So, there's a lot more of that. And I just see that's being embedded (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The cumulative effects of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach continued to grow as it became normalised and embedded in practice year on year.

The feedback I got this year was great. All the classes are doing it. The kids are loving it. They're feeling really excited about it, and they're feeling valued about what they're doing (Principal).

No matter where you are in the school, we all use the same words and ways to unpack those feelings. Especially in the junior classes using the Kimochis; a lot of children that wouldn't normally speak about certain things use the Kimochis and talk about it that way. Putting what they're feeling into a Kimochi and sort of separating themselves from it – role playing instead of saying 'I'm feeling like this'. Talking about it that way has worked really well with a lot of the [...] children [with] experience [of] trauma and things like that (Teacher Focus Group).

It's [WBC] just happening. It's not an onerous thing; it's not an extra thing. It's just all part of your day (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

Any program to follow has to be valuable if you are getting all these results – like from the students having that positive identity - I don't think you can go wrong (Teacher Focus Group).

The whole school adoption of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach facilitated year on year gains as new intakes of children and staff were able to learn from those who already had some exposure to its strategies, language and resources. Those who continued at the school acquired increasing familiarity with the elements of the approach and their level of sophistication in putting them to use. Early investment in one-on-one in-classroom teacher coaching in trauma informed pedagogy and the use of resources, such as *Kimochis* feelings education kit, was augmented over time by the development of the Student Wellbeing Agent role. Students were coached to take on peer leadership in wellbeing and charged with leading classroom-based activities with their peers and junior classes, as well as presenting at family learning events and external education sector events. After three years the school had perceptibly transformed the culture of language, student-staff interaction and peer relationships.

6.2 Teacher Outcomes

The professional development aspects of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach offered opportunities for teachers to acquire and develop new understandings, strategies and ways of interacting with children.

Today when we were out and about we were talking about the word 'jealous'. So the children are exposed to a whole range of feelings words instead of just 'happy' and 'sad'. I really like that. I feel it's one of my strengths I use with the children, so even if I am reading a book we talk about feelings a whole lot more. I think we've really built on their vocabulary and understanding of the range of feelings (Teacher Focus Group).

I think being on the same page, if we all know that we are doing the same thing we know that we will try and move the wellbeing stuff into our social stuff and we try and add things in and do that in the staff room (Teacher Focus Group).

Learning about behaviour as an indicator of children's emotional states enabled teachers to look for ways to engage children differently.

The challenge used to be people saying 'oh they're [students] lazy'. I remember asking 'Do you think 5-year-olds could be lazy? Or is there something else going on here?' So they were not reading what the behaviour is about. I noticed people who have been here for a length of time will start thinking more deeply rather than just those labels (Principal).

They [children] will go up and grab a Kimochi – like they might pick up Cloud – and instead of saying 'I'm feeling a bit sad right now' they are expressing it in that way, using the feelings pillows – they are using that a lot more now (Teacher Focus Group).

That's what we do a lot of. They might say 'he's really not a nice person'. I say 'no they are a nice person – they just haven't made a good choice today about this or that' but knowing that...just because you have made one mistake it doesn't mean... the end of it and you can't do anything about it. You can always do something about it (Teacher Focus Group).

The classroom environment changed as teachers and students learned different ways of expressing their feelings and communicating with each other. Teachers appreciated being able to draw on different resources and strategies depending on the needs of the children in their class.

You can sense it in a classroom. You know when children feel safe. If they feel unsafe there's kind of a pace to the classroom. There's a way that they interact with each other and the teacher. And then how they interact with their parents. You can quickly see a change when they start to understand themselves and others, and they have empathy (SMG Leader).

I put a lot of relaxation music on just with mindfulness, so if ... I finished my instructional component, and they are just working independently, I quite often just have like meditative music. I really find they like it. It just keeps everything really peaceful (Teacher Focus Group).

From a practical point of view when the kids come in from recess or lunch all heightened and we do a mindfulness, we might do a breathing and then we all calm right down. You can literally see them calming down into a practical sense (Teacher Focus Group).

I just think everyone has gotten on board a bit more with it rather than having each individual teacher having their own wellbeing program then you haven't got the common language. I think it's just a more powerful model – and it's got a lot of things.

You can use the Kimochis or there's all the different things you can use... like you are still using a common language, but another class might be looking at more Mindfulness. I am looking at more the social skills or redoing things if there is a problem – but everyone is still on that page as well (Teacher Focus Group).

There's the Character Strengths – so [children] look inside themselves and see what's good about themselves but also take on knowledge of another character strength with somebody else and go 'oh yeah I'm going to be a bit more like that I think'. We are looking at forgiveness at the moment. We have looked at kindness (Teacher Focus Group).

The benefits of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach came to the fore when upsetting events occurred in the school or class community. Teachers and students shared common strategies for coping with unhappy situations such as conflict, bullying and violence.

I just had that with this situation in my room on Wednesday where I had to evacuate the class and it was at 3 o'clock and we couldn't really get the children back in, and I was hurt during that situation so my children were very uncomfortable and had a lot of emotions. So Thursday we sat in a circle – I did the roll call and I did it straight away and we had a debrief and the first thing I did was get the feelings and we talked about all the feelings we were feeling and I went around the circle and we just debriefed (Teacher Focus Group).

I use the language of a re-do so when two kids are having a thing about something, it's like 'well let's re-do that' and that gets them past because they can make it right again (Teacher Focus Group).

There is less bullying. I mean obviously you're going to have bullies unfortunately, but I think now the students have got the power to tell them with the language (Teacher Focus Group).

Students' desire for involvement in the Wellbeing Classroom Approach was met by school leadership developing the role of Student Wellbeing Agents, then inviting them to address staff meetings about the importance of keeping up with the Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities. This innovation led to staff recognising and engaging with students as partners in the Approach.

one... challenge was that some of the [student] leaders were coming back and saying 'oh they [teachers] didn't get time to do it' - whatever they had to do to follow up from their learning within their class. And they were complaining a little bit about their teachers. So I said to [wellbeing coordinator] 'why don't you run a staff meeting and invite the leaders. The Wellbeing Agents collected the data around who was doing it weekly and daily. What were the issues around why it wasn't happening?' And strategies were developed that student Wellbeing Agents presented a staff meeting. This is what we've found has worked really well (Principal).

It's been a long journey to get the staff to a point where they would feel comfortable with these kids doing this. I know that the students felt uncomfortable with a couple of things the staff were doing, so they went to the staff meeting and had a ten-minute

presentation on how unhappy they were about all of that (SMG Leader).

... that staff meeting to me was a really significant shift in the teachers' thinking, because... it became quite clear, it's successful when you... explicitly teach skills and then embed them. But the explicit teaching had to be planned and programmed for, like anything else, and had to have an outcome. And when you did that and you kept to a timeline, like you do for literacy and numeracy, it worked well (School Wellbeing Coordinator)

Teachers began working in partnership with the student Wellbeing Agents to plan and implement wellbeing activities, rather than having sole responsibility for delivering the Wellbeing Classroom Approach.

It's given the kids those leadership opportunities and to take that role in the school. So they go to their meetings and then they have a particular focus or something that they need to do for the next week and then they come in and they present that to their peers and then they go to their buddy class and they present that for the younger students as well. So it's really given them the opportunity to be the experts in what they're presenting... and you might tweak bits and pieces for your particular audience, but otherwise they really have that lead role in it (Teacher Focus Group).

There's a topic... for example the agents are working on forgiveness. They'll bring back their learning, but you [the teacher] can modify it if needed to suit your class (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

I am there for the behaviour management side of it to make sure they're sitting and listening and things like that, and they [Wellbeing Agents] actually just do it. They are like the teachers I suppose (Teacher Focus Group).

We've had to chisel out a couple of chunks of time of the week but it's well worth chiseling out that time, and it's all planned and they come with their activities (Teacher Focus Group).

Student leadership in the wellbeing activities enabled class teachers to benefit from peer-based learning strategies.

I've been lucky enough to have wellbeing leaders where they really are in control of the room. I might just need to remind them to keep the noise level down because they are excitable with some of the activities, but just so well planned and organised that the kids are all just engaged (Teacher Focus Group).

Having the older students take the lead - they're doing the meetings; they're planning the lessons, the activities - with support obviously and then they are coming in to us, sharing it with us, and then we're just building on that rather than having to come up with all the ideas ourselves and it's relevant to them... It's based on their needs and what we're looking at, but for me, I can talk for myself, it's a lot easier (Teacher Focus Group).

In my junior class my students really look forward to their wellbeing leaders coming in (Teacher Focus Group).

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach delivered professional development for teachers; greater synergies between staff in their language and ways of seeing and relating to students; more resources and strategies to work effectively with students – especially at points of crisis and conflict; and opportunities to work in partnership with student leaders to support wellbeing. Any initial reservations about the Wellbeing Classroom Approach potentially requiring extra work or interference in the classroom faded as teachers began to perceive the benefits in their classroom. Teachers welcomed working with children who were engaging in and experiencing less bullying, children who had learned to use self-regulating techniques and with whom they shared approaches to conflict resolution. Student Wellbeing Agents assisted teachers' efficacy through their peer education work leading the wellbeing activities learning. Teachers also took pride and pleasure in supporting children to develop significant life skills and in the achievements of their students and the school as a whole.

6.3 Student Outcomes

As the quantitative data attests, attendance and academic standards at the school have improved over time, and bullying incidents have declined. Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities enabled children to achieve better mental health and school success.

I think there's connections to learning, and kids being able to engage in the classroom, because if they're out because of the behaviour they're not engaging in the classroom or learning (Principal).

Children are whole persons and they have a social, emotional and spiritual... aspect of their lives which needs to be nurtured. The general curriculum doesn't see that, doesn't embrace that. If children are not emotionally secure and are not able to regulate their emotions, coming to school having experienced trauma at home and are very stressed and have high [emotional] arousal, those children are not learning and they're not capable of learning. So unless you have some kind of therapeutic intervention these children are not learning and we are creating massive problems down the track as they experience all sorts of adverse social outcomes (Salisbury C4C Leader).

Changing the ways staff interacted and spoke with children created new ways for children to understand their behaviour and change their own responses.

I've had a psychologist comment to me that children have improved. They'll ask me – what are you doing at school? Because this one's now using these words. And people giving children the opportunity to repair. So 'would you like me to help you?' 'How are you going to fix this up?' 'Do you want another go at this?' Kids are more open when you take that tack... I can compare children who have been here for a length of time and new children and the difference in their ability to manage conflict in a more positive way and listen to another point of view... that's really noticeable actually (Principal).

I've had students who have had to have meetings about their progress and behaviour and who have sat there very quietly while under the table they have been doing the 'breathing hands'... where it's not really visible for everyone. They still employ those strategies... to soothe themselves (Teacher Focus Group).

I have noticed with a lot of my students behaviour used to consistently have to be dealt with by leadership – I don't have to do that as much anymore because they are using all the strategies they've learnt, and I think we're in tune with it as well and we're all again on the same page that it sort of works (Teacher Focus Group).

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach enabled students to develop strategies to support their wellbeing in their day to day lives, as well as at school.

It's not just for while they're at the school... We've had a child recently saying 'oh I think that I'm doing this because I'm not sleeping well'. Or the understanding they have to eat - so they come to breakfast program. They're understanding – well things are going on at home I can go to my room and this is what I do. I practice or I breathe or whatever I have to do. So there's some transference there. It's a big thing for kids to be able to do (Principal).

I think these strategies, they all carry through hopefully their whole life and see that there are times that they need to be centered and breathe and use some techniques and maybe develop and grow more techniques, even join meditation groups or other types of meditative activities to help deal with life, because life is busy and full on for all of us and hopefully we are setting them up (Teacher Focus Group).

As noted in the quantitative data, attendance rates have improved since the school implemented the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. School became a place that children wanted to attend, despite many have complex living circumstances.

There are a lot of kids out there who dread the thought of going to school and I think that that's changing significantly here (Salisbury C4C Leader).

I have seen kids in spite of everything get themselves to school... They will get themselves to school even if they've got no family going with them. They will get themselves there. And you would hope that some of the strategies you're teaching them, and the way they feel about themselves and their dispositions will continue to grow as they get older, because it is about well-being beyond school (Principal).

Their confidence I think has been so amazing. Some of them come in really quiet and now they're standing up in front of their class. They're like sponges, they take everything in (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The school innovation of involving students as Wellbeing Agents developed from students expressing that they wanted to be actively involved wellbeing activities.

We evolved into this idea of the Wellbeing Agents, which was really handing it over to a student led group for them to ask, 'what does the school need to progress in this wellbeing journey?' It came from a very intensive sort of leadership focus, where myself and the school wellbeing leader were involved really regularly each week to now, where the student led group is taking charge, which is something we never particularly expected to be honest. And it's just amazing (SMG Leader).

They [students] began to see their role as peer support people and also advocates for children who were being bullied. Advocates with teachers, advocates within the school and also learning from each other - meeting as a group and sharing with each other and upskilling and being upskilled with wellbeing staff and practitioners within the school (Salisbury C4C Leader).

Having the[student] leaders has been a fantastic process, really. I don't know how it would have been done as successfully without the student [Wellbeing] Agents (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

Wellbeing Agents included students who were first generation Australians, some whose parents were not fluent in English, taking on school leadership roles. The Wellbeing Agents' work also freed up SMG and school wellbeing staff to do more work elsewhere – particularly with families and the wider community. The Agents were also a key contributor to the sustainability of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, providing mentoring to their successors commencing in the role.

We have kids who were Agents last year who now are kind of the experts, and they then help the new Agents who are coming in to skill them up and share ideas and they've already had the year's worth of experience (Teacher Focus Group).

Becoming responsible for helping to lead wellbeing in their school invited students to take on new understandings about their own feelings and behaviour.

We had one of our students who is a leader this year... A couple of years ago she would get into issue after issue - just social issues - with her friendship group and then she was a Wellbeing Agent, and so then she had to go and learn so that she could go and teach others... Now she says quite point blank that 'I was a bully and now I'm not any more' and reflects back on herself and the way that she's changed through having that role (Teacher Focus Group).

The Wellbeing Agent role meant that students had an authentic voice (Harris & Manatakis 2013) informing the activities in their learning environment.

What they have now is really authentic student voice because they're learning it; as an example they are able to get across to the kids what empathy means. So, I've basically given ideas to [the Wellbeing Agents] and said, here's some choice of videos, [and the Agents say] 'I'll do that one in my class', 'I'll do this one in my class', and then this will lead to a discussion about empathy (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

After a couple of years of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach implementation in the school and the development of Wellbeing Agents in the student population, the Agents began to take on increased responsibility and leadership.

The pinnacle of what I saw was this student led group given the task to run a parent event. They needed to promote it. They needed to come up with the content. They needed to then facilitate it. They needed to organise the catering; we paid for it, but they needed to organise it. Now, this is after a couple of years of them in these leadership roles, right. It was incredible. They had 80 to 90 parents come. They led a half an hour presentation between them. The parents left understanding more about the topic, when we spoke to them about it. I never would have expected it. The way that they were given that leadership capacity but then also the way they rose to the occasion. This wasn't just Year 7s. This was a couple of Year 5s, a couple of Year 6s and one Year 7 (SMG Leader).

Those kids – they're not fazed by it - they've come along and they've led in front of 80 people. A couple of those have led a session at staff meeting. So their growth as leaders is just really good (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

Maybe a smaller level - there was a bunch of boys playing soccer on the oval and this group never played particularly well; there was always conflict. I remember observing them and one kid fell over and he threw a bit of a tantrum because he wasn't getting the ball. It was clear he just wasn't as capable and I remember these boys coming around him and ask him how he felt, what they could do to help him and how they could get along with the game. That, to me, was a highlight (SMG Leader).

Students' involvement as Wellbeing Agents had greater impact for the student population because of the significance of peer acceptance in the primary years, as well as fostering leadership skills.

No matter how relevant you think you are as an adult, you'll never be as relevant as someone who's the same age or a few years older (SMG Leader).

Support that's coming from peers is probably 10 times better than any support that might be coming from a teacher or somebody else. To see children starting to take on a caring, empathetic, responsive role to other students is developing leadership at an early age, the kind of leadership that is desperately needed in the community (Salisbury C4C Leader).

The students' Wellbeing Agent role involved leading wellbeing activities with their own class level and with a junior primary 'buddy' class. Students developed skills in communicating with younger students and also to manage a learning environment for their peers.

I think it was easier coming down with younger ones, but presenting in front of your peers, like with anybody, it's obviously a lot more difficult, but they did a lot more work on that and that's really improved from what I can see (Teacher Focus Group).

I just think these kids will be really good leaders one day as they can bring it back to younger children, or I think the same age peers - that's even harder again! (Teacher Focus Group).

The opportunities to develop leadership skills and confidence in public speaking were highly valued by students who took on Wellbeing Agent roles.

... in terms of the student's response to their leadership, what I see is they take a real pride in it. Those kids have had the opportunity to present at different forums and conferences and did really well... They've actually developed their confidence in presenting... They've got the words and the language for it. So I think that that level of leadership is being seen as an important thing. Kids want to stay on as agents really (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

To have the confidence to get up there and speak in the whole room of Adelaide Oval – that was a full room – I would struggle with doing that, but they just got up and did it. They planned it themselves, they wrote it and I just think it's such a good leadership thing and they can see the good behind it (Teacher Focus Group).

The leadership opportunities and valuing of the student Wellbeing Agent role made it an attractive activity for children.

Because these kids are now being valued, I think that a lot of students do say they'd like to be a wellbeing agent. One boy who was a wellbeing agent last year for a little bit.... and then went to a behaviour school and has some life struggles - said to me yesterday 'do you think I could be a wellbeing agent again?' I said, 'look I'll have a talk with you about that', because you obviously have to be a role model (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach has had multiple perceived benefits for the school's student population. The quantitative data indicating reductions in bullying, improvements in attendance and learning gains in NAPLAN scores are reflected in the perceptions of the adult participants in the project of the impacts for children. Improvements in children's sense of safety and belonging at school translated into improvements in attendance rates. A key element of this change was linked to staff using different approaches to communication with children and explicitly attending to their feelings. Having a shared repertoire of language, strategies and processes to identify and regulate feelings supported children's ability to use these to change their responses to stressful situations at school and in other aspects of their lives.

Children individually benefited as they developed increased confidence in their ability to speak up for themselves, calm themselves, resolve conflict and make friends with others and respond positively to their learning environment. Student Wellbeing Agents provided inspiration and were role models to their peers and junior buddy students, but they also developed significant leadership and presentation skills. These included skills in acquiring topic knowledge, working collaboratively, identifying and selecting presentation strategies for particular audiences, and delivering planned content.

The student body as a whole benefited from opportunities for new kinds of trust relationships and authentic learning partnerships with school staff. Children could transform their self-identity from getting into trouble, having no friends, feeling ashamed and helpless, to being a leader, educator and role model for others. Critically, it is not possible for children to learn new ways of relating to others without exposure to a safe social learning environment where they can rehearse and practise their skills. Excluding and isolating children with behavioural problems may 'remove the problem' but children can only develop social skills in social environments.

6.4

Outcomes for Families

A key aspect of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach involved children sharing their learning about feelings and relationships with their families.

I think if you can really educate the children they will have an influence to some degree on their families (Principal).

The school's diverse cultural profile and high levels of student mobility created a challenging context in which to engage families. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach had stimulated greater involvement from families, particularly those with home languages other than English.

One of our targets was to engage more families in the school... as it has become more complex and diverse. We had to consider how we were going to engage families from non-English speaking backgrounds? Now we will get 30 parents to an event. So that's grown significantly (Principal).

We've had quite a few come to our family learning events anyway and the last one they were given pictures of the Kimochis, pictures of feelings. We had interpreters there who could explain that when your child at home has got a certain behaviour, you can talk with them about how they're feeling and that sort of thing. We're getting more families coming to the events (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The school employed Bilingual School Services Officers (BSSOs) to mediate communication across the many different languages in the school.

We had an event recently and it was all EALD families. We provide BSSOs to interpret so they can engage the families in the school (Principal).

Connecting with families as early as possible opened opportunities for parents to learn how to support their child's social and emotional development. Different cultural customs could disrupt student participation in school and helping parents understand how to help their children was an important part of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach.

We've had some quite good conversations with families around sleep and things like that, because within their cultures there was one group of families that the kids were never getting fed and to bed on time, because grandma and grandpa were visiting... because that's what they do in their culture (Principal).

I think the families are more confident in coming and approaching us and asking for help if they want it (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The student Wellbeing Agents took on the role of planning and delivering family learning events to inform parents about key issues affecting their schooling.

One year we had a unit on sleep and overuse of technology. So, they [student Wellbeing Agents] researched – they conducted sleep surveys and they had data and all that to look at about sleep... And then they did their PowerPoints and everything. They had it all set up

up for the family learning event; all about sleep and technology (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The last event we had in class time was only for junior primary [parents], and the agents presented a whole lot on the Kimochis... so they learnt so much, and they loved doing that. And their parents were really engaged in it, so that was just really great to see (School Wellbeing Coordinator).

The school has also established a Family Centre for pre-schoolers so that children's transitions into formal schooling would have continuity of Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities. Despite the high levels of 'new arrival' refugee populations, low income earners and social stress, the school environment was noticeably different from other schools without the Wellbeing Classroom Approach.

The really encouraging thing is the reports that you get back about people coming into a school and saying, this is different, the tone is different (Salisbury C4C Leader).

The school provided a central community resource which could share and foster relationships which emphasised emotional security and acceptance.

It's about the networks that can fan out from the school as children are involved in sports groups and other social groups and so forth. So it's within the school and outside of the school that we are fostering healthy development of children - which includes having a social responsibility, as well as a responsibility to produce good NAPLAN scores (Salisbury C4C Leader).

Underpinning the Wellbeing Classroom Approach implementation has been the willingness of the school to work with community organisations bringing different skills and perspectives to the day to day work of fostering children's development and learning. Professional teacher training programs often focused on curriculum pedagogy and resources at the expense of the development of emotionally safe and inclusive learning environments.

There's a lot of goodwill and a lot of empathetic, caring capacity that's so needed and that doesn't come from a sort of a professional mindset which we tend to think is going to solve our problems, but it's not. It's compassion and love and care and all those sorts of things (Salisbury C4C Leader).

The flow-on to families and the wider community from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has been significant. With two-thirds of the school population speaking a home language other than English, communication with families is complex. Bilingual School Services Officers provide individual translation of school communications to parents and this infrastructure is used to scaffold parents' engagement with the school. Parents also learn from their children coming home with new language and interactive skills. The children's enjoyment of school and the participation of students in leadership roles boost families' confidence in approaching the school for assistance when needed and attending family events, including Wellbeing Classroom family learning events.

6.5

Summary

The Wellbeing Classroom approach has had positive outcomes for the school as a whole, its staff, students and families. The transformation of school culture, achieved over time through:

- committed leadership,
- flexible and adaptable use of strategies and resources,
- a shared language, and
- authentic partnerships with staff and students,

has demonstrated the possibilities afforded by a persistent focus on wellbeing.

The following section focuses on the data from the school's student population, comprising a focus group with Student Wellbeing Agents and 'drawings of *'Me at School'* by students from all year levels.

7

STUDENT WELLBEING AGENT FOCUS GROUP

The Student Wellbeing Agent (SWBA) focus group was recruited for the research by the School Wellbeing Coordinator who regularly works with the students. The Agents whose parents consented to their participation attended the focus group at the school with the Wellbeing Coordinator and researchers during school hours. The eight students attending were from year levels four to seven. The focus group discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed, before being analysed for key themes. These were variously their definitions of wellbeing, self-regulation, being a role model, peer leadership, service learning using Braun & Clark's (2006) thematic analysis, confidence and self-esteem.

7.1

Definitions of Wellbeing

Wellbeing Agents linked wellbeing to understanding their physical and emotional responses to situations they encountered and being able to empathise with others.

I think wellbeing is understanding what your body is trying to tell you.

Wellbeing is just understanding what your body's going through, physical state, your mental state, emotions all that.

I think wellbeing is understanding your emotions, your feelings and how to control them.

I guess wellbeing gives you better understanding and helping you know what to do.

Since I became a Wellbeing Agent I have changed and now I know how people feel when you do something bad to the other person [bullying]. You understand the emotions and feelings.

It helps you understand your mental health and it helps you practice for situations, it gives you understanding of kindness, emotions and empathy. You really get to understand what to do.

The students described different wellbeing strategies and concepts they had learned.

Interoception was one... there are certain things that some people don't understand what their body is trying to tell you-for example, feeling thirsty. So some people get the signals while others don't and it's just those activities help you understand about your body in different ways.

It includes empathy which is to understand how people feel, not just go up to people and just help them and ask them if they're alright.

Mindfulness - we focus on mindfulness and trying to calm down our emotional state when in a tough situation.

Kimochis and bullying and the bystanders and... everything... They teach you how to understand your body. They tell you about feelings.

The hand one okay... you place one hand on your thigh then you stretch out your fingers as tight as you can and you'll hold for around 10 seconds... then you relax your fingers. So then we ask the class where they felt the tension in your hand... So then we do this activity again but this time we ask them to focus on a particular place where you might feel the pull. So we stretch out your fingers and concentrate and try to feel that tension, then you relax your hand again. So then we ask, 'so who actually felt it in their arm this time?' Yeah so there's a difference when you concentrate and you actually realise there was a pull here as well.

The Wellbeing Agents saw their role as helping others to understand wellbeing concepts and use them in their daily lives. Helping other students to learn about ways to support their own wellbeing required them to be a role model.

Just knowing what wellbeing is and then passing it onto people who don't really know... don't really understand how you can implement it into your day-to-day life.

Wellbeing at our school is trying to teach and trying to let other students understand how to deal with situations in that they might react instead of respond.

Wellbeing is being a role model to the students.

We can spread the word out to other people and it can help them calm themselves down.

Passing all the activities and all the information we learn to the other students through activities and what we're learning.

Being able to help other people understand their wellbeing and what their body's going through.

If they don't really understand it you can refresh their minds of what they had forgot.

You feel like you're a great role model to them and maybe if they see someone else hurt or something they can help that person as well... It spreads.

Doing the activities and seeing the students engage with them and relate to the things we do, we're giving them a better understanding about it.

7.2 Self-Regulation

The ability to recognise feelings of stress, tension and rising fear or anger was a central component of wellbeing knowledge for students. Knowing how to calm themselves down and teaching others these skills enabled them to deal more positively with upsetting situations.

If you are too angry you have all this anger built up and it's good to let it out because you won't be able to think properly.

If you don't [calm down] then you could do something in that situation that could lead to consequences you don't want later on.

I saw a little kid was who really angry, he was about to smash something. So I told him to calm down and I showed him a mindfulness and then he stopped.

Once I had started doing wellbeing, I had learnt how to calm myself down better and deal with situations that I wouldn't particularly have dealt with in a better way before I went. And it could help me calm down; it could help me calm down friends and stuff, and guides me to help people more.

I see myself as better than before, because before I could get angry easier. I could be a little bit rude sometimes without knowing it. But now I know how to check on if I'm doing that or not.

Learning how to effectively identify and respond to bullying situations was a key dimension of the Wellbeing Agent role.

Wellbeing has helped me understand what to do when you're being bullied or you see someone else getting bullied. Instead of engaging, it makes me think twice and maybe ask them to stop and if they don't, visit a teacher - because if I go in there I know something worse is going to happen. The wellbeing has helped me calm myself down to not do those things.

The wellbeing audit we take usually two times a year asks you about feelings and who you like to play with and if you faced any bullying or not.

There's the bully, there's bystanders, which stand there and then there's hero bystanders which go tell somebody about the situation and get the [bullying] person to leave.

7.3 Peer Leadership

Student Wellbeing Agents recognised that they were well placed to educate their peers as they lived the student experience and were able to recognise what others were going through.

Maybe the other peers feel more of a connection or they listen to us a bit more than the teacher.

Being the same age, you understand what others also think and feel throughout the day - connecting better with them.

You can understand what they can go through, how they react in their ages, you can explain it... how they understand.

Once one of my friends got themselves into a sticky situation where if they did anything further they would get a greater consequence. And it was just telling them not to take that risk and taking that action.

I think the 6-7s have really enjoyed the role play game because it gets to let them practice how to deal with a situation like that before they actually do something.

It's a good job to have because if one day you're in a situation where you don't know what to do and if there's someone bullying you or if you see someone getting bullied and you're the bystander or something, you know what will happen, they can go stop them or tell the teacher and you know how they feel.

Part of taking on the role of peer leadership involved having power.

Being like the teacher.

So having power over the junior primary kids so when they're being silly you tell them to stop, they stop straightaway.

If we're running activities with the other Wellbeing Agents we beforehand decide what would work and what wouldn't work and just helping with that.

7.4

Service Learning as an Agent

Students recognised that in taking on the role of a Wellbeing Agent they had opportunities to learn and to develop their skills. They recognised that helping others supported their own wellbeing and that qualities such as kindness shared those good feelings.

Feels like you've done something really good and you feel good about yourself. And it can start a chain of happiness and helpfulness. One person helps one person, and then they keep helping others.

It doesn't just fill the other person's bucket, it fills yours too.

It gives you a sense of warmth that you've done something, one of the highlights of your day was helping somebody.

People like getting kind compliments from other people and it just makes them feel better once you pass a compliment on to somebody else.

Last year we did a family learning event where everyone would come together for an hour or so after school and would just talk about helpful things like mindfulness and all of that with the parents... Last year was sleep I believe and technology. This year it was for the junior primary parents and in that we focused on what we've recently taught the junior primary kids... we have these tools called the Kimochi characters and we showed them... how the junior primary kids might relate to those Kimochi characters and ways of dealing with situations around them.

You should do wellbeing so... in the future you can do it and... just making it better for the person.

I'd say that it's really great at getting to engage with the community and get to know everyone. Just the feeling that you've potentially made someone's day much better by helping them - it's a good feeling.

7.5

Confidence and Self-Esteem Impacts

Student Wellbeing Agents noticed that they felt better about themselves and were more confident of public speaking and their abilities to help others and to respond effectively to difficult situations. Students reported getting over feelings of shyness and enjoying the role.

Being a Wellbeing Agent increases the leadership roles and more confidence of speaking in front of your peers.

I was really shy but now I feel more confident because we are doing really easy activities to start off with.

I was just very shy and now, when I'm a Wellbeing Agent, I feel more confident. It gives you a lot more confidence to speak in front of your peers or the staff of the school, whoever it may be.

Presenting in front of assembly or in front of a class - that's become a lot easier now.

At the start I was a bit nervous when I first started doing activities in my class and now like I feel more confident.

When I started to do activities in my class I was not confident and right now I'm confident of what I'm doing for the class and the junior primary.

I'd tell them that they should be a Wellbeing Agent because wellbeing is fun and it builds up your confidence.

7.6 Summary

The focus group data indicated a range of positive impacts for students who took on wellbeing leader roles in the school. Their self-knowledge and awareness improved and some commented that their behaviour and reactions had changed for the better since taking on the role. The students were able to articulate a range of wellbeing strategies they had been involved in teaching to their peers and junior primary classes and had developed language to discuss various roles of students in bullying situations. They identified that positive actions which helped others made them feel good and helped to spread kindness and helping actions throughout the school. The students valued the role and understood that their peer education role had greater impact because they were closer to the experiences of fellow students. Their leadership and presentation activities had boosted their confidence and self-esteem and they encouraged other students to take on Wellbeing Agent roles.

The data show that the Wellbeing Agent role has been a key innovation of the whole school Wellbeing Classroom Approach. It has not only provided an avenue for students to have an authentic voice (Harris & Manatakis 2013) in the wellbeing life of the school, but has proved to be effective in embedding the wellbeing culture in the student body and developing student leadership qualities. In a diverse school with many languages and cultures, Wellbeing Agents from all backgrounds model the intercultural qualities of kindness, helping others and passing on their learning to benefit others. The students show their peers new ways of tuning into their feelings, calming themselves and acting to respect and avoid harming others, or attracting unwanted consequences. The value, trust and authority given to Wellbeing Agents has elevated the role amongst the student body, thereby also elevating the value of character strengths such as kindness, forgiveness and respect. The infectious attributes of

positive feelings were recognised by students, naming helping others as ‘the highlight’ of their day. The students developed leadership and public speaking skills, becoming confident in their ability to organise and present information and relate to an audience. Their opportunities to engage with families and with the broader education sector have showcased the efficacy of this approach in changing the whole school culture. The school’s culture of wellbeing is examined in the following section through analysis of children’s drawings of themselves at school.

8

STUDENT DRAWINGS: 'ME AT SCHOOL'

Children's representational drawings can be understood as a product of their personal experiences within their cultural contexts (Gardner 1980). Golomb (2004) argues that children's drawings have projective significance, often revealing the feelings of the artist in relation to the subject. Inviting students to draw a picture of themselves at school provided a means of gaining insight into children's sense of identity and emotional responses to their time at school.

With a school enrolment of 366, the drawings sample of 125 comprises 34 percent of the student population. The school students completed self-portrait drawings titled '*Me at School*' as part of the data collected in 2019. They were also asked to write a sentence on the drawing about their feelings about school.

The drawings were completed during class time under direction by their class teachers. By completing the drawing in class with their teacher, the researchers avoided disrupting children's school time with the data collection task. Drawings by students whose parents had given consent for their child to participate in the research were anonymized then provided to researchers and analysed using SPSS software and qualitative content analysis. The data collection process meant that researchers did not have control over the specific words used by class teachers or Bilingual School Services Officers who assisted students with English as an additional language when directing the drawing task. This limitation was acceptable given the complexities of language, culture and trauma in the student population.

8.1 The Drawings Sample

The drawings were completed by children aged six to 13, with a mean age of 9.8 years. All year levels were represented (see Figure 10 below). Forty-eight percent of drawings were by boys and 52 percent were by girls.

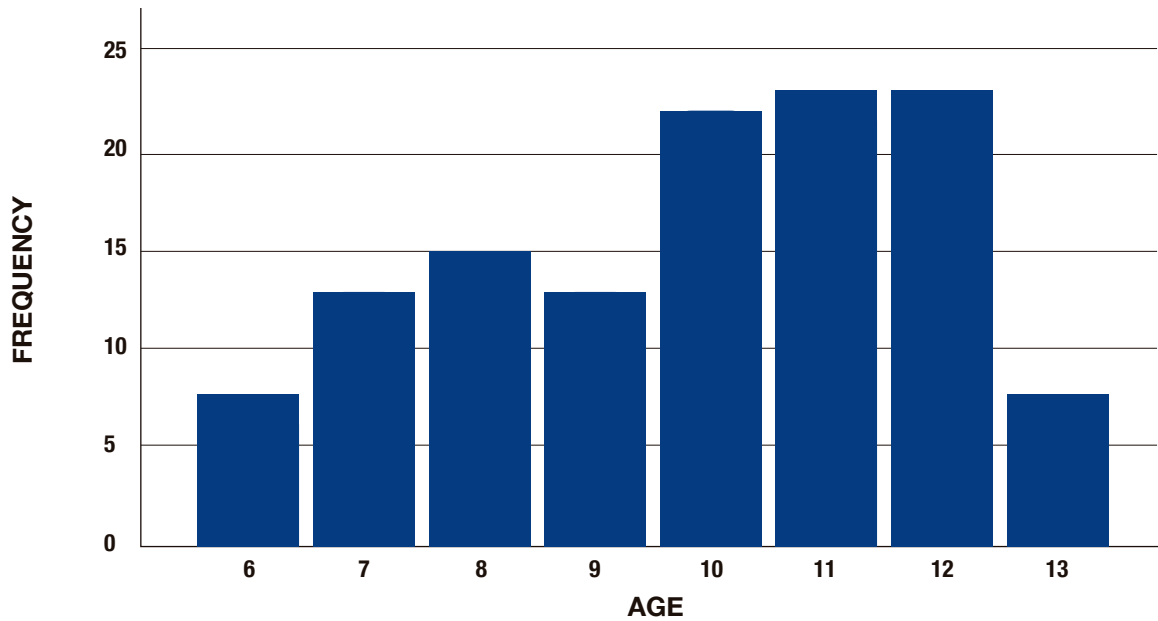


Figure 10: Age distribution of drawings sample (n = 125)

The anonymised drawings were coded against school records to identify drawings by students who were:

- Receiving school card (an indicator of low income) (n=73, 58%)
- Refugee (n=27, 22%)
- Trauma survivor (n=14, 11%)
- Disability (n=9, 7%)
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (n=5, 4%)

Children's home languages were also recorded on their drawing to provide an indication of their cultural background. The languages were grouped by continental regions for analysis. English was the first language of 62 students (50 percent). 25 students (20 percent) spoke a language from the Indian sub-continent, including Punjabi, Hindi, Tamil and Nepalese. Sixteen students (13 percent) spoke either Vietnamese, Chin, Khmer or Burmese. Twelve students (10 percent) spoke Arabic, Dari, Farsi or Iranian. Seven students (6 percent) spoke African languages Acholi, Sudanese, Kirundi or Swahili. Two spoke Tagalog, the language of the Philippines, and one listed his language as Pidgin.

8.2

Analysing the Drawings

Thomas and Jolley (1998) provide helpful guiding principles for researchers who use children's drawings as data sources in their analysis. They argue that children's drawings can be linked with developmental age, becoming more complex and detailed as they matured. There are culturally common details in conventional representations of human figures, buildings and outdoor locations and drawings can be scrutinised for their presence or absence.

For example, a culturally common depiction of a house is typically square with a triangle roof, a window on each side and a door in the middle. The picture may include details of a fence in front with a gate. It may include a

garden with a tree and maybe a swing, or flowers. The sky may include a sun, clouds and birds. It may include people or pets. The details which are present or absent variously provide indications of the artist's culturally derived concepts related to houses, families, boundaries, outdoors and skies.

Relative size of objects in a drawing can also carry significance with increased proportionate size correlating with appealing subjects, and smaller size linking with diminished value (Burkitt & Newell 2005; Thomas & Jolley 1998). Colour choice is also linked with affect (Burkitt & Sheppard 2014) with children using preferred colours to signify positive affect and less preferred, often dark colours, such as black or brown, for negative affect, or red for danger.

In addition to content and composition, relative size and colour, other factors providing meaning in the drawings included children's written statements about their picture content, facial expressions, the completeness of the human figure (relative to age group) and the activity depicted.

Indicators which raise questions of concern in children's drawings of themselves include:

- a depiction of content or human figures which is below the expected standards for the age group – missing body parts (hands, arms, legs) or facial features, scribbling lines, floating in space
- sad or angry faces or crying or negative affect
- isolated position of self in relation to others
- very small self in relation to other humans or picture content
- absent, split, concealed or incomplete self
- depictions of violence
- words indicating fear, sadness, anger, boredom, lack of friends, stress
- dark colours
- visible genitals

(Allen & Tussey 2009; Macleod, Gross & Hayne 2013; McInnes 2019).

Indicators of concern are just that. An indicator that educators should pay attention and gather further information about a child's emotional and physical states, their behaviour and close family and friend relationships. A scribbly picture may be a product of feeling tired and hot at the time of doing the drawing, or it may reflect feelings of shame and self-hatred. Only further observation and information gathering can answer questions raised.

Researchers individually scrutinised drawings and separately identified those which raised concerns, before coming together to mutually review and identify drawings raising concerns. Where researchers had differing concern indications, the default coding was 'concern' on the premise that it was better to raise a question than to ignore or discount a potential situation of concern for the child participant. Drawings identified as being of concern were provided to school wellbeing leadership to review and follow up if indicated.

8.3

Results of Drawings Analysis

Two thirds of the drawings were positive depictions of the artists' school experiences. The following table identifies the distribution of the 44 (35 percent) drawings of concern by gender. The school had already identified six of these children as having documented concerns. This reflects that indicators of concern identified by researchers in the drawings could indicate a temporary negative feeling or low self-esteem, through to serious situations of current or historical bullying or abuse.

TABLE 5: Gender and drawings of Concern Cross-Tabulation

		GENDER		
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
CONCERN	YES	26	18	44
	NO	34	47	81
TOTAL		60	65	125

(n=125) p=.067

More boys' drawings were identified as concerning (Table 5). There were no statistically significant differences in the gender distribution of drawings of concern. Further discussion on drawings of concern will follow details of the process of coding and analysing the 'Me at School' drawings. The drawings were coded according to the words used, the actions depicted, the context portrayed, the colours and emotional affect of the picture. These data are presented below.

8.3.1

Words

The words on drawings provide a layer of signification, or meaning, to be taken from the drawing. Words such as *'My school is lovely because people are not harsh. I feel safe because of my nice teachers'* (see Figure 11, Drawing 108: year 5 girl), may simply indicate that the artist identifies safety as an important aspect of their school experience. It may reflect the emphasis of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach on safety, or it may be that the artist's attention to safety at school indicates an experienced absence of safety in other contexts. The overall affect of drawing 108 is positive, with a female child seated at a desk with pen poised over her work, an alert, smiling face, bright colours, her question *'what is wellbeing?'* and the aura surrounding her filled with love hearts and the words *'I LOVE my school'*. Her question, while seated at her work desk, suggests that wellbeing is, for her, a topic of scholarly engagement. The child's reference to people who are *'not harsh'*, suggests she may have had exposure to harsh responses and prefers to avoid them. The capitalisation of *'LOVE'* and heart symbols emphasise her depth of feeling for her school.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 11:
Drawing 108

Coding of words about the drawings first identified the subjects of children's statements, such as 'friends', 'learning', 'helping', 'nature' and 'bullying', then words referencing feelings – 'happy, like, love, good', and words referencing feelings of safety, without a specific subject.

For example, a statement such as: 'I feel good at school because I have lots of friends to play with 😊' (Figure 12, Drawing 87: year 3 girl) is coded as 'friends', rather than 'like' because 'friends' provides a specific subject. The chosen words indicate the conscious intent and focus of the artist.

Drawing 87 has a happy affect with two smiling and waving female figures in an outdoor space. The artist has an arrow identifying 'me' and wears a yellow dress with the words 'share bright'. She has black hair and rosy cheeks and waves at the other girl saying 'hello, how are you?' The other girl has brown hair. She is waving also, and her dress has the word 'hello'. The sky is blue with three fluffy blue clouds and four birds. The children stand on green grass with four bright red and yellow flowers.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 12:
Drawing 87

Friends were the most frequently mentioned element of school experience nominated by nearly thirty percent of participants (see Table 6 below). Positive feelings generally about school were nominated by one in four students. This finding may reflect the invitation to children to state their feelings about their wellbeing at school. Being grateful was given a discrete category as it is more specific than a general positive emotion and a topic of focus in Wellbeing Classroom activities. Safety was nominated by around one in six students. This can be open to interpretation that whilst school was safe, they had felt unsafe in other contexts, thus elevating their attention to the importance of safety. Alternatively, this may be a product of language used at the school about the importance of feeling safe. Learning was nominated by 10 percent of participants, while being respected and being a helper were nominated by 6 percent. Negative experiences of being insecure or unsure, being bored or bullying, or 'no friends' were nominated by only seven children. One child referenced 'nature' at school.

TABLE 6: Children's Words about their 'Me at School' drawing

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Happy/Love/Like/Good	31	24.8
Safe	23	18.4
Helper/Respected	7	5.6
Learning	12	9.6
Friends/Play	38	30.4
Nature	1	.8
Bullied	1	.8
Bored	2	1.6
No Friends	1	.8
Insecure/Unsure	3	2.4
Grateful	4	3.2
Need To Improve	2	1.6
TOTAL	125	100.0

(n=125)

Drawing 27 (Year 2 boy) in Figure 13 below, illustrates the centrality of peer relationships during the primary school years. Laird et al. (2001) identified that peer rejection in the primary school years can adversely affect children's behaviour as they grow older. Being able to make friends and join in with others are key skills supporting children's sense of wellbeing. The school's biannual Wellbeing Audit tracks children's numbers of mutual friendships as an indicator of their wellbeing.

Drawing 27 is labelled '*I like school because I have frendes (sic)*'. The picture appears to represent a sporting game – perhaps soccer. The drawing contains six coloured human figures and two rudimentary incomplete figures. The picture does not indicate which figure is 'me,' but each figure is labelled by what are most likely references to their online identities or 'handles'.

On the left, one figure, wearing blue and green stripes with red knees and hands, is smiling with arms wide, and saying 'wow'. There is then a smaller figure wearing blue stripes and black sleeves with arms spread and a

smiley face. The words next to him say 'A bum musten 120'. The next figure is the largest with wide eyes and arms raised as if to catch something. He has fingers and toes and wears a purple top with black sleeves. There is writing 'For the omglance (sic) code' on his top. Above the figure are the words 'Best boy omg 145'. The larger size and details suggest this is the artist.

The fourth figure wears a green top with a cross through the middle and a word on the chest. The figure is labelled 'Denae 26' and has a thought bubble saying 'wow'. The fifth figure on the far right is smaller, maybe indicating distance, and is framed by a structure which looks like a goal net. He has the label 'sleepprocs320'. He has a blue top with red sleeves. Underneath this goal area is writing and numbers 'Dimond12345' which may name the online identity of the sixth coloured figure. He is also small and is in the central foreground wearing a pink top with purple sleeves and pants and blue hair. There is a thought bubble with writing in it, however the meaning of the writing is unclear. Next to this figure are two other shapes.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 13:
Drawing 27

In the bottom left corner are letters *ad adcb abcd*, as if the artist is practising letters to get them correct. The drawing captures the artist's sense of achievement and enjoyment of the admiration of peers when he performs well in a sporting contest. School provides opportunities to join in games with others and to experience acceptance and success. The use of what appear to be online identity labels suggests this group participates in online gaming or chat activities. If these are online identity labels, educators and parents may find it useful to follow up the seven-year-old artist's online activities, given their evident significance in his self-representation.

The references to helping others in some of the drawings indicate active awareness of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. Figure 14, Drawing 85 (Year 3 girl) is an example of one of these. The words in Drawing 85 state 'At our school there are some bullies (sic) like every school and I feel proud when I help people. I feel nice but the people being bullied (sic) are sad, so this is me being a "bystander hero"'.

The term 'bystander hero' refers to those who witness someone being bullied and intervene to try to stop it. There are three figures in the picture. All wear yellow tops. Two boys are wearing black pants whilst the female artist in the middle wears a skirt. The yellow haired boy on the left, wearing red shoes, is pointing and laughing at the figure on the right. This person, with brown hair and green shoes, is crying and sad.

The artist has long brown hair and wide brown eyes. She is saying 'hey stop bullying him'. The picture shows

the artist as confident and authoritative, as a 'bystander hero' who is unafraid to intervene in the bullying. It is also interesting to note that the depiction of bullying captures the elements of a one-way behaviour where the victim is passive and distressed rather than a dispute between them. This reflects the artist's awareness of bullying being different from a squabble between students.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 14:
Drawing 85

8.3.2 Actions

The actions depicted in children's 'drawings of *'Me at School'* provided another layer of signification in the way children experienced school life. Some children focused on their self-portrait as the only content and others situated themselves in various contexts of activity (see Table 7).

TABLE 7: Actions in 'Me at School' drawings

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Learning	16	12.8
Playing	30	24.0
Helping Others	9	7.2
None	9	7.2
Waving/No Apparent Interaction	56	44.8
Computer	2	1.6
Thinking/Wondering	2	1.6
Being Helped	1	.8
TOTAL	125	100.0

(n=125)

The most common action in the drawings (45 percent) showed the artist waving or looking ahead and not interacting with any other human figure in the drawing, as shown in Table 7. A further seven percent depicted no activity. One in four drew themselves playing with others, reinforcing the importance to students of friends and peer interactions at school. Thirteen percent drew themselves learning, and a further two percent drew themselves with a computer. Seven percent showed themselves helping others, while one percent depicted themselves being helped. Two percent of students drew themselves thinking and wondering.

The relative prominence of eight percent of students depicting helping as an activity provides evidence of the values of the school's wellbeing culture. Playing and learning are expected school activities, however helping others is not a generally visible value in student school culture. In Figure 15, Drawing 122 (Year 5 boy) is an example of a depiction of the artist helping another.

The picture shows two boys in the school grounds with the school buildings in the background. The artist has a smiley face and asks 'what's the matter?' The other boy has a sad face and states 'I have no friends'. The artist states 'you can be my friend' and the other boy says 'thank you'. They are surrounded by four signs, each with a red 'banned' line across the various words, fighting, violence, bullying and give up. There are two green signs with the words sharing and helping others. There is a blue sky with fluffy white clouds and a yellow sun in the corner. There are also brightly coloured flowers. The words state 'I feel kind and helpful and peaceful and at school I am kind to other students and help them if they dropped anything'. The words emphasise that helping others generates positive feelings and self-esteem for the artist.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 15:
Drawing 122

8.3.3 Context

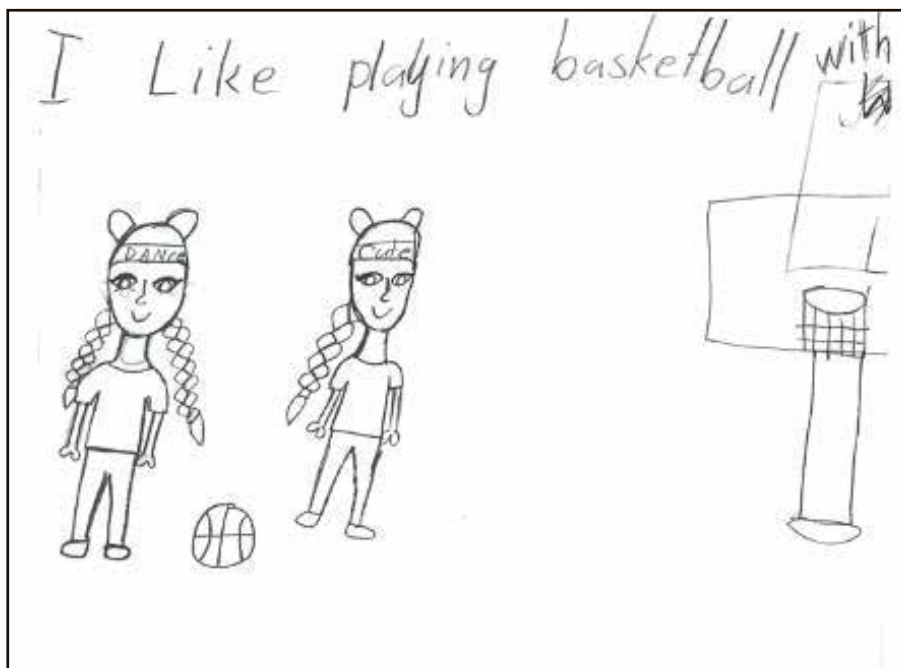
The context coding captures the locations of the 'Me at School' drawings. Table 8 shows the categories of contexts depicted, which included sports areas and playgrounds, classrooms and the library, inside the school grounds near school buildings, outside the school grounds, outdoors in general, the school breakfast club, and no apparent context.

TABLE 8: Contexts of the Me at School drawings

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	
Games/Sport/Playground	31	24.8	
Classroom/Library	26	20.8	
None	18	14.4	
School Grounds/Buildings	31	24.8	
Outdoors General	15	12.0	
Outside School	3	2.4	
Breakfast Club	1	.8	
TOTAL	125	100.0	(n=125)

The school grounds buildings were the backdrop for one in four drawings, as were sports areas and playgrounds. A further 21 percent of children referenced a classroom or library setting. Fourteen percent of drawings did not provide a contextual setting. Twelve percent of drawings were located in a general outdoors setting. Two percent positioned themselves outside the school, and one percent referenced the breakfast club. The context of children's drawings provides an indication of the locations significant to children's school experience and their relationship with these.

Drawing 59 (Year 2 girl) provides an example of a drawing featuring a sporting area context (see Figure 16 on next page). The black and white drawing depicts two girls, who are standing with their arms by their sides. Each figure has long plaits, a smiling face and head band. One headband says 'dance' and the other says 'cute'. There is a basketball on the ground between them and a basketball goalpost at one end of the picture. The picture is in black and white. The words state 'I like playing basketball with ~~W~~'.

**ME AT SCHOOL****FIGURE 16:
Drawing 59**

8.3.4

Affect

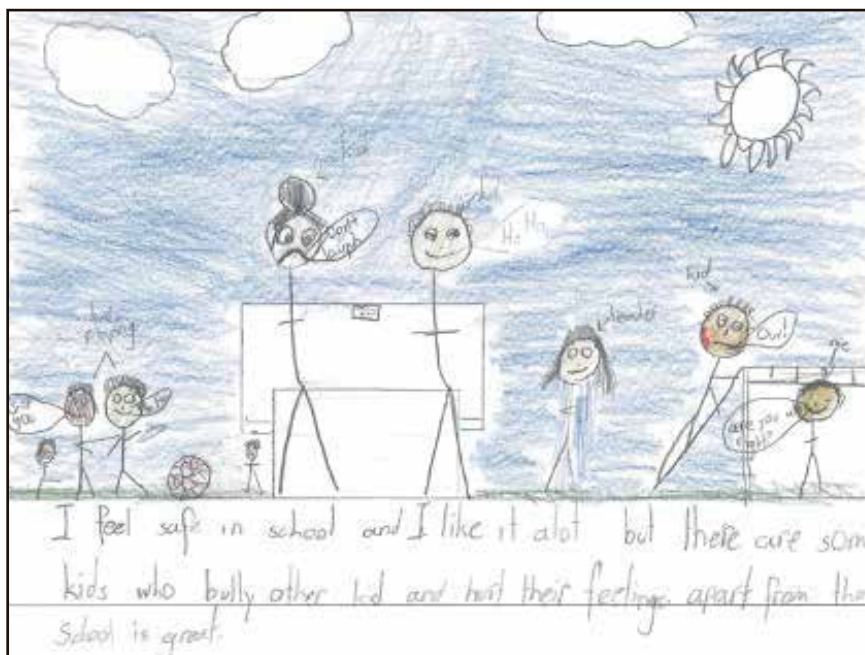
The fourth aspect of the 'Me at School' drawings to be coded was the emotional affect of the picture. Facial expression, the formation of drawing lines, the completeness of figures, their relation to other people, their relative size and emotional impact were coded. Seventy-three percent of drawings showed a happy smiling facial expression, six percent showed a negative emotion and two percent showed no emotion (see Table 9). Eleven percent of pictures featured human figures missing body parts or facial features, or showed them isolated from others. Two percent of drawings featured scribbling lines. Three percent showed small human figures in relation to other elements of the picture, and two percent depicted a figure busy learning. The affect coding is linked to the way the drawing conveys the artist's sense of self-esteem and their feelings of happiness or otherwise.

TABLE 9: Affect visible within the Me at School drawings

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Happy/Smiling	91	72.8
Scribbling	3	2.4
Missing Face/Arms/Legs/Isolated	14	11.2
Negative Emotion	8	6.4
Nil	3	2.4
Very Small	4	3.2
Busy Learning	2	1.6
Total	125	100.0

(n=125)

If the happy and smiling affect is combined with the 'busy learning' group, three quarters of the sample represented themselves in a positive way. In Figure 17, Drawing 185 (Year 6 boy) provides an example of a picture with complex affect.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 17:
Drawing 185

Drawing 185 presents a tableau of 9 human stick figures. There are 4 figures with a soccer ball on the left of the picture. Two of these are smaller, as if further away. The larger two of these figures are identified with text as 'kids playing'. They have smiling faces. One face is brown and the other is grey. The brown face figure is saying 'got you' and the other says 'ha ha'. The two largest figures are in the middle of the drawing. They appear to be in front of a square board. Text identifies each of them as 'a kid'. One figure is shown as female with pinned up hair and a downturned mouth and the other is male and smiling. The female figure has a grey face and is saying 'don't laugh' and the male figure with a light brown face is saying 'ha ha'. There are three figures on the right of the picture. One is identified by text as a teacher. The teacher has a light brown face and shoulder length hair depicting a female. Her eye sockets are empty and she has no arms. The next figure is identified by text as a 'kid'. He has a brown face with a red mark on one side and is climbing onto monkey bars and saying 'ow', indicating hurt. The final, smaller figure is under the monkey bars and labelled 'me'. He has a brown face and is smiling and asking, 'are you alright?' The statement on the picture says 'I feel safe in school and I like it a lot but there are some kids who bully other kids and hurt their feelings. Apart from that, school is great'. The picture features a large blue sky with fluffy white clouds and a sun and a thin layer of green grass under the feet of the figures.

The picture is comprised of positive and negative components. It was coded as having a positive emotional affect because the artist depicted himself as smiling and helpful to an injured boy. It is interesting to note the teacher's empty eyes and lack of arms. Symbolically this could be interpreted as the teacher being unable to 'see', and the absence of arms referencing a perceived inability to act effectively.

Drawing 164 (Year 7 girl) provides an example of a picture coded as depicting negative emotion.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 18:
Drawing 164

The picture shows two similar female figures sitting at a desk in a classroom. There are posters and box files on the wall behind them and a worktable beside their desk. Each figure has closed eyes and they are clothed in identical t-shirts. One figure has a half-smiling half-sad face with a line down the middle and the other figure has a smiling face. The drawing is black and white. The words state:

'How I feel about myself: I feel confident and happy on the outside, but I am very shy and sensitive on the inside. How I feel about school: is fun because my teacher makes it. This school is very respectful, and they respect all people and their religion.' The reference to a shy, sensitive inside self and a confident outside self is coded as negative emotion because it reveals the artist having a split sense of self, rather than a unified sense of identity.

Five percent of drawings featured dark colours which may indicate negative feelings. Drawing 173 (Year 6 boy) provides an example of a drawing coded as negative emotion in which the figure is incomplete and features black and red colours, as well as references to potentially concerning elements of online culture.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 19:
Drawing 173

The picture features a head and shoulders portrait of a male figure wearing a hoodie, with blackened eyes and mouth. There is a red line in a triangle shape around the figure's head. Part of the hood is red. A serrated line extends from the right elbow across the picture. The figure's left sleeve says 'Pewdie Pie', referencing a 30-year-old Swedish male YouTube identity popular with pre-adolescent boys. Pewdie Pie has been criticised by Wired magazine (Ellis 2017) for 'racial slurs, rape jokes, anti-Semitism, and homophobia'. The right sleeve features the words 'sub to'. On the hoodie front are the words 'MEME REEEEE'.

The 'know your meme' website states the following about REEEEE:

"REEEEEEE" is an onomatopoeic expression of intense rage or frustration typically associated with the Angry Pepe character and used by those who frequent the /r9k/ board on 4chan. The expression is often associated with the Autistic Screeching meme, however it is intended to represent the unique croak produced by several species of frogs when agitated. Additionally, the expression has been combined with the word repost to call out duplicate posts on Reddit, Imgur and other sites.

The statement on the picture says *'I feel good with my friend at school'*. This is an example of a picture where the words are positive, but the drawing elements of an incomplete figure, dark colours, and referencing of a meme linked to *'intense rage or frustration'*, raise concerns.

The following section provides examples of some of the pictures coded as concerning. Drawing 28 is an example from a Year 1 girl student.



ME AT SCHOOL

**FIGURE 20:
Drawing 28**

Drawing 28 is drawn in pencil with the words which appear to say *'My School. I feel so happy'*. The writing has multiple outlines with previous versions partially erased. On the left of the drawing is a human figure shape outline with a large mass of scribbled hair rising vertically from the head. There are two irregular superimposed circle shapes where the face would be. A rough wavy line extends across the picture to two floating circle shapes which are both scribbled out. On the right of a picture is a square building shape with double doors with a window in the top of each door. The scribbling lines and absence of a face in the human shape show less developed skills compared to other pictures by children of similar age. Whilst the words are positive, the affect of the picture is negative and suggests the need for further attention.

Drawing 80 (Year 3 girl) provides an example of a picture by a Year 3 student coded as of concern.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 21:
Drawing 80

Drawing 80 features a single human figure in a classroom with two desks and a board, two windows and a door. The room is coloured pale brown and the windows, door and desks are pink. The human figure is coloured orange and is a rudimentary form, and at age nine does not reflect the gender of the artist. The head is a circle with a face with two dot eyes and a smiling mouth. There is no hair, or nose, or ears or clothes. The figure floats in the middle of the room. The words state 'I like doing Publisher because it is fun doing life cycle of a lizard' indicating enjoyment of learning and being in her classroom. The rudimentary nature of the isolated human figure and its missing elements are again less developed than would be expected for the child's age, warranting further attention.

Drawing 150 is an example of a Year 6 boy student picture coded as of concern (see Figure 22 on next page). The picture features two smiling male figures who appear to be 'high-fiving' each other or waving. They appear to be inside a school building with a ceiling, three windows in a wall and a table in the background. The drawing is in black and white. The boys wear shirts with sleeves buttons and pockets and pants with pockets. The figures are cut off at mid-thigh. There are details of 5 fingers on each waving hand and one figure is wearing glasses. The words state 'I feel like this school could be better if we had nice people. Right now I'm going through lots of stress at home.' In contrast to the scribbled pictures with rudimentary incomplete figures, this drawing is detailed. The picture appears positive, but the words indicate that there are 'not nice' people at school and stress at home, indicating a need for further attention.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 22:
Drawing 150

Drawing 197 presents a picture by a Year 7 twelve-year-old girl which was coded as of concern (see Figure 23). The drawing depicts a female figure from mid-thigh in the middle of an otherwise empty frame. The figure has long brown hair tied in a ponytail with a long fringe falling across one eye. The eyes are very large and black with white dots stylised in cartoon anime form. There is an ear, nose and small, smiling mouth. The figure wears a green hoodie top complete with hood cords, waist and wrist bands and black pants. She has no hands on the ends of her long sleeves. The words state 'when I am at school I feel safe and happy'. Indicators of concern include the missing hands and legs of the figure, the large black eyes and the isolation of the figure from any context or activity. Again, the words appear positive, but could carry a meaning that she did not feel safe and happy elsewhere.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 23:
Drawing 197

As these examples show, a combination of factors was balanced in considering whether further inquiry was indicated. The focus of researcher analysis was consideration of the drawing's communication of the student's self-image. An identification of concern is a prompt for further attention rather than a diagnostic imperative.

8.3.5

Interaction of Concern Identification with other Variables

A cross-tabulation analysis of concern identification was conducted with other key variables of language, age, gender, low income, refugee status, trauma, disability and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status using the Pearson chi square test of significance, where p values of .05 or less are considered to be significant. This test was used to identify whether there was a statistically significant relationship between concern identification and any of these variables. English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) and Disability were found to have significant relationships to concern identification, and the Age Group variable approached significance.

TABLE 10: Age groups of drawings of concern Cross-Tabulation

		AGE GROUP			
		6-8 years	9-10 years	11-13 years	TOTAL
CONCERN	YES	14	7	23	44
	NO	22	29	30	81
	TOTAL	36	36	53	125

(n=125) p=.058

The Age Group variable was just outside a statistically significant relationship with identification of concern with a p value of .058. Younger and older age groups were found to be more frequently coded with drawings of concern. The middle age group of 9-10-year olds was least identified as having a drawing of concern. Considering that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced in 2015, students aged 9-10 in 2019 would have been in Reception and Year 1 at that time. This age group has therefore had maximum exposure to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, and this could explain the results.

Table 11: Concern and English as an Additional Language Cross-Tabulation

		English as an Additional Language or Dialect		
		NO	YES	TOTAL
CONCERN	YES	27	17	44
	NO	34	47	81
	TOTAL	61	64	125

(n=125) p=.038

The p value of the Concern and EALD cross-tabulation was .038, showing a statistically significant relationship between these variables. As the above data in Table 11 show, children with English as an additional language were significantly less likely to be identified with a drawing of concern than those with English as their home language. EALD is recognised as a factor creating vulnerabilities for children in monolingual English-speaking school systems (Premier & Parr 2019), yet in this school, with more than two-thirds of enrolments being EALD students, fewer EALD students' drawings in the sample reflected indicators of concern.

Drawings by seven of the nine participating students with a disability were identified as of concern, with a p value of .007. Figure 24, Drawing 46 (Year 1 girl) provides an example of a drawing of concern by a student with a disability. The student was also identified as: having a trauma background, living in a low-income household, and identified as Aboriginal Australian and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The drawing is in lead pencil. There is a space defined by scribbling, containing two female human stick figures with triangle dresses. Both have feet but no hands. One figure has a smiling face with eyes and a nose and protuberances around the head which may be hair or ribbons. The second figure is more scribbled and there are no clear facial features. There are three trees interspersed between the figures with circular scribbled leaves. On one side of the picture is a flower and a butterfly. There is a sun in the top right corner. The words say 'I like school'. The indicators of concern are the scribbling affect and the poorly formed drawing of the figure on the right when compared to the other figure.



ME AT SCHOOL

**FIGURE 24:
Drawing 46**

Figure 25, Drawing 106 (Year 5 boy) provides another example of a drawing of concern by a student living with a disability. The picture depicts two figures with the statement 'I feel bored and I feel normal'. There is a semi-erased face and two other circles which have also been partially erased. One figure, wearing a green top and black pants, stands with his hands on his hips and his feet planted wide apart in a confident stance. He has black hair. His eyes are shut and his face neither smiles, nor frowns. The facial lines of eyes, nose and mouth are replicated in space beside the face. The figure in green may depict the image of a person who may hit or bully another.

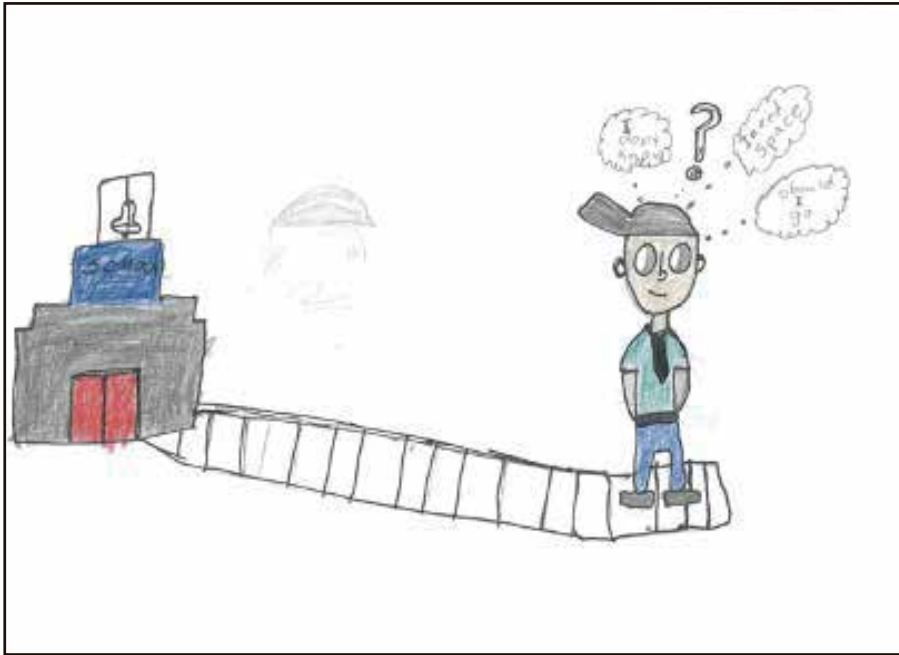


ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 25:
Drawing 106

The second figure, the artist, is larger and wears a yellow shirt and black pants. He has three speech bubbles. A speech bubble next to the other figure states *'Normal because I never get hit or bullied (sic) this year'*. On the other side of the artist one speech bubble repeats the words *'I feel bored and I feel normal'* and the second speech bubble states *'Bored, because there (is) nothing to do at school'*. The figure stands with his legs apart and his arms raised and apart, complete with detailed fingers on each hand. The face has black hair, brown eyes wide open, a nose and a round red mouth. Again, a replica of the facial features is placed next to the face. The shoes have laces. The most striking detail is a large black question mark above his head, with another three smaller question marks on each side of it. There are no background details of any kind. The artist's statement that he is no longer being bullied or hit is a positive validation of the impacts of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. The indicators of concern centre on the expression of boredom and *'nothing to do'*, indicating that the artist may not be sufficiently engaged either in learning or social relationships at school.

Another student with a disability whose drawing was of concern also represented himself with a question mark. Figure 26, Drawing 114 (Year 5 boy) shows the artist outside the school at the end of a path to its door. He wears a green top and blue pants with black shoes and a black cap on sideways. He stands with his feet apart and arms tucked behind his back. The face has large oval stylised eyes, with a nose and mouth and ears. The mouth has a little smile. Above his head is a large question mark surrounded by three thought bubbles. These state *'I don't know'*, *'I need space'* and *'should I go?'* The school building is black with red doors, a blue sign above saying *'school'* and a bell tower on top. The artist's positioning outside the school, his questions about whether he should go and the school's representation in *'danger'* colours of red and black, indicate a need for further attention.



ME AT SCHOOL

FIGURE 26:
Drawing 114

8.4 Summary of Drawings Analysis

The drawings sample, representing over one third of the student population, provided a means to assess students' self-image at school and their experience there. A clear majority of students depicted themselves and named themselves as having a positive experience. This is a clear endorsement by students of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach employed in this site and an indicator of its efficacy.

The drawings provide evidence that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach is embedded in the school's culture and language. Students used words and concepts in their drawings appropriated from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, such as 'bystander' and 'bystander hero' in reference to bullying, being a helper and being helped, being respected and having gratitude.

Whilst 35 percent of drawings were identified as being of concern, there was a relatively low threshold of inclusion in this category. Drawings identified as 'of concern' ranged from students' explicit negative images and statements, through to interpretation of meaning which may raise questions about their wellbeing and self-esteem. Importantly, the school population is categorised as having relatively high levels of disadvantage, diversity and complexity, yet the drawings analysis indicates it has achieved high rates of student satisfaction, engagement and enjoyment. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach provides a schoolwide cultural infrastructure and peer education resource, in addition to state schools' usual resources of school counsellors, disability services and Bilingual School Service Officers, to respond to such identification of concern.

Age Group, English as an Additional Language or Dialect and Disability were the variables which were significantly related to indicators of concern. The Age Group variable indicated that the students who had been exposed to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach since commencing school were less likely to have a drawing of concern than those older age groups who started school before the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced, or those who were still in their junior primary years, with less exposure to the Approach. EALD status students

were less likely to have a drawing of concern than their English-speaking peers, reflecting the reported increasing engagement and satisfaction of EALD families since the Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced. Most of the drawings by students with a disability were coded as being of concern, indicating a need to specifically further attend to the experience of students with a disability. Again, recognising that the school already has student learning plans and resources in place for these students, this may translate to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach activities which favour valuing the differences amongst students in their physical and intellectual capacities and abilities.

The drawings data affirms the overall efficacy of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, providing evidence of high levels of student happiness and self-esteem at school, the cumulative benefits for students of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach over time, and the efficacy of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach in engaging and supporting children with an EALD background.

9

CONCLUSION

The Wellbeing Classroom Approach data indicated positive changes across all aspects of the school, encompassing all key stakeholder groups of staff, students, families and the partnering community organisations. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach commenced in 2015 in a complex school with high levels of language and cultural diversity, and students from families living on low incomes. In 2019, while data for this report was collected, the school was re-categorised from the 3rd to the 2nd highest category of disadvantage, based on the socio-economic status of its student population.

The levels of development of the school's commencing students are assessed each year using the Australian Early Development Census. Quantitative data derived from school AEDC records has shown year on year gains in the percentages of 5-year-old school commencers classified as 'on track' across all developmental domains except for Language and Cognition, which has had no significant change. This domain reflects the high proportion of families with home languages other than English in the school district population. The AEDC provides a window on the development of children starting school in each year, rather than any impacts directly from the school environment. There may be some effect from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach on school commencers with older siblings attending the school, however the main import of AEDC data is to indicate the developmental profile of the school commencers each year.

The standardised tests providing school NAPLAN data on Literacy and Numeracy from 2014 to 2019 show the results for tests in Years three, five and seven. These data affirm that the commencement of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach across the school in 2015 has been linked with a trajectory of improvement for each test cohort as they move through the two-year test intervals. There are many factors contributing to children's academic achievements, however the data provides evidence that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has not hindered or harmed learning outcomes, and is likely to have contributed to the positive outcomes to some degree. Children who feel safe and comfortable are more able to attend to their learning than children who are living with fear, anxiety, rage or sadness (Australian Childhood Foundation 2010).

School data from twice yearly wellbeing audits has identified a downward trend in the number of incidents of bullying reported at the school, and the frequency of children being sent to the Principal in relation to behaviour problems. There has been an upward trend in school attendance rates in the period 2015-2019, and staff, students and parents have indicated high levels of satisfaction with their school experience and the Wellbeing Classroom Approach. The school identified significant increases in the levels of parent engagement in family learning events and other school activities, particularly amongst EALD families. Families have also been more willing to approach the school for assistance when needed.

The interview and focus group data from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach community organisation partners, school leaders and staff indicated positive outcomes for the school, its staff, students and families

arising from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach activity. Respondents identified that the school culture of language and relationship dynamics had noticeably changed, enabling new dynamics of relationships between staff, between students and between these groups.

Staff *in situ* professional development and mentoring in trauma informed pedagogy supported teachers to acquire new understandings of, and responses to, student behaviour. The investment in teacher professional development was a crucial element in effecting changes in student experience and achievement. Resources such as *Kimochis* social-emotional development learning kit, interoception, and mindfulness body awareness approaches, character strengths concepts and anti-bullying concepts such as 'hero bystanders' were implemented with students in wellbeing activities led by Student Wellbeing Agents as well as teachers. The innovation of peer leadership in wellbeing has supported staff to scaffold student learning from peer-led activities derived from students' ideas and perceptions.

Staff and Wellbeing Classroom Approach community leaders identified that students were more willing to engage positively with school and were able to use their wellbeing learning to self-regulate, to reflect on and change behaviour and they were sharing their learning with their families. Teachers found that their relationships and communications with students were positive, classrooms were more harmonious, and these changes reduced the number of students they sent to the Principal due to behaviour problems.

Student Wellbeing Agents gained knowledge, leadership skills, peer education and public speaking skills and enhanced self-esteem from being able to support and assist others. Their role was recognised and valued, which in turn promoted the value of wellbeing culture across the student community. Parents, including those from EALD backgrounds, were able to see their children taking on leadership roles in the school, generating pride in their achievements and trust in the school.

The Student Wellbeing Agent data emphasised the benefits experienced by students who took on this role, and their efficacy as peer role models in the school. They spoke of helping their peers to gain insights into their behaviour, including potential consequences, and ways to calm themselves. They also practised selecting, planning and delivering classroom-based wellbeing activities, as well as intervening in situations of bullying or distress to assist a student. The Agents reported feelings of increased confidence, self-esteem and the joy of helping others. They noted how good feelings were passed on by students in their treatment of others, a contagion of kindness, contributing to the significant cultural change in the school.

The drawings data provided useful insights into students' self-perceptions and their experience of school. In a school of high complexity, diversity and socio-economic disadvantage it is notable that two-thirds of the drawings sample were assessed positively, with one third identified as having possible concern indicators. Concern indicators could reference a child's passing feeling, or historical difficulties or a current context of adversity. The drawings of concern were referred to the school for student follow-up where considered appropriate. The large majority of drawings reflecting positive self-esteem and school experience was a testament to an overall environment of wellbeing for most students.

School experience cannot, of itself, resolve or change family socio-economic circumstances, cultural and language challenges or family relationship problems, but it can potentially provide a consistent experience of a safe, friendly, learning environment with good relationships with peers and staff. This is important for all students, but especially for those affected by trauma or chronic stress. A statistical analysis of the concern variable against demographic variables identified significant correlation between having a disability and a drawing of concern, indicating a need for more attention to the wellbeing of students with disability. There was also a statistically significant relationship with language whereas EALD students were found to be less likely to have a drawing of concern than their English-speaking peers. These data reflect the efficacy of the

Wellbeing Classroom Approach in relation to EALD students in particular, as it could have been expected that EALD students may experience more, not fewer, difficulties. Age group analysis of drawings of concern approached statistical significance, such that students in grades four and five, who would have started school at the time of the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, were less likely to have a drawing of concern than younger or older age groups. These data allowed an interpretation that this group, with the longest cumulative exposure to the Wellbeing Classroom Approach, had the highest rates of wellbeing.

In conclusion the data presented in this report provides evidence that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach is effective in sustaining a supportive school culture with benefits for staff, students, families and the wider community. There are gains across academic outcomes, reduced bullying, increased attendance, improved parent engagement and satisfaction, student skills in self-regulation, friendships and behaviour change and Wellbeing Agent leadership skills.

Key messages from this research indicate the importance of:

- having a wellbeing approach which is flexible and adaptable, tailored to school needs
- direction and support prioritized by school leadership, leading a coordinated school response
- staff access to applied professional development in trauma-informed pedagogy over a period of time and a suite of effective resources
- authentic, structured student voice to develop, plan and implement wellbeing activities
- a whole of school commitment to authentic engagement with wellbeing values, language and relationship dynamics to create a safe, nurturing, respectful community
- the cumulative benefits over time of a consistent focus on wellbeing, attuned to the practical contexts of staff and students

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Wellbeing Classroom approach to the understanding of children's wellbeing is the emphasis on universal practice and collective collaborative, sustained work to create a wellbeing culture. suggested rephrasing. Individualised responses to children with learning and behavioural difficulties are important in addressing specific needs arising from each child's specific circumstances. Social relationships and social-emotional learning, however, take place in the communities in which each child belongs and lives. School is the community where children spend most time outside their home life. There are benefits for all if the relationship dynamics and contexts which stimulated a child's disruptive and distressed behaviour can be transformed. By struggling to succeed in their school community children can become labelled and excluded.' por 'When children struggle to succeed in their school community, they become labelled and excluded. The Wellbeing Classroom Approach fosters a sustainable culture of being respectful of feelings of oneself and others, finding character strengths, taking time to calm down, forgiving and re-doing difficult encounters, spreading the joys of kindness and taking responsibility for behaviour as a valued member of their community.

This study has not explicitly included data on the costs and benefits of the Wellbeing Classroom approach; however, the resource expenditure has been contained within normal school funding and operation provisions of the South Australian Department for Education. Expenditures on pedagogy resources, such as *Kimochis* and wellbeing mentors, align with school budget and operational structures. Commitment and coordinated, cooperative effort with strong leadership over time has been the principal investment by all members of the school community.

The estimated Wellbeing activity hours over 40 weeks are detailed below:

- Students (366 at time of data collection): 60 hours per student = 21,960
- Wellbeing Agents (18): 100 hours per agent = 1,800
- Class teacher (17): 80 hours per teacher = 1,360
- Wellbeing leader: 200 hours
- Principal: 120 hours

The total hours invested in wellbeing activities across the school over the course of a year add up to 25,440. The study has not identified any other forms of increased risk, loss or cost arising from the Wellbeing Classroom Approach.

The research identifies that the Wellbeing Classroom Approach has been successfully translated from individual junior primary classrooms into a whole school approach with manifest benefits distributed across the school community.

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