



# Evaluation of MindMatters at

## Phoenix High

(Fictional Name)

### DRAFT

### Progress Report after 2 Years

This school was one of fifteen schools that agreed to participate in a case study as part of the evaluation of MindMatters across Australia.

The evaluation was conducted for the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council by the Hunter Institute of Mental Health

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## Summary

**Phoenix High** is a co-educational government school set in a sizeable town within a remote area of Australia. There is a high student turnover and staff turnover, largely because of the transient nature of the population of this remote community. The school has approximately 400 students in years 7 to 10, many (as many as 50%) of who are Indigenous. A smaller but significant proportion of students come from a non-English speaking background. The school also has a small unit catering for Year 11 and 12 students who choose not to graduate to the nearby senior college

At the time of taking up the MindMatters program the school was faced with the challenges of providing support to a student population many of who are described as having multiple levels of disadvantage. Behaviour management was a major issue, with a reasonable proportion of the students being constantly in conflict with other students, teachers and the school.

MindMatters was identified at a time when the school had started implementing major changes to address the multiple needs of students, particularly those most at risk of school refusal or suspension and expulsion. For executive and staff at Phoenix High, MindMatters represented a framework for thinking about student wellbeing and implementing necessary changes.

Pastoral care periods were introduced early in the adoption period, and MindMatters was used by pastoral care teachers across the years. Later on teams of teachers were formed at each grade level, and flexible approaches to lesson delivery and the achievement of educational outcomes were introduced to engage students in their own education. With this increased flexibility, different teams took different approaches to pastoral care time and the ways in which they used MindMatters resources.

Some in the school, including the deputy principal, regard MindMatters as being instrumental in assisting the change process to occur. For them, MindMatters became a symbolic name for the reorientation of the school towards wellbeing. For others, MindMatters was seen simply as a curriculum resource and that it was just one of the initiatives that the school adopted. In any event, important improvements in school climate and other wellbeing indicators have been reported over the evaluation period.

*MindMatters is what we are doing everyday with our kids. When you talk to them. We've just put a name on what we are normally doing with our kids to make them communicate with each other, feel wanted, feel valued. I think with the transition programme, (MindMatters) has made it explicit at the beginning of the year and then it reminds you. I think (if) you're valuing your student and yourself as a teacher, you are doing it (MindMatters).*

*So that was a huge big MindMatters rich session but without picking up the MindMatters folder.*

*In one sense, it's the symbolism of the MindMatters programme which I think we've been able to embrace and use it as part of the banner of what was going on here anyhow. And I'm saying to teachers now, you know, the materials are a resource that we use as we can, or modify them as we can, but it is that whole approach.*



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## 1 This school's characteristics at the beginning of the study

### Overview

This is a co-educational school set in a sizeable town within a remote area of Australia. There is a high student turnover and staff turnover, largely because of the transient nature of the population of this remote community. The school has approximately 400 students in years 7 to 10, many of whom are Indigenous. A smaller but significant proportion of students come from a non-English speaking background. The school also has a small unit catering for Year 11 and 12 students who choose not to graduate to the nearby senior college.

The community includes people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and cultural groups, with a very high proportion of indigenous people (approximately 50% of the student enrolment are Aboriginal). Many families experience social and financial difficulties, such as unemployment, poverty, family violence, substance use, blended or unstable family situations, or isolation. However, there are also more affluent families in the area and the background of students varies widely.

Despite the range of religious traditions, languages and cultural difference one teacher made this observation:

*their socio-cultural experience is largely drawn from the mainstream, you know, their life issues wouldn't necessarily be all that different to lower socio-economic or working class people elsewhere. Staff 2001*

### Administration

The staff was described during the 2001 visit as being made up of 25 teachers with 5 executive teachers. Class sizes were approximately 25-30 students with a 'high percentage' of classes being taken by a teacher with a support assistant or Aboriginal resource officers supporting them and the students in the classroom. The staff indicated at 2001 that there had been a conscious choice to have class sizes this large to "allow other things to happen." The main 'other' thing noted was an effort to work towards creating a more flexible timetable.

The school also has the (virtually) full-time services of a school nurse who is employed by the state health authority. The nurse described her role had changed from first aid provision to health promotion and supporting harm prevention initiatives. Her contact with the students commences in Yr 6 and her role supports them in the transition to high school. This continues:

*It's a very wide sort of job plus I do get involved with mediation. I've tried not to get involved with the discipline side of things because it's not really my role but you end up sitting in taking notes or being part of something sometimes. Staff 2001*

### Timetable

The day was structured into three blocks with teachers being in class for two of the three teaching periods of the day.

### Curriculum

The curriculum offered until 2000 was the core key learning areas Years 7 to 10. Teachers were organised into three main teaching areas: Mathematics and Science; Humanities; and

Options. Options teachers taught programs such as dance, drama, text studies, art, and media.

In 2001, the school responded to observations that a number of students, particularly indigenous students, had been unsuccessful in managing the transition to the senior secondary high. The establishment of an officially recognised course of study that integrated both VET and other skill building units of study that meet the learners at their point of competency. The courses have official recognition and the school established the Year 11 section of the school as an independent unit attached to the school. This enabled a higher level of flexibility and innovation in timetabling, physical arrangement of the learning space and 'mood'.

*The students come and go a little bit more, they run up until 12.30 each day. Some stay behind for private study. There's just less structure. ... doesn't obviously run the full gamut of Year 11/12 stage 2 programmes. Staff, 2001*

While the initial focus on the difficulty of indigenous students failing to make the physical and emotional transition to senior high was the impetus for the establishment of the Yr 11/12 enclave at PHOENIX HIGH, the unit was attracting a range of students from both the indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Staff also indicated the high degree of emphasis on support for work experience programs. Two support staff are employed to ensure the implementation and management of the work experience program.

### **Educational context**

In this state, high school mainly comprises grades 7 to 10. The last two years of formal schooling are set in senior colleges. At Phoenix High students generally enrol from three feeder schools, although due to the instability of the population, a reasonably proportion arrive from out of town or even out of state.

### **Annual turnover**

Annual student turnover at Phoenix High is high (as much as 50% of enrolment can change in one year). Staff and students are often short-term residents in this town and the movement of staff and students out of the school reflects the transient nature of the population in this region. This factor was a constant throughout the two year period of the evaluation.

*We've had quite a large influx in the higher levels, they're not just all year 7's. (The principal) said we've enrolled 223 kids since April out of a population of 400 new kids. We've only got 400 still so an enormous turnover in the number of children as well. Staff 2003*

### **Pastoral care arrangements**

Students are organised into home groups mainly for administration. There is no formal pastoral care program although some effort is given to team building and group work skills.

*Year 7's at the start of the year do a little bit of team building and group building and part of our outcomes that we work out at the start of the year or for the following year are to get them to work as well in a group to work well as a team to reduce certain bits of work and the year 10's do some other sort of*

*programmes up there but it's probably a little bit of hotch-potch at the moment and a little bit all over the place. Staff 2001*

The school has a number of ancillary staff whose roles relate to student welfare, including two Special Education Teachers and a number of casual Inclusion Support Assistants (ISAs). These staff provide support for those students who need assistance in working in the classroom, often because of a disability or learning difficulty.

Students also reported valuing the peer helper programme, which provided easily accessed and easily identified support for students who need it.

*S1: Most of the school like at recess and that's walking somewhere and it's not hard to find a peer helper because there's lists up and photos up and stuff or teachers and that. Student. 2001*

### **Behaviour management arrangements**

Prior to adoption of MindMatters, the school ethos did strongly emphasise student support and the school encouraged teachers and other staff to foster a personalised relationship with each student. The school placed an emphasis on providing a safe and stable environment for young people, which provides a variety of learning opportunities and different ways in which students can gain a sense of achievement.

The school discouraged bullying and some participants felt that marginalised students were not ostracised as Phoenix High to the degree they might be in other schools. The school encouraged flexibility and has a great deal of tolerance for types of behaviour that might not be considered acceptable within other settings. This placed some extra demands on staff (particularly those who are new to the school and who had experience teaching elsewhere) but many acknowledged that an authoritarian approach was counterproductive with several of these young people.

Overall, the school was described by staff, students and community members as being very accommodating, allowing a number of compromises in terms of behaviour and school programs, in the interests of promoting attendance and giving every student an opportunity to learn. The identification of students with behavioural and special needs was met proactively with early establishment of understandings about responsibilities and rules.

*It has almost allowed for ... an individual case management approach. Staff 2001*

An underlying understanding of the tensions between differing cultural models of recognising authority was expressed by one staff member in these terms.

*Some will have difficulty because they've just never had clear boundaries drawn for them and don't understand authority structures. Their background doesn't predispose them to that kind of thinking, to respect a person by virtue of their position. We don't have a lot of that in this school. Authority is very strongly dependent on relationships, and teachers who perhaps don't do enough of that will probably suffer in class. They don't necessarily understand these western institutions called schools. Staff 2001*

Staff also reported that mediation was a vital part of the way in which behaviour was managed in a framework that allowed for participation and skill development of behaviours to support the building of community in the school. Staff indicate that it was routine for staff to communicate to students that they need to:

*... come and let someone know when there's a problem. We can get the other party and sit round the table and you know put the facts on the table as to what's been going on, how it's been making them feel, and the other party. But they sort of come up with the rules of how they're going to live together in the school community type thing. And we start that right from the start so from the time in Year 10, they're just coming and saying that we want to have a mediation. It takes the younger kids a longer time to understand the principles (and procedures) of it, but they get there in the end. Staff 2001*

### **Other welfare support structures**

Prior to adopting the MindMatters program, the school had a range of effective partnerships with several external agencies (see below).

Further, students entering the school from feeder schools who were already identified as having specific needs, or intellectual or physical needs, arrived with background briefing notes to ensure smooth transition and planning for support. Of 100 students enrolling in Yr 7 in 2001, 32 students were identified in this way.

*Quite a number of those were essentially behavioural issues. Staff 2001*

Despite the apparent flexibility of Phoenix High and the structural elements of high support there were still a number of students who were at high risk of being excluded from the school. In order to assist them to keep connected to education options the school has established a transfer procedure that enables a transfer under the 'school umbrella' that prevents a drop-out or official disconnection from the school. It simply becomes a move to another educational opportunity that is better equipped to meet the student where they are.

*We know that they are often in trouble with the police as well, yet they've maintained a daily interest in coming and being involved in some kind of educational programme. If they can maintain that, there's hope. Staff 2001.*

### **Links to the community**

The school has well established relationships with a range of agencies that provide counselling and support services for students. Some of these services are paid for by the school, on a fee-for-service basis or by negotiating a blanket fee for the treatment of students. Examples of these services include:

- Private psychologists and counsellors in the town
- The local mental health team, within the government-funded health services
- A community youth centre where students who have dropped out or been excluded from school can access correspondence study and personal support
- An outreach centre run by an Aboriginal organisation, providing a range of health, dental and psychological services for indigenous people
- A service provided under the auspices of the Commonwealth to assist young people with the transition to work or college (they also offer education for student and teacher groups within local schools)
- fee-for-service organisation specialising in families with drugs and alcohol problems and students with behaviour problems Development of relationship with the support services and the broader community was evident.

One particularly innovative initiative described by staff was a magazine/newsletter in the local newspaper twice a year to inform the community of the undertakings and successes at the

school. Despite this, however, the newspaper was reported to portray the school quite negatively at other times.

### **Parent involvement**

The links with the broader community are underpinned by the evidently strong relationship with the parent body. The staff indicated a high value of parent engagement with their kids' education.

*I think Phoenix High does a great job of bringing families in to try to encourage parents to come and be a part of the education of their kids. And that's a good thing I reckon. Parents 2001*

Parents interviewed also indicated a high level of awareness and appreciation of the processes established to assist their sons and daughters into senior school and appropriate subject choices for their future goals or local employment, TAFE education or university options.

Staff and parents also noted a high level of effective communication with parents both for students at risk, students misbehaving or students showing consistency or success at school.

*Staff are actually encouraged by the senior staff to actually ring for good things. for good feedback as well as if there are problems of if there's something that needs to be sorted out. I know a lot of parents who have children elsewhere don't get that feedback and don't get problems dealt with - not 'ti;the end of the term when there's an 'E' on the report or something like that. I really value that (communication) as a parent. And I see it happening. It's not just one or two kids. Parent 2001*

Parents also indicated that it was routine for staff to contact them if they noted changes in student behaviour. It was noted that sometimes a phone call would unearth a crisis at home or a death in the family or other critical incident about which the school had not been advised but often explained student behavioural change.

Parents discussed some concern about the inflexibility of class allocation in managing personality clashes between students and staff, or between students. While some parents indicated that the situation provided a challenge to learn valuable life skills another asked:

*Can they cope at that age and are we putting unnecessary stress on them by not moving them? Parent 2001.*

### **Student views of the school**

Staff report that students attendance at school is an indication of connection to the school in a way that is even more significant in other settings. As noted above staff observed that the cultural assumptions of value attached to positions of authority in schools, and indeed to schools themselves, are not valid in the community in which Phoenix High is based.

*Kids will come to school, not because they see any intrinsic value in the work or see where it might be leading to, but because they , like being with you. I think very much here it's relationships with the kids that are going to give you that necessary coercive ability with them where appropriate, to get them to stay on track and do the right thing. Staff, 2001*

Another stated:

*I think some of them or a lot of them see it as a safe place to come. It's where they've got a lot of friends, they know there's adult support for them, and last but not least a place of learning. But for a lot of them it's a safe place to come .. (compared to being a home or out in the street).*

Yet another:

*There are plenty of kids who come from good, steady homes but there's a sizable proportion who come from unsteady homes, that the school is a constant in their life. I think for a number of kids it's a predictability about school which makes them feel comfortable and I don't think they have that a home. Staff, 2001*

Students interviewed in 2001 expressed a high esteem for their teachers and the procedures at their school.

*I reckon it's a pretty good school because there's heaps of people you can talk to here and not get into trouble if you tell them something. And they're not going to go dobbing or to the police or anything. They'll help you sort it out and see what you want to do, whereas other schools just dob and sort of things like that. Student 2001*

Students indicated that the school had a bad reputation for drugs which they attributed to drug dealing and use that went on nearby but generally not in the school. They also considered negative incidents were overplayed in the local media. Students were aware of the gap between their esteem of their school and the reputation their school had in the local community.

*Well most people think that it's a bad school because, like, they've got a bad reputation from the past but actually it's really good. Student 2001*

Students asserted that staff were effective in engaging them without coercing them.

*They give you a choice really . . .*

*My brother went to here, like, (teachers) got him out of a lot of trouble.*

*But all teachers here are like that, they want to make it fine for us and ...*

*They try and make it not too boring and that for students.*

*Students 2001*

Students also asserted that anti-bullying messages and strategies were in place in the school. They indicated that bullies, when identified, were "dealt with" but that not all bullying was reported because reporting would likely lead to more intimidation. Despite this observation students made sure that the interviewer knew that they felt safe attending their school.

They also indicated that the school made significant efforts to recognise successes with awards and mentions in the newsletters. Students identified the presence of a minority of students who might be not feeling so happy about themselves and identified parental break-up and being teased. They also noted the impact of drug use on students:

This school's characteristics at the beginning of the study

*Like they're really smart and then they just stop doing heir work and ... stop being smart, just not doing their work.*

Teachers were noted to be flexible and approachable:

*Most of them are really easygoing, like they'll agree if you'll say, ask to like change the topic to something else but still*

*Yeah, we get all sort of opinions in the classroom*

*And different levels and then you're allowed to work to your ability and stuff. They don't grade you on, like say if someone hands in a really good report and then everyone else is sort of lower than them, they don't grade to that person to your own standard sort of thing.*

### **Staff views of the school**

At first visit, some staff expressed quite differing views about the school's accommodating and flexible approaches. While many staff understood and supported this direction, certain classroom teachers expressed concern that the social difficulties encountered by young people were sometimes used as an excuse for truancy or difficult behaviour or for a relaxed approach to academic standards. They sometimes felt disempowered by the behaviour management system, saying that the school was too accommodating. They reported that the system did not put learning first and did not adequately encourage students to be accountable for the consequences of their actions.

Teachers thought that schools and staff role was changing in response to social change and that they were aware of taking on more and more responsibility for students' wellbeing.

*We have a problem where a lot of the parents feel it's the school's place to be doing the discipline. They (the parents) shouldn't be doing any discipline. And that's why you have them running a bit amuck until we can set them some levels of standard. But it's surprising the amount of people who don't out there take on the responsibility of their children. Staff 2001*

In general, staff expressed the view that they felt poorly equipped to do that and the hope that MindMatters might enable them to acquire and develop better tools to support both staff and students.

Staff indicated that there was a high level of collegial support among the staff:

*Working with the kids is tough, but what has really made a lasting impressions on them, they haven't found in other schools, is the enormous social interaction and collegial support that people feel here and I think that comes about as the result of the challenging nature of some of the students with whom we deal. Staff 2001*

Executive staff expressed a sense of awareness of staff concerns and anxieties but a mindfulness of the need to challenge and reform school practices that did not meet their students' needs and were likely to reinforce social inequality or lead to absenteeism, truancy or school drop out.

The commitment to establishing and maintaining a stable physically safe and emotionally safe environment for students was expressed many times:

*I mean stability in their lives is probably out the window. School I think is the most comfortable and stable environment in many of these kids' lives. And I guess it's the one place where they get to, I suppose, develop some of those social/emotional skills. Staff 2001*

*For some kids, this is the safest place they've been to and even when you're tearing your hair out wondering why they misbehave so much, they won't go away, they won't leave. They want to be here. Be here at 6 o'clock in the morning and leave at 5 o'clock in the evening or even later. Staff 2003*

The high level of change amongst the student population had a significant impact in the school:

*There's two categories. You get quite an itinerant population coming through. So there's the kids that have been around and been everywhere, like around Australia with their parents and then you've got the kids that have been born and bred (here). Staff 2001*

Some staff indicated that students from both populations considered school as an optional extra to fit in around the other priorities of their life. Some of these priorities could be absence to visit extended family at a distance from the town, or other cultural reasons for indigenous students. For non-indigenous students absence could be related to parental employment.

Some staff indicated that the opportunities for professional development and career advancement in the region were so limited as to affect staff moral and sense of engaging with further education or training – sensing that there was no professional or financial advantage in doing so.

Staff noted their impression of students' mental health being adversely affected by critical incidents, such as family breakdown and parental separation, and deaths in families. Where deaths were suicides and families rejected counselling for the student, staff expressed significant concern for the student's wellbeing.

One staff member noted that her experience in this town echoed that of teaching in another remote town where students could leave school and enter employment with relative ease. Some of those students failing in the school structure could, within a year of leaving be in mining jobs, in particular, where they could be earning \$100,000. The importance and relevance of school and the oft-assumed authority of teachers and the qualifications gained through education were openly critiqued and in some cases derided. As teachers commented, in this situation:

*The authoritative approach won't work.*

Some staff indicated that given the high level of transient student and teacher population in the school a formalised student/teacher pastoral arrangement could be an advantage.

### **Community views of the school**

A community member who worked in a number of schools in the town indicated that they sensed a lack of respect for teachers at this school that was noticeably lower than that expressed in other local schools.

Another noted that the relationships with health support services in the town were well managed by the school nurse and that referrals were appropriate and effectively managed.

Support agencies indicated that drug and alcohol issues were present in the school and that they were no better or worse than that evident in other schools in the region. They noted also that referrals for drug and alcohol problems among younger students were generally for anxiety about a family member's use and that among older students referrals were for problems with their own use. Parents indicated that in a town of 25,000 there were 75 liquor outlets and that alcohol was a big part of the entire culture of the town with much alcohol abuse being modelled daily amongst the parents and carers of the students at Phoenix High.

Community members indicated that Phoenix High was considered to be a school that did provide a wide range of options for students. Elements noted and applauded were, Duke of Edinburgh scheme, peer helper program, Inclusion Support Program and the decision to implement MindMatters. Some of these initiatives had drawn in new students from other local schools. However, despite the range of options offered at Phoenix High the prevailing attitude expressed by community members was:

*If your kid's a bit academic it's probably not a place to come. Community member 2001.*

Community members did note, however, that there had been since about 1999 a shift to more positive views of Phoenix High than had prevailed prior to that time. They attributed this largely to the flexibility of staff, the attention to individual difference and the choices in teachers' interactions with students to work as facilitators of learning rather than the more traditional teacher director role.

Community members also noted that the learning about indigenous culture was open to indigenous and non-indigenous kids. They saw this as building cohesion and understanding in their community.

This cohesion they saw as sabotaged by negative media representation in the local outlets particularly the local paper which they generally described as sensationalist and misrepresenting the general nature of the school. They saw this as exacerbating competition between students from local schools and disadvantaging their students in the local community.

### **Parent views of the school**

The parents interviewed were very supportive of the school.

*P1: I think from being a parent and having the interaction over the last couple of years I think the teachers here relate really well to the kids. There seems to be much more on level with them than the other schools. And I think it encourages kids to be individuals. That they sort of can explore their own sort of things that they want to do, there's a lot of options.*

*P2: Creativity*

*P3: Support*

*P1: I think that flexibility is really, really important. Because it's flexible in that it caters for lower learners and high achievers so...*

*P2: Nobody gets left behind. The kids at all different levels just sort of look after*

*P1: And to have the opportunity to achieve in all sorts of ways, academically and socially. I think it really does work that way. Everybody's really accepting of everybody's views and origins and everything.*

*Parents 2001*

There was an indication from parents that the SRC should be empowered to do more than act as a fundraising committee and take a more realistic and real role in leadership of the student body and in and participating in decision making in the community.

The large turnover of staff was seen as a significant negative at Phoenix High:

*My daughter's in Yr 9 and I think that has had a big effect on her this year. She's had five different teachers and it's terrible. . Parent 2001*

Parents also expressed concern at the capacity to attract well-trained staff with appropriate knowledge and skill in teaching particular subjects. They expressed appreciation of the range of VET courses and opportunity for engagement with subjects that kept students engaged with school and experiencing success in learning.

The contrast of views across the sample of parents interviewed was evident; from the parent who indicated that she felt there was a disappointingly low level of respect for staff to another parent who indicated he considered that commonsense and practical engagement of students should prevail even if it involved moving outside of guidelines and established boundaries and traditions.

On the whole, parents appeared to have the opportunity to engage with the school and their sons' and daughters' educations. The majority had positive opinion of what Phoenix High was providing for their kids, but remained hopeful of further change and improvement in the school and it's profile in the community.

## 2 How the evaluation was undertaken at this school?

Four school visits were made in October 2001, November 2002, November 2003 and November 2004. At these visits, the school arranged for various members of the school community to be interviewed, and these conversations were audio taped for later analysis. The following interviews took place:

Interviewees	Number interviewed			
	1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	3 <sup>rd</sup> visit	4 <sup>th</sup> visit
Principal	2	2	2	1
Senior teacher	2	2	2	4
Teacher or assistant teacher	6	12	12	1
Student	8	8	19	28
Counsellor, social worker etc	-	-	1	1
Parent	8	6	6	-
Community member	2	1	-	4

Over the two years of the evaluation, one telephone interview was conducted with the Assistant Principal who coordinate the evaluation and this was also taped for later analysis.

Student questionnaires were administered in April of 2002, June 2003, June 2004 and July 2005

At baseline, the following participation rates were achieved:

Grade 7	27%
Grade 8	64%
Grade 9	39%
Grade 10	21%

Results from first round of data collection are used as points against which results, after two-years of implementation of the program, can be compared.

When the evaluation was extended from two years to three, the evaluator was asked to attempt to engage teachers in a discussion about their classroom experiences of teaching any of the MindMatters lessons. This was done opportunistically by asking all interviewees whether they had taught any of the MindMatters lessons in recent weeks. If they had they were asked to briefly describe what they had taught and their opinion of the process and outcome of the lesson in question. None of the teachers who were interviewed at the fourth visit at Glastonbury had taught MindMatters lessons in recent times.



### 3 Why did this school decide to adopt MindMatters?

#### 3.1 Community context

The community in which Phoenix High is set is geographically isolated but is large enough to provide a large number of employment options for students aged 15 and over. The job range caters for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled persons. Staff indicated that it was not an unusual mind set for students to see Year 10 as the highest level of study required for them the complete prior to embarking on a long term working life. Staff noted the contrast in this respect with other schools and settings across the country, and they noted its impact on general attitudes to the purpose and status of schooling in the region amongst the local community and the students in their care.

One staff member noted that the isolation of the community had the effect of reinforcing traditional conservative views of the role of women

*Probably being in a very closed society, lack of self-esteem and lack of world knowledge is one thing that I've found - from a woman's perspective, I suppose, I think the girls haven't even hit the Germaine Greer era where it seems to be social structure where they're - not being against marriage or kids or anything - but still they see their role as the woman structured where you get married and have a baby and be the secondary partner. Man being head of the family very much so. And even trying to teach them - whether you show them videos or anything outside the world, that seems to be an unreal situation, they can't relate it back to this situation. Staff, 2001*

While acknowledging this impact on girls, another teacher thought that the cultural conservatism was actually even more significantly impacting on the boys in the town. Boys in this town, she argued, were immersed in models of the man being the head of the family and in addition to isolating them from other models of manhood it put considerable pressure on them to play out accepted roles.

#### 3.2 Student well being Issues

##### Mental Health problems

One of the most frequently stated reasons for implementing the MindMatters program was that many members of the school community still recalled the spate of suicidal behaviour some years before, in which two students died.

*I think it was around about 3 or 4 years ago, we had a spate of suicides and 2 of the students within the school actually committed suicide so it was in a period of time when there was about 10 or 12 suicides within the one year and most of those had been students that went through the school but 2 were actually students at the time, so it affected the staff, the students, the whole school community, so we could get a better understanding amongst the staff and students, I think it would create a more supportive area for the school to operate in. Staff 2001*

Staff also felt that students were exposed in the media to misinformation and negative attitudes about mental health problems, such as eating disorders. Staff indicated that students' actual understanding of mental health in general and these issues in particular was poor. They expressed some hope that the implementation of MindMatters would provide

impetus, skills and resources to assist the school in redressing this lack of understanding and knowledge.

Staff noted the ongoing impact of bullying and teasing, despite the school's concerted efforts to address it. They identified bullying as core mental health issue that needed a more strategic focus and response at Phoenix High.

Instability in parents' relationships and changes in environments and ongoing changes to the nature of the family structures was perceived as having a very negative impact on students' self-esteem, and well being:

*They've left (where they were) because their parents have broken up, and he's left with her girlfriend, or she's left with him and they've escaped and then they come here and then that relationship breaks up or they've met somebody else on the way, it's not a purposeful itinerant thing. Staff 2001*

Staff also noted that for some students where parents were unable to manage, students were taking on additional responsibilities and actually providing support to their parents. One community worker indicated that the sons and daughters of such parents are perhaps more needy than others and require the school to provide a level of flexibility to enable them to complete school with a strong sense of belonging and achievement. In the eyes of this community worker, poor experience of school was a key factor in the development of the parents' movement towards mental ill health.

### **Bullying and harassment**

At the first visit, bullying was frequently mentioned as one of the key issues that needed to be addressed at Phoenix High and many staff considered that the range of MindMatters bullying resources would be useful for the school.

Staff reported internal school findings from student surveys that indicated that:

*10 out of every 30 students (indicated that they) had experienced some sort of bullying or harassment within the school and its probably a lot high than that. And they looked at the different areas in the school that it was coming from and it seemed to be- I suppose in different places for different year levels, depending on where they were congregating. Staff 2001*

Staff indicated that the level of intimidation and bullying from some students was such that adult staff would be left intimidated. They expressed great concern for the non-bullying students of all ages in the school.

There were also reports of large numbers of Year 10 students gathering at a bus stop near the school and ganging up to intimidate younger students. Police presence to limit the damage was likely to increase social difficulties for the bullies caught in negative relationships with the local police. The commitment to attacking bullying at Phoenix High was seen as essential in changing both in-school and out-of-school behaviours.

A form of bullying identified was the overwhelming pressure to not be a 'stand out'. The tall poppy syndrome was mentioned by one staff member who asserted that:

*They all like it to be sort of fairly even and if one tall poppy's there, they quite often want to knock them down. But I don't know if it's a sort of cultural thing - it's a big 'shame job'. Staff 2001*

One of the challenges teachers faced was to find ways to be able to recognise students' successes in ways that didn't compromise their relationships with their peers. The culture of 'equality' reinforced by students' demands for sameness was perceived as limiting both students and teachers. Staff expressed a desire to establish a community in which dreams and aspirations could be aired freely. They also expressed a desire that students develop competencies in recognizing each other's successes.

*Like, how do you get them to say: "Good on you, you're doing well." Give them a pat on the back, you know, how do you get them to do that? Staff 2001*

While some teachers felt that bullying was no worse at this school than at others in that town they were still keen to address this issue.

Students indicated that in some ways they felt the school was a relatively safe place. For example they were not worried about their property being stolen. They asserted that you could leave a bag unattended and return to it later to get lunch or books from it and that property was safe.

### **Drugs and alcohol**

Students indicated to staff that boredom was one of their main motivations for alcohol and drug use. The staff and students concurred that alcohol and marijuana were the major drugs of concern. Tobacco was indicated as being widely used but was not identified as a problem (by students or parents) for which they would seek counselling or assistance to quit.

MindMatters was seen as enabling a way of addressing the underlying boredom of students by helping them to be more aware of how to build self-esteem and resist peer pressure.

There were reports of generally isolated incidents of students affected by marijuana, solvent abuse or glue sniffing during the school day. The behaviours they displayed that brought their problems to the attention of staff were described:

*By the afternoon, (these kids) have gone into their psychotic rages and are screaming up and down the hall and these are just 12 years old kids. And then again those kids aren't actually too much of a problem at school because they tend to have dropped out before Year 8. You see them around town, but they're not at school anymore. Parent 2001*

The staff reporting these incidents indicated that the culture of the town was one where drug issues were relatively widely experienced in the community. They also noted that the school culture opposing drug and alcohol use was for many students in complete contrast with their regular lived experience. This tempered expectations of just how much the adoption of MindMatters might achieve in this domain at Phoenix High.

### **Behavioural problems**

Difficult behaviours were reportedly very common and the school had developed a capacity to transfer very badly behaved students into a more flexible school structure annexed to the school. This was a way of both acknowledging that some behaviours were unacceptable at Phoenix High yet still maintaining some education options for the offending students. The arrangement avoided the shame of exclusion from school for students who might be hitting all kinds of boundaries with law enforcement in the broader community. In this way the school was demonstrating its commitment to continue to offer support to marginalised students and to continue to keep some positive options open to them.

Staff noted more disturbances amongst the grades 7 to 9 students and fewer among the Year 10 cohort who they describe as having, by that time, formed more secure and respectful relationships.

One staff member noted that very bad behaviour was limited to a relatively small group of students.

*We've got 400 children here, and I reckon at the most we wouldn't see more than 30 to 40 at the absolute most on a regular basis. So 90% of the kids are essentially towing the line, within whatever their limits are and teachers all have limits too. What surprised me more than anything (when I first came here) is really how good the kids were compared with what I had anticipated based on what I'd heard.*

*Staff  
2001*

At the first visit, differing views were expressed by teachers about the approach that the school was taking in its tolerance and management of what is seen as non-conforming behaviour. Some teachers clearly felt that the school was too flexible.

*I think you would have various pockets of staff. Some staff would say the school's not strong enough, we need to have bottom lines on everything, and we don't have bottom lines, it's all too wishy-washy. And you'll hear that, and I mean you should talk to some people who would have those views within the school and I'm not saying I would necessarily share them in some issues. Staff, 2001*

Others indicated that they felt that the school did not back them up when they attempted to impose some level of necessary conformity. The leaders in the school, however, felt that occasionally, the imposition of unnecessary conformity can be a form of bullying by teachers.

*We have been too accommodating of teachers who did not see it as their responsibility to look holistically at their students, who insisted on meaningless conformity, eg. no baseball caps in class, margins drawn in workbooks of width exactly 2.5 cm, as a method of bullying kids into submitting to the absolute, and arbitrarily-administered authority of the teacher. Most students felt stifled in these environments: some accordingly bucked up against the teacher and a behaviour issue was created; others just suffered in silence. Management was then brought in to "sort out the student" and the student pleaded with management "to sort out the teacher." Our practice was to bring both parties together to try to resolve the issue. Staff, 2003 (reflecting on 2001)*

Yet another view from one staff member indicated that the high staff turnover may have some association with particularly poor behaviour in year groups that are most affected by changes in their teachers.

*You can see it in the difference in the classroom. When I first came here, one class..., if the class has got a consistent teacher throughout the year, they're a lot better than a class that has had.... We had one class .... this is the year 8 class I had, but in year 7 they had five teachers and it took them 2 to 3 terms before they even stopped saying to me, like 'you don't care, you're not going to come back again'. So I think having the same teacher throughout the year. Staff, 2001*

### **Truancy, attendance**

Staff indicated that truancy was an ongoing problem, and that some year groups had a particularly poor profile.

The high truancy has been a long-standing problem explained in this way by one staff member:

*It's an attitude that's backed up through the years, it's been baked up through the years because parents did it and they didn't see anything wrong with it. If I ring somebody up and say your son was just seen down at the mall (their response often is) . . . "Oh damn. We've got to go get him again. Look don't worry about it, I'll get him to school tomorrow." That's the attitude we have within the community.*

*Staff 2002*

Another teacher felt that the high level of non-attendance by some Indigenous students, the student body had accepted a culture of non-attendance being an acceptable phenomenon.

*So dealing with kids from families who are just constantly moving through so, they have a sort of short life (at the school), by the Indigenous kids who, for cultural reasons, are away from the school for a few days, or sometimes up to a month or so at a time. The non-indigenous kids who then see that as their right, therefore, then to go off whenever they feel like it. Staff, 2001*

### **Gender specific needs**

Peer pressure to conform to standards or fads of dress was noted as a particular pressure on the girls at Phoenix High. Staff also noted the ongoing harassment of a young gay male at the school. He was seen to be quite exceptional at the school.

Staff also indicated that the 'traditional' performance of gender roles in the community and in the students lived experience was limiting for both young males and females. Boys were singled for particular concern regarding pressure to fulfil roles as main income earners and "the man being head of the family" in the near future.

### **Indigenous Specific Needs**

In Phoenix High, staff noted the additional pressures on indigenous kids who might experience the death of a relative. While for non-indigenous kids the death of a relative could still be a significant event, the frequency of such deaths in the Koori community and the attendant expectations of the Koori community to respond to this in particular ways, that might in fact compromise the student's school performance or even capacity to attend, was identified as a pressure on these young people who are trying to straddle two cultures and balance competing demands.

## **3.3 Consistency with school direction, ethos**

In the minds of key decision makers in the school, MindMatters was perceived as being consistent with the expressed direction in which the school was heading. The discourse of staff, particularly staff in leadership roles indicated a high level of appreciation of the role of

school in this community in providing a safe and nurturing place for whole study body, but particularly for those who may be less supported in their home or in the broader community. It was acknowledged that the school had already implemented a comprehensive range of projects and mechanisms to support and retain students and to enable their participation and success in schooling and in building self-image.

Nevertheless, there were considerable hopes for what the MindMatters framework could deliver by enabling a fusion and collective vision for the multiple initiatives in place at Phoenix High.

*I think we've got projects here that are the end result. Like if one of the kids are bullied and harassed we've got the answer to that end but we haven't got the intervention to stop them from doing it. And that's what I like about MindMatters. It's actually putting the fence around the top of the cliff rather than the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. You know we seem to have what's happened at the end when those kids (fail). . . and I think if you can actually stop kids from even getting into that stage where they are inherent bullying or inherently depressed or whatever, go for it! Staff 2001*

The school's Student Service Committee, in particular, saw in MindMatters an articulation of their own commitment to student wellbeing.

### **3.4 Perceived need to emphasise student well being**

Teachers reported that schools and staff appeared to be taking on more and more responsibility for students' wellbeing, because of the impact of social change on families. In general they expressed a concern that they were poorly equipped to do that and thought that MindMatters held for them a vehicle and opportunity to develop a range of skills and strategies to support both staff and students.

*I guess, as teachers we're being asked to take on more and more responsibility for that sort of care of kids that don't get this at home. So I just think we don't feel very well equipped at times to be able to do that so we need to do something about equipping ourselves to be more able to do it. To have the resources. Staff, 2001*

In general, several of those interviewed felt it was positive that the school was implementing the MindMatters program as part of their existing focus on student wellbeing. They felt this was a necessary directional change for the education sector. Many did not necessarily think that MindMatters would be the answer to all these issues, but did feel that it provided a comprehensive approach and would sponsor interest in doing things across the whole school.

Staff reported local concern in response to youth suicide in the general community and two suicides within the student body in the late 1990's that had impacted enormously on the community. The impact was felt both in a communal experience of loss and grief and a heightened awareness of a need for greater understanding in the whole community of the nature of mental illness and skills for noticing and responding to signs of poor mental health.

The hope expressed was:

*We could get a better understanding amongst the staff and students. I think it would create a more supportive area for the school to operate in. Staff 2001*

### 3.5 Impact of student well being on academic outcomes

One staff member reported that interaction with students was often compromised by an intrinsic mistrust of adults that was impacting on student capacity to own their education and to take the risks necessary to engage in learning and the other risk of trusting teachers.

*For some of our kids there is an intrinsic hostility toward, I think, toward all adults that comes from their experience at home which gets translated to the people who represent the adult world, which is the teacher. And until you can fully address those kids, of their social issues, the delivery of an academic programme is always going to be difficult. You know, you start to get the social side of it right, the academic side will flow much easier. Staff, 2001*

This staff member indicated that in addition to the promise of what MindMatters had to offer, the school needed to expand even further the range of opportunities that students had to work cooperatively with adults (for example towards productions of art, drama, music and other group tasks) that enabled the building of genuine esteem, modelling of good communication styles, and creation of objects or moments of performance that could be acknowledged by the broader community.

### 3.6 Organisational concerns

#### Staff mental health

The isolation of the school was seen as having a major impact on staff morale and a cause of workplace pressure. Staff felt, for example, that they were frequently called upon to teach out of the subject areas in which they had been trained.

Students were frank in their assessment that some of the teachers could not exercise sufficient control of the classroom to enable learning. This exchange between students indicates the considerable level of stress that some teachers experience and their subsequent poor methods of coping.

*S1: Some teachers can't handle the students.*

*S2: There's a lot of teachers that can't handle them*

*S1: There's teachers that just sit down and ignore all the kids, and then there's some teachers that take it too far.*

*S2: Like scream, swear, slam things down on the table.*

The leadership team saw MindMatters as providing a support for building the relationships between students and teachers that would reduce the stress that they feel.

#### Staff morale

Staff indicated a range of views about morale. One of the pressing issues that arose during interviews was a generalised concern for students' wellbeing and an increasing anxiety about the expanding range of skills and competencies teachers seem to need to be able to fill in the

expanding need range of the students coming before them. One staff member suggested an opportunity for staff to express this generalised concern would result in the following type of discourse:

*'Why us! Why do we have to do this? Why don't parents do it anymore,' you know? And I think we need to hear that and say, 'Okay we're the worriers, we're the soldiers, we're the ones that are going to have to take this up.' Staff 2001*

He also expressed concern that if this task it to fall to teachers the vital issue of adequate resourcing was another problem that would arise.

As previously mentioned, staff turnover at the school was described as high. The proximity of staff to one another outside school hours was described as facilitating a high level of staff contact and informal support networks. The school was considered welcoming, social and accommodating. This was not adequate, however, to counteract the considerable challenge of the classroom experience at school for many of the staff who moved on to other places.

### **3.7 Characteristics of MindMatters itself**

Due to the fact that the school's ethos was already firmly focussed on student support, and accommodating the individual needs of students, and to the extensive network of community partnerships that were in place, the primary value of the MindMatters resources for this school was as another (complementary) tool to enable staff to move towards building resilience and wellbeing rather than constantly responding to the absence of it.

### **3.8 Early expectations of impact of MindMatters**

One staff member indicated that MindMatters could be delivered on two levels. One where the resources were used, the lessons taught and the programme could be considered officially implemented. The other level he indicated, involved teachers engaging and coming to terms with a level of perception about their role and relationship with students that was much more demanding:

*You know, I can look at the MindMatters as say, Yeah if I was a teacher, this looks straight forward, just to kind of give a lesson, but why am I doing this? And if I'm going to do it effectively and do it with some love of the kids that I'm dealing with to promote their mental and social and moral wellbeing, then I need to see myself in that bigger picture. Staff 2001*

Expectations therefore, were largely dependent on which model of adoption of the initiative most staff members would undertake.

The first issue that staff indicated they hoped would be addressed by the implementation of MindMatters was the bullying and harassment issue. Other staff also indicated an appreciation of the material on grief and loss in the MindMatters kit.

The main hope was to bring some collective vision to what staff could enable in their students:

*. . . it's probably a little bit of hotch potch at the moment and a little bit all over the place, so something like this (MindMatters), I would say would get everybody on track, going for the same sort of goals and doing the same sort of thing so as kids pass through the years from 7-1- they can build on what they've*

*found out in the previous years and stuff like that. I think also with our clients that there is a lot of social problems out there that the kids have to deal with everyday and sort of reacting to what our clients' needs are and that's in some sort of MindMatters programme or mental health strategy. Staff 2001*

### **3.9 Early expectations of problems**

As in many of the schools, staff at Phoenix High expected that there would be concerns amongst some staff about the nature of the material they would be engaging with in the classroom, and the need for a positive relationship between teachers and students to be already existent before MindMatters could be effectively utilised.

*The big issue is that people needed to feel comfortable ... people are going to want to have a greater sense of confidence in being able to do that and that's what we need to look at, how we address those issues. Staff 2001*

*I think you'd need to have a very positive relationship with the kids, especially with our kids to teach them or to actually get something going and connecting with them as well. Staff 2001*

*I think teachers have to be able to be confident and comfortable about their own delivery of something like this and secure within themselves if they're going to be able to engender that sense of wellbeing in children. Staff 2001*

Staff turnover was expected to provide further challenge to the adoption and implementation of MindMatters. Given the isolation of the community and limitations on professional development this was of considerable concern.

The scepticism of staff who had seen other programmes implemented which did not achieve their initial expectations, was seen as a potential problem in engaging them in a wholehearted commitment to the MindMatters initiative.



## **4 What did this school do to introduce MindMatters into the school?**

### **4.1 How MindMatters was identified**

Initially, executive staff became informed of the program through a statewide professional development day late in 2000. The school had also been aware of MindMatters during the pilot phase of its development, due to the participation of the then principal in a national principals' association.

### **4.2 Process of deciding to use MindMatters**

The staff were informed about MindMatters gradually during 2001. Three staff members attended professional development and, through their participation in the student services group, the decision was made to take up the program by asking the various teams of teachers to meet and decide how to use the curriculum resources.

Another staff member indicated that staff meetings in 2001 were used to inform and gradually move towards consensus in adoption, although it was accepted that some staff would embrace the programme more than others.

*I don't think there'd be anybody who would say, I don't want to do it because they would realise the inherent value actually in it. But I think they might be a bit wary of extra work in the teaching . . . I don't think there would be a teacher in the school that would say I don't think this is going to do any good for the kids, why bother. . . . Staff 2001*

Staff indicated that the invitation to be a part of the evaluation, which was extended in August of 2001, provided a moment at which the planning group determined to proceed.

*Well are we really (ready)? I mean we've done a fair bit of the preparatory work now, all that early stuff, surveys etc. Do we go ahead with it? Do we make a wholesale commitment to doing it . . . The answer was yes, we will do that and that was supported by the principal. Staff, 2001*

### **4.3 Attendance at professional development**

Principle responsibility for planning the school's adoption of MindMatters was taken on by the school's Student Services Team, three members of which had attended a two-day Professional Development workshop in 2000, which was organised by the MindMatters National Office. In 2001, one of these staff members had resigned, leaving just two members of the team with relevant training.

Upon returning from the initial training, staff members did not think they could train others in all aspects of the program but did run a brief in-service session at a staff meeting. In 2003, the MindMatters state-based officer ran brief training for small teams of teachers.

### **4.4 How school was informed or involved**

There appears to have been a gradual dissemination of information about MindMatters to the whole of the school staff over the period 2000-2001 at Phoenix High.

Staff who were trained in 2000 implemented some elements as a trial in 2000-2001 and this experience provided an opportunity for staff to hear about the initiative and for those implementing it to become more familiar with it and to begin to make initial conclusions about how MindMatters could work effectively at the school. During this year, staff were also aware that there was a review of the critical incident policy and that surveys were under way.

The executive staff were determined to take the implementation slowly and to provide time and opportunity for all staff to develop familiarity with the MindMatters framework and underpinning concepts.

*We were going to take it one step at a time and not rush into it . . . and start implementing things slowly. I think the first thing was having that critical incident programme put together and then discussing it. And we did the surveys out of the book, having that all correlated and sending it to the staff again.  
Staff 2001*

This process was followed by a presentation to the whole staff at a staff meeting followed by a period of consultation and feedback with the small leadership team that was forming. The material selected for general distribution to staff was the MindMatters material on bullying and harassment and the material on games:

*So that they could see what was being recommended out of the package there.  
Staff 2001*

*I think the way we tend to do things here, everything is fairly highly negotiated. And it's always difficult because you have some people leave at the end of the year and there's new staff coming in and have no idea what they're coming in to.  
Staff 2001*

#### **4.5 Formation of a core group or other planning group**

*The core planning group formed around those who had initially attended MindMatters training and the Assistant Principal who had main responsibility for behaviour management and student welfare. .*

With executive staff and other interested staff members the audits and planning moved forward during 2000-2001. Planning was guided by the experiences of the limited trialling of elements of the programme in that period.

#### **4.6 Process of planning**

Early in 2001, the core team began its gradual implementation process by developing a critical incident plan, based on guidelines in the MindMatters material and examples of incident plans they had seen from other schools. As indicated above, the occurrence of a number of suicides among the extended school community had heightened the need for this type of policy and MindMatters seems to have facilitated this early action.

Following this, the school's [planning group moved on to utilise the recommended audits for parents and teachers from which they began to develop an outline of where MindMatters material might fit into the school curriculum, within different grades. They also audited the students with the support of a local Mental Health worker who collated and reported the data back to the school at a staff meeting.

The main information gleaned from these audits, was that bullying was a much more significant issue than staff had seen or acknowledged and that there were a range of types and patterns of bullying that emerged for each year cohort, and that there were groups who particularly effected within those year cohorts. This information was vital to the next phases of planning and final implementation.

#### 4.7 Early plans for change

Plans for change were driven by a philosophy that was articulated in terms of generating a safe learning community:

*We can talk about the school community, (but) we have to actually create it or create opportunities where kids can feel as though they are part of a special community at this time of their life. Staff 2001*

With this goal in mind staff identified that effective change and implementation of MindMatters would require a mindfulness of the prevailing timetable structures based on three broad divisions within the school (Humanities, Science/Maths, and Options) and the limitations on staffing that the structure would necessarily imprint on MindMatters. Staff indicated in 2001 some consideration of other “more significant changes” to classroom, structural and timetable structures were being seriously considered. They indicated that the effective adoption of MindMatters would be an important part of those overall considerations.

Other plans which were being considered were seeking out opportunities to make the staff more aware of the support agencies with which the school had long established and successful partnerships. There was some acknowledgement that students were missing out on some support structures simply because staff were not well enough informed to guide students towards support. Also plans to broaden the possible range of learning experiences to include more excursions and out of school learning and community building opportunities were mooted.

Staff indicated that planning done to date would ensure that there was no duplication of material from MindMatters with allocation of different elements of the programme to different year levels. The response to the implementation was informing further planning and implementation as best practice models arose in the Phoenix High context.

#### 4.8 Views of PD

Staff indicated that the professional development training that they had attended was too short. While they expressed a confidence that they had developed a greater knowledge of the elements of the kit, staff interviewed indicated that any expectation that they could effectively take on the training of their teaching colleagues was misguided.

*In terms of letting us know what was going on and in terms of being able to go and teach it yourself, that was fine but in no way could you be expected, I don't think, to go back to your school and say, 'Right, this is what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it.' Staff 2001.*

It appeared from further comments that despite such reservations staff did actually take on a training role and did support their colleagues in implementation without any additional further external professional development support.

These staff at later visits made comments that indicated they had had a positive experience of the professional development provided by MindMatters, and that they were energised and enthused by the experience. They noted that with or without the professional development

What did this school do to introduce MindMatters into the school?

training, the materials in the MindMatters kit were themselves “*Very self-explanatory and user friendly.*” (Staff 2003)

The reality of limited training opportunities was in part explained by executive staff who reported that in this state there were limited funding resources and a recently changed model of professional development that was proving quite limiting and that Phoenix High was:

*Still learning about how to do that I think, or adapting to the model. Staff 2001*

#### **4.9 Review processes**

Review processes of implementation did not appear formalised but staff engaged in the trial implementation were clearly critiquing their experiences and using that knowledge to inform further implementation and adaptation of MindMatters.

## 5 What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

It needs to be said from the outset that many changes were made at Phoenix High during the first two years of the evaluation that were designed to provide a greater level of support for students. Both the principal and the deputy principal were in accord with the need to reorient the school towards putting the wellbeing of the students higher up the agenda. Some in the school, including the deputy, saw MindMatters as being instrumental in assisting the change process to occur. For them, MindMatters became a symbolic name for the reorientation of the school towards wellbeing. For others, MindMatters was seen as a curriculum resource and that it was just one of the initiatives that the school adopted. Even if the latter view is the most accurate picture, MindMatters was nevertheless attributed with having been a valuable component in the overall change process.

In this section, all changes that relate to providing greater support or to the wellbeing of students are listed. It may be the case that some of these changes would have emerged even if MindMatters had not been adopted. At least in the view of some of the school leaders MindMatters either assisted the changes to happen, or provided a corroborating reason why the changes should occur.

### 5.1 Changes in pastoral groups

The main change implemented in this area was a shift to an emphasis on integrated pastoral care. At the commencement of this study, a single period was designated as a homeroom period and home room teachers were designated a specific "pastoral care" role for these students in their home room. At the first visit, homeroom teachers in each grade were considering how MindMatters could be utilised during this period.

School leaders, having found a strong resonance with the MindMatters philosophy, were encouraging all staff to re-envision their pastoral care role. This broadening of pastoral care was an expectation that teachers should extend a high level of concern and care for wellbeing to every contact that they had with students.

*I think the emphasis was, and I've kind of said I think the staff senses too, - it's not about a curriculum resource. And I looked at the first survey that we gave teachers. MindMatters is a curriculum resource, you know, (but) every time we interact with a child its MindMatters you know?. It's everything that we do with kids and so we're trying to say, 'Look there is a resource that you can use, you use it as you need to give expression to with the issues that kids face.' But there's a lot of other stuff that people are doing which is also part of MindMatters in that holistic sense. Staff 2003*

By 2003 staff indicated that in 2004 there was to be a pastoral care time allocation in which in addition to general pastoral responsibility for all students, staff were allocated time to spend with a small group of students in their year group with the intention of working on team building, cohesion, belonging and confidence across a range of learning opportunities of which MindMatters would be a part.

There was no indication of any formalising of the pastoral time curriculum. Rather it was time that could be allocated flexibly but meaningfully to issues of the day that may impact on the social or emotional wellbeing of the students. There was evidence that this time was used differently by different teams within the school, with teachers having quite a high level of autonomy in how they structure the pastoral care time.

*There are teams now - like year 10 had their formal Pastoral Care programme right from the beginning of the year on a Wednesday, periods 3 and 4. They*

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

*break into Pastoral Care groups and teachers take about 15 kids or something like that. I think they allow the kids to self select as well. And they used MindMatters material sometimes for that as well as the general 'How're you going and where are you up to with your work'. Team B (in the Middle School) certainly has certainly has - they actually call it 'Pastoral Care'. (the principal) said, whenever in the past they had organised these sessions called 'Pastoral Care', kids never took them seriously or they never work but kids actually say now, 'What have you got now?' 'I've got PC now', kids will say. So Team B certainly has...*

*Team A haven't - they said they probably haven't covered MindMatters, used MindMatters materials as such but their team has a sports focus so every morning for 45 minutes kids go out and they engage in some kind of sporting activity in 2 groups, which has, you know, a lot of essential learning and MindMatters issues being covered and they've also organised a couple of camps - 2 or 3 day camps up at Hamilton, and so I think they were achieving similar outcomes in those ways. Staff, 2003*

## 5.2 Changes in policies

The introduction of a new Critical Incident Plan early in the adoption phase is mentioned above. This initiative seems to have been an initial concrete outcome of the school's adoption of MindMatters. This early success is influenced by the impact on the school of a number of suicides in the extended school community.

Further, at the end of 2002, the school chose to become a pilot school for a program called Real Justice. The underlying principle of the program was reported as restorative justice, bringing together the victim and the offender after an unjust act, to share their stories and discuss a resolution. This, it was argued, was to assist offenders to appreciate the consequences of their actions and their impact upon other people. The school felt that the principles of Real Justice were consistent with the principles they applied to conflict resolution and behaviour management and would help teachers to more comprehensively adopt these approaches.

The framework of MindMatters may have enabled the critiquing of, and subsequent adoption of, further programs to ensure they met with the guidelines of creating wellbeing in the community. In addition staff indicated that change in policy could then be explained, justified and shown to be integrated into the every practice and learning opportunities for the students:

*When I'm talking to new staff I can say, "We're into restorative justice or a real justice approach to behavioural management or the correction of (misbehaviour) and that ties in with the MindMatters of course. Staff 2002*

This integration is further demonstrated in the following extract which indicates the adoption of MindMatters as a "philosophy" as much as a program.

*And with the students with this Restorative Justice that we had, a lot of it was from harassment issues. So myself and the harassment officer put together the harassment programme, which supports the MindMatters philosophy and we've delivered it to every class from year 7 right through. That was one of our aims this year. And we'll repeat it again, because a lot of kids hear some stuff but not all of it and they were quite quick to pick up different things, and trying*

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

*to instil into them that you're not pimping on your friends and you know, that you need to come and let somebody know. Staff, 2003*

A key development that emerged in 2001 and reached its full implementation in 2002/ 2004 was a change in the way the school approached the issue of managing students behaviour, away from a system of rewards and punishments towards one of engaging students' interest more closely in their education.

*I've been personally moving away from this term. I hate the term. I think this whole concept of trying to manage behaviour or setting up coercive systems where we trick kids into behaving well, whether it worked in any kind of way, I think it's just an antiquated notion. I think we've moved in terms of our philosophical discussions, away from that to engagement; engaging kids out of which a lot of behaviour issues that arose disappear as these kids actually find meaning and purpose for being at school. And that's been the driving principle for the changes that have taken place, I think, as imperfect as they still are. But I think we're heading in the right direction. That's been the driving principle, that's been responsible for those changes. So working differently with kids; setting up ways of organising those; enabling kids to be more self-directed in their learning or to engage in things that they do find meaning and relevancy in. And where you achieve that, then want to just muck up or to be rude or to be struggling to break out of a structure that doesn't meet your needs anymore is largely removed. Staff 2003*

### **5.3 Changes in structures and processes**

The most significant areas of change in this school during the study period were the reorganisation of the school into sub-schools and the introduction of more flexible teaching arrangements within these sub-schools.

Grade 7 was designated as the "foundations school" and an emphasis placed on bridging the transition from primary school to middle school. Grades 8 and 9 were designated the "middle school". Grade 10 became labelled, the "senior school".

#### **Introduction of more flexible teaching arrangements**

Changes in teaching arrangements were made gradually from 2002 onwards.

In late 2002, the traditional timetable and model of teaching within Grade 10 was changed to a model in which the timetable was made more flexible to accommodate students' needs and interests. In this new model, teachers and assistant teachers operate as a team. Formal teaching was undertaken in shorter periods and to smaller groups. When not participating in formal lessons, students worked together in a "study hall" arrangement. Because of its flexibility, students were more able to participate in vocational options and some chose to undertake Year 11 work in the nearby college.

Although the teachers were teaching to smaller groups, the model required teachers to present their (shorter) lessons on more than one occasion so that all students could be given the opportunity to attend more flexibly and still access direct guided instruction. When not presenting formal lessons, teachers as team members supervised the students who were in the "study hall". Teachers reported that these arrangements allowed an increasing familiarity with students' particular capacities and needs.

As the grade 10 model was gradually refined in the first half of 2003, in the second half of 2003, the Middle school was similarly reorganised with three teams of six staff (teachers and

assistants) working each with approximately sixty students in a similar model to the senior school although not incorporating the same external options.

Within the foundation school, students were divided into two groups and each group was taught by a team comprising two teachers and an assistant.

#### **Changes in responsibility for problem resolution**

Further procedural change was reported in 2002 that required staff, when facing a difficulty of any type with a student to firstly consult student records, then if necessary liaise with a senior teacher in their area, then an advisor and then finally the deputy principal. This change in procedure was underpinned by a philosophical stance that asked teachers to 'take the initiatives in the first instance' to get to know the particular issues or difficulties confronting their smaller group of students. Teachers would develop (with support if they required it) and implement a response to and with the student involved, rather than handing the 'problem' onto another staff member to 'fix' as had been the earlier practice.

School executives and leaders saw these changes as being essentially underpinned by the MindMatters framework.

Staff and students indicated that they broadly supported these changes and felt that they had benefited in a number of ways.

### **5.4 Changes in school environment**

In 2002, staff reported that students expressed a greater sense of overall safety as a result of the allocation of a police officer within the school. The police interviewed in 2002 indicated that they spent about 2 to 3 hours per day at the school. Police indicated that their primary role was to build positive relationships with the students, to be proactive in preventing fear and crime in the broader community by promoting relationships with students so that "we're not the baddies".

*I mean we're there if they have a problem but they've also got to realise that they overstep that mark well then I carry out the duties as required. Staff, 2002*

Staff indicated that the change to students sense of safety was not a change to safety at school, which both staff and students indicated, during the 2001, was already high. Rather it was that students having access to police at school allowed them to get to know the police and to inform them about issues affecting them outside of school hours.

One police member reported that an incident of assault on a bus and issue of intimidation in the general community were able to be better managed as a result of their placement in the school and increased visibility. Police asserted that they also considered that, for some students, Phoenix High was the only place of stability and safety in their lives.

### **5.5 Changes in timetable**

In 2003, and subsequently, the entire structure of the timetable was adapted as indicated above. The change was driven by awareness that the traditional timetable, despite the presence of a teacher and support staff member in most classes was creating a highly stressful environment for both students and teachers.

The new model of presenting core content to multiple smaller groups of students meant that face to face teaching time was seen as being more effective. The time spent in the study hall,

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

allowed teachers to provide less formal support to individuals or small groups and also enabled a greater degree of peer mentoring among students and among staff.

The shift from a focus on timetabling to more flexible learning arrangements is reflected in the following comment that relates the change to a commitment to a more relational way of dealing with students.

*The ultimate thing is do they get the work done. The challenge always is to ensure that the intellectual quality of what they're being asked to do is there, but you've got such a wide range of kids that you have to be able to allow them achieve success at their various levels and I think this way of organising allows that in the best way that I've seen here. And you know I think it fits in more with the way we need to come together as human beings. Staff 2003.*

A possible benefit anticipated was that new staff could be more fully supported and inducted, an important issue at Phoenix High with such a high staff turnover.

## 5.6 Changes in support services

In 2002 there was an indication by staff and community members of the desire to establish a position of a school counsellor. In 2003, a person had been contracted into this role but had only just commenced work at the time of the third evaluation visit to the school. There were debates about what the role of the person might be and whether the person employed had the training to fulfil certain expectations.

*Can I call it a student advisor? I'm cautious because of the lack of training that the person has at this stage. It was a decision that was first muted at the sub-school level and some of the teachers said we do need a counsellor. Historically we had a counsellor about 4 or 5 years ago and that person operated as 0.5 careers and 0.5 student advisor giving advice to kids about various issues and very much the assistant principal the implementation of the behaviour management policy. Staff said that they would like something like that again and instead of having any teaching load they'd like that person taken off line to be a counsellor for the students. Now I think what they're getting at is somebody to support the Assistant Principal and supporting behaviour issues in class. I'm cautious about the term counsellor because I don't believe a teacher taken off line has the training to be a counsellor, so I'm using the term student advisor. Staff, 2003*

As one community member noted that person would form a part of the support for teachers implementing MindMatters and indicate a practical support for staff as well as students in encountering and dealing with issues that were likely to arise during the implementation of the programme.

*There's lots of different programmes around but they've all got the same underlying philosophy, you know, nurture your staff. Community Member 2003*

In 2003, it was reported that a Career and Advisory Transition Team (CATT) was to be established, the focus of which was to support transition from Yr 10 to Yr 11 and continue students from Yr 11 to 12.

*And it allows tailored programmes for students. It allows them to go and do activities or work experience that they would come in and do their English and*

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

*Maths and they're being placed somewhere to try and find (a job). They're never going to be the person that goes off to uni or something. But to keep them so that they can actually get a good job. Some are doing Maths and English in school and then doing work placements during school time in the week. Staff, 2003*

Again, this change is seen as connected to, if not an essential outcome of the school's adoption of MindMatters.

*I mean it all sort of fits in with the same sort of model as MindMatters but given that they've got lots of balls to juggle in terms of being at school and managing home life and the issues that might come up for them, you know, working part-time because lots of kids in town work, it's a fabulous town for kids to get part-time work.. (Community member 2003)*

Part of the support offered was relaxation classes and yoga for both students and staff. MindMatters was reported as one of the tools used by the therapists employed to support and frame the CATT implementation.

*I think things like MindMatters can help to just alleviate (anxiety), teach them some techniques that when you start to get anxious, and being anxious is not a bad thing. But how do you manage it, how do you make it easy on yourself, you know do some breathing and ... this is where I am introducing yoga and goal setting and that sort of stuff. So between the three of us I reckon we've got some reasonable skills that the schools can sort of utilise and we all promote the MindMatters programme. (Community member 2003)*

## 5.7 Changes in curriculum

### Changes in pastoral curriculum

At the first visit, the school had only recently decided to adopt the program and sent representatives to the professional development. They had developed an outline of how materials could be integrated into the curriculum across the grades, which was to be discussed further by the staff. The Year 10 coordinator (also a member of the core team) had used some of the material in a Year 10 elective, drawing on the modules about Understanding Mental Illness and Bullying and Harassment.

By the time of the first follow-up telephone interview, the materials had been used in the following ways:

- Some of the 'Resilience' material had been used with year 7 students as part of an orientation to high school and then in an ongoing way once per week for most of the first term
- The middle schools (years 8 and 9) had been exploring the 'Bullying and Harassment' material, although coverage varied between classrooms. They were making strategic selection of the lessons and exercises and were adapting them as needed.
- It was planned that year 10 would formally commence some coverage of material, including 'Bullying and Harassment', in the following term; they were also hoping to cover some 'Understanding Mental Illness' material in a year 10 elective.

At the time of the second visit, it seemed that some homeroom teachers had been more motivated to continue the implementation than others and that use of the MindMatters material across classes was patchy. Some teachers indicated that they had not really

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

understood that their use of MindMatters was a compulsory thing, and suggested that regular reminders and follow up from members of the core team might have helped them maintain the use of the material.

Some teachers lost direction or became busy with other priorities; some may have been uncomfortable with the material itself or the way in which it was supposed to be integrated into the timetable.

Staff in the middle school reported a less evident use of MindMatters but an awareness of the use of other programmes pastoral in nature.

*While they might not be labelling it as MindMatters as such, they're doing a lot of that Pastoral Care. Staff 2002*

### **Changes in health curriculum**

There were no particular planned changes were noted in this area. However one staff member made this observation:

*With the health classes, in my view there's a really artificial separation between mental health and physical health because, I mean, physical activity often really does make people feel really good. And conversely, if you're feeling bad about yourself, you tend to have less energy, less participation. Staff 2003*

### **Changes in other curriculum areas**

With the changes in organisation of the sub-schools, and the consequent emphasis on students working with small groups of teachers, use of MindMatters resources across the whole curriculum was definitely encouraged, but uptake was left to the teams of teachers to organise themselves. As far as the leaders were concerned, as long as the ideas underlying MindMatters were adopted (i.e. teachers focussing on relationships and supporting the students within their teams) formal incorporation of the curriculum content was not a specific issue of concern.

*The devolution of responsibility for pastoral care to where it matters, namely, within the teams of teachers and students who live and work with each other each day at school, has meant giving them the freedom to develop relationships of care and concern appropriate to each context. Staff, 2003*

Certainly, conversations with some of the teachers do indicate that at least in some teams there was evidence of this integrated approach being implemented.

*"I think once you've got the information there ... the MindMatters book ... I think it's just something that you're doing all the time with your class ... It's developing resilience by talking with the kids as you develop a relationship with them. ... You're doing it every day that the kids come into the classroom." Staff 2002*

*See I don't know if it fits in but I'm aware that our students aren't very resilient. So I'll build in things to my normal course. Like I did something this morning, technical drawing, which is not strictly Maths or Science, I got from (name) and it takes quite a bit of patience and they had to follow it through*

What changes were made during the first two years of the evaluation?

*over 45 or 50 minutes. And I try to do those things throughout the term to build their resilience. So that is a practical way, that instead of talking about it, in other words, I'm actually trying to do it. Staff, 2003*

Another example of this opportunistic approach to incorporating MindMatters is given in this exchange between members of the student services team:

*And I think they also bring it into other lessons as well. It's not just set aside as Pastoral Care.*

*Yeah and you see that with the teams - there I'm talking again - but because they've got this team structure. Like (teacher's name), I've seen him do it. I'm sure, it happens in other classes, because they all come together, 60 kids there in the morning, all the teachers are there. So if something's happened in the world, (name) would spend 5 or 10 minutes just talking to the whole group or getting them finding out their responses....*

*One of this students, their brother died and so he went through the grief component with all these kids and how people felt and got them openly talking about... He was, I think, only 2 years old. He had been born with a problem and they knew that the time would come but yeah, it was quite devastating for the family.*

## **5.8 Changes in partnerships or relationships**

At baseline, the school already had extensive links with the community, particularly in terms of connection to referral agencies. Creating further links over the course of this study did not appear to have been a high priority for the school in its implementation of MindMatters.

## 6 Sustainability of changes at the fourth visit in 2004

When this school was visited for the fourth time late in 2004, most of the structural and policy changes that were evident in earlier years were still in place. It should be noted that the deputy principal who had been an ardent advocate for MindMatters as the rationale for whole school change was not present at the school throughout this year. Consequently the overt emphasis on MindMatters had diminished. MindMatters was now more likely to be seen as a curriculum resource that was valuable for opportunistic use in pastoral care classes.

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, it is difficult in this school to separate changes which directly arise from the school's use of MindMatters, from those that might naturally have emerged because of the personal commitment to student wellbeing by school leaders. For example, changes such as the creation of pastoral care classes were described by some as the way in which the school was implementing MindMatters principles, whereas others saw it as being unrelated to MindMatters, except that MindMatters was sometimes taught in this period. This discrepancy in the way MindMatters is perceived and described became stronger at the third visit due to the absence of the deputy who is acknowledged as having held a grand vision for MindMatters in the school. As the school itself has found it difficult to describe the direct contribution of MindMatters, it is not particularly meaningful for the evaluation to do so. Perhaps it is sufficient to describe the range of changes made that relate to wellbeing and to assume that the contribution of MindMatters is in some way supportive or even, perhaps, catalytic.

*And I think a lot of the ideas have come from MindMatters and have just been passed along without them (the staff) realising that's where it's come from and (that) how the school operates is to the philosophies of MindMatters. We certainly work as a team, with the wellbeing of the student, looking at all avenues. Staff 2004*

### 6.1 Changes made in first two years

#### Pastoral care and use of MindMatters in pastoral care settings

Pastoral care arrangements were a central plank of the school's efforts to provide a more supportive environment for students. Three sub-schools had emerged during 2002 and 2003 and are described in the previous section. Different pastoral care arrangements were described for each of the sub-schools at the final visit in 2004.

In the foundation sub-school (Year 7), students are in traditional classrooms but spend the whole of the pre-lunch class time with one teacher who is designated as their pastoral care teacher. The whole of the time spent with the pastoral care teacher is seen as providing opportunities for pastoral care. There is no designated time when pastoral care issues would be addressed. While in 2003 there had been an experiment with combining classes and teaching in teams of two, in 2004 teaching had reverted to the more traditional one teacher in a class situation.

*It's sort of changed throughout the years. Last year there was one team operating together in two separate classes. There was a team-teaching situation. This year they've started off with the kids going to different lessons, but things got changed around because it wasn't really working to this more Pastoral Care type grouping, where the kids have the same teacher for the first 4 lessons. Staff, 2004*

MindMatters does not seem to have been addressed either formally or informally in the curriculum in Year 7 during 2004. None of the teachers in the foundation school have been

trained in MindMatters and, while some have had some limited experience of using MindMatters in the pastoral care period in 2003, these staff seem to have formed negative views of its effectiveness in this mode of use. Nevertheless, some level of ongoing opportunistic use is reported.

*I don't know about it myself but I have not been trained in it. I surveyed, teachers, the foundation teachers. They say that new teachers were not trained in it and had little knowledge of it. More experienced teachers who have been around and were trained in it say that the actual material that were trialled with MindMatters materials weren't well received by students last year. They said that the streetwise kids found that the material - as I said I haven't got a personal familiarity of it, I'm just feeding back - the streetwise kids felt that the materials were too contrived, that they didn't take them seriously. So there's been an endeavour to approach some of the MindMatters objectives in a structured way, not so much in delivering lessons in it by using it opportunistically. There's an element that seemed to have persisted, however, the programme, overall, hasn't had continuity in terms of staff. Staff, 2004*

In the middle school (Years 8 and 9) significant structural change occurred in 2003 in that individual classrooms were abandoned and teams of teachers worked with a cohort of students in a somewhat radical open-classroom situation. In all there were three such teams and each team has a degree of autonomy in how pastoral care is organised. One team leader describes the structures of pastoral care and the use of MindMatters in her team for 2004, reflecting that the change processes initiated in 2003 have been ongoing. Use of MindMatters is as the need arises, and MindMatters is used as a starting point rather than a definitive curriculum resource.

*Our team has changed and evolved over the year as well. We started off at the beginning of the year and we had our team divided into four groups, out of the 8/9 level. And each of those groups had their Pastoral Care teacher in charge of that group. And we actually, did MindMatters things as part of the Pastoral Care at the beginning of the year. But we've gone away from those groups now and it's an evolving and changing process, we're going to be more like year 10 so that they're more together. So when we do those sorts of things, we did one on 'bullying and harassment', not specifically from the Mind Matters book, but we've all done Mind Matters so we know what we're talking about. And we did that one about 4 weeks ago, and we do it more now in response to something that's happened or come up than as a regular time-slot of activities. A couple of years ago it was far more programmed. But now, because we know it, it's something that we sort of fall back on and we need it. Staff 2005*

This team leader describes the usefulness of using MindMatters in the early months of a new year in building connection with students. The quote also reveals teachers' intentions to continue using MindMatters in this way.

*It does work better early in the year when you've first got the kids. We, as teachers, enjoyed it as well. And I think it will be good for us next year as well because we don't know the kids coming up this time round, whereas in previous years we've known the kids because we've taught at lower levels before. These will probably be the first group that we've really got going through that none of us have ever taught previously. So there'll be a lot of being able to create connections and that sort of stuff so we can do early on and then go from that.*

*We used too, in the past. We've had electives where we've used some MindMatters stuff as well, particularly the mental health stuff. Staff 2004*

The leading teacher for year 10 has always been a strong advocate for MindMatters. When interviewed in November 2004 this teacher had just returned from an extended period of leave. She describes the situation that she established with use of MindMatters in pastoral care up until she left towards the end of 2003, describing her experience that the students responded well to MindMatters.

*Yes. I think our MindMatters was pretty strong for the past couple of years. We always had a Pastoral Care programme that was slotted into the kids' week where they spent a double during that time with the Pastoral Care. Started from about anywhere from about 12 to 17 kids in the class with the classroom teacher and the kids chose those groupings; and then we allocated ourselves to a group. We thought we needed to be. Ours was quite structured I suppose. We didn't go through the whole MindMatters programme by any stretch of the imagination, but we picked and chose what we wanted and when we wanted it and we all did those. And there were slight modifications I suppose, depending on the way the teachers felt that a lesson was going to go with certain kids. I mean we've got some pretty streetwise kids, I suppose in year 10 and they seem to love it. Staff, 2005*

While she was on leave during 2004, there were a number of changes in pastoral care arrangements for Year 10, in which there is no longer a distinct pastoral care period.

*The Pastoral Care this year, as such the lesson time was lost this year because the school had some problems in starting, having to block in maths times and things like that so they sort of lost it this year and the size of the group that we had as well so the Pastoral Care, sort of I think has become more of a structure than the actual classes itself. Staff, 2005*

This leading teacher intends to use her authority with the team to revert to the earlier structure of pastoral care that she had established and to the more explicit focus on MindMatters.

*But next year - we're already talking about next year - and we're definitely going back to a designated Pastoral Care time that we find that all kids will attend. It's a way of keeping track of them as well. We don't just do the MindMatters during that Pastoral Care time. There's a whole lot of other things that go on as well. But we are keen to pick that up again, run with that next year and we'll definitely have the MindMatters stuff running again through that programme. Staff, 2005*

### **Use of MindMatters in curriculum**

Apart from the use of MindMatters in pastoral group situations, members of the student services teams claimed that teachers are using MindMatters opportunistically in their teaching. The way in which this occurs is varied and reflects the view that it is MindMatters principles that are being implemented as much as specific use of MindMatters curriculum resources.

*Can you tell me more about that?*

*We've had a couple of camps this year, one was in Sydney and because some students couldn't afford to go to Sydney, the other teachers took kids just out bush to have a camp which our illustrious constable went on. The year 10s went over to the Gold Coast and just doing those wellbeing type issues while they're away. And cooking classes and relaxation - because cooking isn't a subject here anymore, it's more a thing if a teacher decides she wants to book the kitchen. And just looking at different avenues rather than just doing your normal schoolwork.*

*I run a little hairdressing class for Special Ed kids Thursday afternoons. That was sort of good for the Special Ed kids as well.*

*And some of the teams - (name)'s team - he actually broke his team into different groups so that friends aren't sitting with friends and getting them working together, you know, doing little quizzes and having a competition within the classroom and so they're having to integrate with a group that normally they wouldn't be and sort of communicate and work together with a team. And I think that happens in a couple of the other groups where they actually make them without them knowing by splitting them up so that they're working with different people but doing it in a fun way.*

*So how do you relate these things you're just telling me now back to MindMatters?*

*Because in the MindMatters project itself, it's the way you work with people and relationships are formed and getting people to work as a team. And that's a lot to do with how MindMatters works, it's not just getting up in the class and trying to break down barriers within certain groups. I think they're doing that without even realising it half the time?*

*Staff exchange  
2005*

### **Focus on bullying and harassment**

The school was maintaining its strong emphasis on bullying and harassment, although this appears to be addressed on an 'as needed' basis as well, rather than through the implementation of a set program for particular years.

*I think bullying's always around. It's being dealt with. (Name) and (name) went in and did some classes in one area where there was some bullying more so with a group of kids, just to point out what it was. We did -(Name) and I went through the whole school with doing harassment and bullying. She's the harassment officer here, so that everybody knew what it was and that was repeated again. And it's dealt with, it's not pushed under the carpet. Staff  
2004*

A specific example of the school's strategies for helping students to develop skills in dealing with bullying and other conflicts is the Restorative Justice program, first adopted by the school in 2003. Commitment to this school has continued into 2004 and additional training of staff has occurred.

### **Peer support**

One additional program that appears to have been overlooked in earlier years and which is still continuing in 2004 is the 'Peer Skills' program in which students in year 9 are trained to act as mentors for younger students, and as buddies for students who are having difficulties fitting in to the school. The program is funded by Kids help Line. Training of peer helpers is over two days and begins late in Year 8. Some teachers are also included in the training 'so they understand what the programme's about and so the students (the peer helpers) can identify a staff that they can go to. The program is seen as being very successful.

*I think just the speed at which the team actually sort of assists too is really good. I can see the girls who are involved, they're just sort of straight there, 'how can we help, when can we help, can we see them now?'. So it's just sort of put into place straight away. It's working well. Staff 2004*

### **Focus on supporting transition to work**

Another of the school's initiatives to support students was the establishment late in 2003 of the Careers and Advisory Transition Team to support students in transition from school to work or from year 10 into year 11 at the local College. This initiative was fully operational by the fourth evaluation visit in 2004.

*Yes I think so because there's also been other options opened up for students who can't work very well in the classroom and getting them out into work experience and this year we used CATT, and (a community service provider). The centre of appropriate technology is an organisation that we had students in earlier in the year, which is an aboriginal organisation. But they teach them with regard to welding and woodwork and it gives them an option to look at and then they realise their maths is important for them to go on to do a trade like that. Staff 2004*

### **Position of school counsellor**

The person employed in this role in 2003 was no longer in the school and a new recruit had been employed not long before the final evaluation visit to the school. This person, was to be allocated specific responsibility for supporting MindMatters.

*And we've also had a change in counsellor and while we were putting more and more onto our other counsellor to do the MindMatters, at least the paperwork side of it, the new counsellor hasn't really got on top of all of that, but she is - between you and me - I think a lot more focused on the young people and on the kids and displays a lot more energy in dealing with the kids rather than the bureaucracy and the paperwork and the projects and programmes and these sorts of things that (the other counsellor) used to be involved with and spent more time doing the paperwork in this time. This particular approach that we've got now is much more suited to achieving the needs of our clientele. School executive, 2004*

## 6.2 New changes made in third year of implementation

A number of new initiatives have commenced in 2004. Given the waning focus on MindMatters, these initiatives can be seen as arising out of particular needs and demands on the school as well as being expressions of the school's consistent ethos of student support.

### Indigenous Transition Unit (ITU)

The need for this unit arose out of a particular departmental priority to increase Indigenous participation in school. The difficulty for many indigenous students of high school age is that they have had varying levels of participation in primary school and many lack sufficient knowledge and skills to even participate at an elementary level in high schooling. The purpose of the Transition Unit is to 'get them used to sort of mainstream schooling, so if they cut the grade so to speak, they can then go mainstream'. The Unit has varying enrolment up to 18 students with ages ranging from 12 years to 16 years. Staffing is one teacher, with one male and one female Aboriginal support teacher.

### Breakfast program

The school's experience early in 2004 with the Transition Unit led it to form a partnership with the a local agency whose purpose is to reduce youth homelessness and to assist students to stay in school. The breakfast program is specifically for the students in the Transition Unit.

*They believed it would help some of the students, especially the students in ITU to break up their day, give them some breakfast, because a lot of them weren't having breakfast at home and of course their concentration levels fluctuated throughout the day, so they thought it would be a good idea to start this breakfast programme up, reconnect picking up the students, taking them over to that new centre. Community member 2004*

### Individual student plans

The school has adopted the practice of having students think about and write an individual plan for their school year in an effort to try to help the students to stay connected to school and engaged in school work by being aware of their individual hopes and targets. In this way students can feel they are being treated as individuals. Teachers interviewed attribute a perceived improvement in behaviour in part to individual learning plans (ILP).

*I think the ILPs as well, how they sit down with the students and they set a goal for students and the teachers assist them to achieve that goal. I think that's given them a lot more confidence in what they do, how they react and things like that. Their teacher usually sits down with them and it could be a big goal, it could be a little one. Little things like from not getting into trouble for most of the term or getting an A in their class. Staff, 2004*

### Families Matter

At the final visit, the school had agreed to participate in the Families Matter initiative at the instigation of the state-based MindMatters officer.

*(Name) is also wanting to do the Parents Programme and it's the school nurses this week that run with that which we're going to organise so that she can come*

*down and do the training with the parents and she'd like to do the staff as well as long as it wasn't on the dates when she'll be in Sydney. Staff, 2004*



## 7 What issues did this school face during the implementation?

### 7.1 Issues that helped

#### Positive professional development

Staff reported high esteem for the standard of professional development that they experienced from MindMatters PD staff, and that associated with other programs (such as the Real Justice program) that were implemented during the time of this study.

#### Positive staff attitudes or reactions

Staff generally indicated a high level of commitment to the profession and their capacity to impact positively on the lives, learning and emotional wellbeing of their students. They noted that there was support in their school for the delivery of expressed philosophical outcomes of wellbeing and competence for the students.

Staff indicated that MindMatters was a good match with the sub-school structure, that the student services team and new structure procedural response enabled a proficient addressing of student needs, that they were supported in their work by the school generally and executive staff particularly and that the school had high level competency in communication at all levels.

Further, staff acknowledged the natural leaders for MindMatters had emerged in teachers who were part of their team.

*Like I said, for the year 7's next year one of the teachers is very keen. She absolutely loves the programme and she's very keen to do a lot of it so we thought, in the first term, if we do a lot of it as an induction staffing and a bit less towards the later parts of the year. But we're keen, with the year 7's there'll be two team taught groups and we might get the teacher who's interested in it to run it for all of them rather than us all doing. I mean we'd all be involved but each of us teaching it separately. That might be an easier way to do it. Staff 2003*

The resourcefulness of some teachers allowed them to interact with the MindMatters curriculum resources to find alternative ways of addressing the lesson goals in the situation where the activities suggested in the resources was not appropriate.

*I actually did the bullying unit or tried to do the bullying unit, like as it's set out and I found that a little bit, yeah I had to adapt and a lot of things didn't work. I found it valuable, it had a lot of good ideas but I found that using - stuff that was more relevant to them like the videos that they watched, we pulled out bullying bits in different videos, like Shrek and all that. But some of the stuff worked, some of the stuff didn't and because I thought it was a bit over their heads, some of the concepts. Staff, 2003*

Another teacher in the same group indicated that taking an approach of integrating MindMatters into other teaching was preferable to a more faithful presentation of the MindMatters lessons and that it can maintain the MindMatters approach more effectively.

*We found some of the stuff came out when we were doing a particular novel which talked a lot about peer pressure. That was the Mr Petrovitch one and I found that through that we got a much better response because they were reading about this boy who was peer pressured and we discussed it and questions and character profiles and that sort of thing. And it made it a lot more real for them because they could identify with this kid or the bully, either one of them and I think they got more out of that because it came through the story that they were reading and that they were really engaged with, and I guess we milked that a little bit, to use that as a springboard for peer pressure and bullying and you know, treating people from other cultures properly. So that was a huge big MindMatters rich session but without picking up the MindMatters folder. Staff, 2003*

### **Helpful leadership**

Staff indicated that the executive leaders in the school were accessible, helpful and responsive to their needs. Because of the high level of turnover, staff appeared to value the ongoing articulation of the philosophical underpinning for the changes and decisions made during the period of MindMatters implementation at Phoenix High.

Leaders also indicated an awareness, through ongoing collegial discussion with staff of critical failure points in the implementation of MindMatters and a commitment to making necessary further change to support better and deeper implementation including supporting more in-service and professional development along with supporting school based changes of practice to ensure better implementation and outcomes:

*I think, perhaps we got people to look (at MindMatters) and they said that they were comfortable based on what they'd seen theoretically, and to look at some plans, but you know, in terms of preparing both the teacher and the student for the whole experience, I think, next year we will need to rethink that whole approach and you know, have them do some games ... developing cooperative behaviours without the kids even knowing it, which might predispose them more to (MindMatters) Staff 2003*

The leadership of a senior teacher within Year 10 in 2002 and 2003 was seen as a particularly important factor in the more substantial use of MindMatters in that sub-school during the period 2001-2002. Interestingly, when this teacher was absent for a period of leave, the year 10 team did not fully continue with their formal use of MindMatters curriculum resources but nevertheless had continued to commit to their approach of supporting individual students through fostering close and flexible relationships.

Throughout the period of the evaluation, the leadership staff in the school maintained an explicit and deeply convicted stance on the promotion of student wellbeing and the support of students who were at high risk. This ensured that the school staff received a consistent message from the leaders and, although this may have not translated into an insistence that MindMatters curriculum resources were used by classroom teachers, through other changes made during the period, the philosophy underlying MindMatters was seen to be strongly lived out in the policies and management of the school both in the classroom and in extra-curricula activities.

This is highlighted by the following extract from email correspondence with a member of the school staff in 2004.

What issues did this school face during the implementation?

*MindMatters has become the symbolic leitmotiv permeating both the philosophical and actual changes that have been occurring at Phoenix High over several years. It is true that the school has not rigorously 'taught' the MindMatters curriculum materials, but the school's increased focus on student and teacher resiliency, and on the fact that we inhabit a relational world has been re-inspired and given additional impetus by the MindMatters' Weltanschauung (worldview). Staff*

### **Availability of resources**

Staff indicated a high level of access to the MindMatters resources and other curriculum resources to support those ideas taken from the MindMatters material. They also indicated a high level of collegial sharing of resources and ideas. Even staff who were not using MindMatters indicated familiarity of the resources and that they had easy access to the resources should they choose to use them.

### **Usefulness or suitability of MindMatters**

It is not possible to separate out the specific impact of MindMatters from impacts that may have emerged by the structural changes that were imminent at the time of adoption. Nevertheless, there was a broad consensus that all of the changes outlined above had had some positive impacts on the school, and that MindMatters had value-added to the school's increasing emphasis on student well being.

Staff indicated the usefulness of the programme in justifying and enabling staff to respond to mental health building moments across all subject areas:

*When issues arise in Maths or Science or Physical Education or Health or anything like that, that related back to that particular MindMatters approach, that's when it's most powerful to go. "Hey have you been talking about this with somebody here?" or "Let's build on what you already know." Staff, 2003*

Staff frequently noted the usefulness of the materials in the MindMatters kit. Particularly positive comments were made by several staff about the points for discussion, topic starters, ideas for role plays and the worksheets as base starters for effective school and class specific lesson planning.

*Most of what I used worked really well and it was easy to pick out the bits that suited you and go with them. I know the relief teacher continued MindMatters because it was part of the programme and she seemed to have some really good success with that and that was actually with the boys' group too. Staff 2003*

### **Good staff communication**

Staff noted the opportunities for communication afforded by the new structures, timetable and established modes of providing for the flow of information and ideas through formal and informal networks in the school. The frankness of staff interviewed with peers indicated that there was extensive trust and ongoing communication between staff about all elements of school life.

In addition the proximity of staff to one another in out of school hours generated further opportunities for casual discussion and building of rapport to support in school communication.

### Participation in MindMatters evaluation

The small group of staff who had attended training were very keen for the school to participate in the evaluation process because they saw that the process itself would help them to maintain momentum for the process of change that they wanted to introduce.

*We thought by accepting, it would be someone behind us with a bit of a whip type of thing, just making sure we stay on track. . . so that we can't slacken off, that we still keep the momentum going and that someone will come along again and just keeps us on track. Because sometimes when you take these things up, it's so easy to get off track because something will happen and come along but now that we've committed ourselves to being involved, you know it will keep us more on track with what we plan to do. . . Staff 2001*

Indeed this anticipated boost for commitment seems to have occurred, at least in the first year of the evaluation. The school valued the information it received from the student surveys and also made use of the payment that they received for participating to support some additional professional development that they would not otherwise been able to afford.

*I wonder where we would be if we hadn't been selected as a school to be involved in the programme, because I don't know where we would be finding the (resources) to get to the conferences, to get staff to do some training and inservicing. And to maintain, you know, the surveys that we do and all these sorts of things. Keeps the MindMatters programme at the forefront of a lot of discussion and I think that has been very much a plus. . . . Staff 2002*

## 7.2 Issues that hindered

### Professional development issues

Due to the isolation of this school, access to professional development was a significant issue. Further the position of stat-based officer was vacant for a considerable period during the first year of the evaluation period. Consequently, many of the teachers either felt unprepared for using the MindMatters resources or were unwilling to do so without training.

*It has taken it's time to really get MindMatters going because I think there's a number of teachers there who aren't up to speed with it, who don't own it, weren't involved in the decision to take it on board, and I don't think are implementing it, because they don't know too much about it. . . Staff 2002*

The need for adequate professional development to support uptake is revealed in the following statement from a staff member who appears positively predisposed to using MindMatters but has not done so due to lack of training..

*I actually haven't been in-serviced on MindMatters. I'm a school assistant so I probably miss out on the in-service. But I'm working with a group of disinclined boys, a group of 8 boys that have been taken out of the classroom and we're doing an alternative programme and probably the MindMatters would be good for them if I knew what I was doing. Staff 2002*

### **Negative staff attitudes or reactions**

After the first year, there was a perception that teachers in the Maths/Science faculty had less success in successfully using the MindMatters curriculum resources than their counterparts in the Humanities faculties. In part this seems to be due to a perception that teaching their subject which is assessed and for which they are accountable may have higher priority than teaching MindMatters. There was also a report of some level of awkwardness for these teachers in that the content of MindMatters was so very different from that of their core subjects and that this was also awkward for the students who were not used to relating to their maths or science teacher in the way required by the MindMatters lessons.

*But my concern I guess, is like (name), that I feel that those students in terms of I'm doing Maths/Science so to leap from Maths/Science to that (MindMatters) is very... I mean Kylie says it's different doing English Soc you know, but to go from Maths/Science and to suddenly say we're not doing that today, we're going to do this, a very different sort of lesson. But I'm reluctant to do it because I feel those kids need, I mean I feel that they're so far behind in terms of their Maths/Science anyway. I'm reluctant to say, Look we're spending a few minutes doing this, not that I don't feel it's important ... Staff 2002*

Another teacher from this faculty was not reluctant to use MindMatters due to having had a variety of teaching experiences. Nevertheless, he found it similarly awkward due to the perceptions of the students towards their Maths/Science teachers.

*Well my class is a most dysfunctional year 9 class in the school and it's taken me 3 terms to get them into a decent working pattern and when you try something that's not science with them, then you lose them completely. So really I dropped it after (we did) bullying. Staff 2002*

Staff teaching drama, in contrast, indicated that the material in MindMatters was useful but simply reflected material already in use in the school:

*Yeah it's relevant to some of the kids. But there wasn't anything from the MindMatters that was, you know, mind blowing or anything different. Staff 2003*

Interestingly some staff commented that primary-trained teachers, and teachers who were early adopters of change were more likely to be comfortable with MindMatters than staff in non-humanity subjects who had trained with a basic degree in a subject and added on a teaching qualification at the end.

Some staff indicated that the implementation of MindMatters by staff would require them to open up areas for discussion that could lead to a level of emotional disclosure. Their view was that, as teachers, they were not trained to deal with this type of communication.

*I don't think we are qualified, I mean it's like where do you break the barrier between being a counsellor, a psychologist and a teacher that you are actually trying to open emotions that you're not qualified to deal with. I mean, as you know the students come from a bad background but how do you know that you're not actually triggering something, when you're talking about, I mean that's why I don't believe in doing the Suicide. Staff, 2003*

While a majority of staff indicated a high level of esteem for the people in leadership roles there were certain dissenting voices of some staff indicating a view that there was a failure of leadership to establish consequences of inappropriate behaviour. Notably these comments came from staff who indicated they had only recently come to the school. A general concern some staff indicated that they thought:

*...too much time is being spent I feel reflecting and talking about it (bad behaviour) and the kids know at this school there's no set consequences. Staff 2003*

Other comments reflected a fundamental disagreement of values between certain staff, and those of other staff and the schools leadership in relation to the way in which the school allowed its concern for the social circumstances of students to override the concern to set behavioural standards.

*I think in this area of Australia there's a lot of problems, family problems that do impact on kids but I think also that that is used as an excuse a lot of times to allow the kids, many of the kids to get away with or do what they like. To me, there's a lot of excuses . . . I mean some of the family problems are drunkenness and abuse in all sorts of ways, physical, mental, sexual, financial you name it. They exist, and they've existed all through the ages and to me, you know, if the kids grow up believing that problems can be used as an excuse and eventually do some stupid things with themselves, like try to harm themselves and maybe succeed, you know, because the excuses have been made for a long time. Staff 2003*

School leaders who saw the system of rewards for good behaviour and punishments for bad as antiquated, acknowledged that there was a long way to go to win the hearts and minds of some of the staff to a commitment to engaging students more positively in schooling.

*I mean my suspicion is that you know, some staff have begrudgingly gone..., like they're carrying out the form of where we're at but their head space is not really there yet. And we haven't had perhaps that time to have that deeper conversation as to why we're doing things the way we are. Staff 2003*

Another staff member indicated that the school leadership focus on pastoral care was imbalanced and pragmatically directed by funding rather than ethically directed by a sound philosophy of education. She asserted that the school lacked:

*. . . any sort of major concern for content and education because there's a lot of funding the school gets to getting Aboriginal kids through to year 12 . . . and one of the things that really frustrates and I find a bit hypocritical about this whole MindMatters thing, is that the school's really big on pushing it because they're getting funding for it.*

Staff indicated that the arrival of MindMatters was a point at which different philosophies amongst the staff about the purpose and nature of teaching became more evident. In one staff exchange one staff member indicated that MindMatters provided him with a label that arrived to meet his everyday practice based on a belief that students can't learn until they feel safe.

*MindMatters is what we are doing everyday with our kids. When you talk to them, . . . We've just put a name on what we are normally doing with our kids to make them communicate with each other, feel wanted, feel valued . . . I think with the transition programme, (MindMatters) has made it explicit at the*

What issues did this school face during the implementation?

*beginning of the year and then it reminds you. . . . I think (if) you're valuing your student and yourself as a teacher, you are doing it (MindMatters). Staff 2003*

In contrast another staff member in the same discussion indicated that MindMatters was detracting from opportunities for real teaching/learning that generated skill development and opportunity for genuine esteem building.

*MindMatters is aimed at improving students' self-worth, and then I think being at a school my main job it to increase the skill level and when you're spending time on this (MindMatters) you're not doing that and I think a lot of my kids, more than needing that sort of thing, need to have their skill level improved and through that they feel better in (themselves). Staff 2003*

### **Timetabling issues**

Critical decisions about when the MindMatters resources would be timetabled into the week were left to the homeroom teachers. In the Foundations Sub-school and the Middle sub-school, no set time was established whereas the teachers in the Senior School agreed to use MindMatters at a set time each week (at least in the first year). This delegation of decision-making to groups of teacher does seem to have created the circumstances in which teachers could find it easy to overlook that they needed to do MindMatters sometime during the week.

*We left it up to the teachers sometime during the week and I think there may be an issue there. Staff 2002.*

In discussions with teachers about this, some were embarrassed to admit that they would probably have used the MindMatters resources more if the leadership had made them more accountable for doing so.

*There was something at a staff meeting we were told a bit about it. Yeah it was more here's the stuff, go for it. It had the yearly timeline which - well I lost my yearly time line, I didn't know what I was supposed to get up to when. And like (name) said before, at a sub-school meeting we brought it back up and you know what are we supposed to be doing and we got another timeline, not all that long ago hey? So I think we probably needed reminding throughout the year. Staff 2003*

*I think the only way it would be fully successful is if it was compulsory and you had to hand in a report and evidence of what you've taught and how you've taught it and the results. bla bla bla. I think that's the only way that the whole school would actually get in and make the whole thing effective. Staff, 2002*

Staff were not even sure whether the school considered that the use of MindMatters resources was something that they should be doing.

*It could be mandatory. I don't know. Maybe I wasn't listening that day. Staff, 2002*

One reason for this uncertainty could be that there does not seem to have been any formal procedures in place for teachers to record or report on their use of MindMatters curriculum resources.

Certain teachers in the middle school supported the flexibility that they had been given and did not believe that have a set time for MindMatters would work as they had experimented with using a double period on Fridays and did not find it effective.

*I don't think it works having an explicit MindMatters lesson unless it's part of a different sort of programme because they think, what are we doing this for, it's not work but if you incorporate it in your normal teaching and you stop the class for 10 minutes and say, let's have a quick game of this, it works better. ...*

*We used to bring them altogether on Friday, have the big double room and we used to focus on MindMatters and it ended up they just saw it as a big easy day, you know you'd try MindMatters things and it would be like, Oh Friday's the easy day, special Friday workbooks, group games with activities, talking about feelings and emotions. They just saw it as... Maybe it was the wrong day of the week to do it, maybe we shouldn't have brought the classes together to do it, but it didn't have any impact on the kids. Staff, 2002*

### **Crowded curriculum and competition from other initiatives**

Along with MindMatters, staff indicated that they were extremely busy and it was very difficult to ensure that good initiatives and programmes continued and remained adequately staffed, resourced and accountable.

*There's the right ideas but they're just not being followed up as well as they could be And like the MindMatters could be a whole school thing and I'm blaming myself here too, that I don't follow-up things. Because you've got so many excuses not to follow-up things up in your day. It's jus that I'm thinking about it now. The MindMatters could be a lot stronger that what it is for the kids' support. It's not working. It could be working a lot better for them. And I need to get myself organised to do those sorts of things. Staff, 2002*

Regarding the MindMatters implementation the frustration of ensuring delivery was occurring and that outcomes were being met was evident in this response:

### **Changes of staff**

High levels of staff turnover presented a number of challenges to the school. Ensuring adequate induction about MindMatters for new staff in such a setting is clearly vital. Staff described the level of change in particular years as 'rollover' rather than 'turnover' as the level of staff change was so high. With a high concentration of that change in Years 8 and 9, the MindMatters programme was seen, in 2002, to have moved ahead in Year 7 and Year 10 but not in the Middle years. This in turn had an influence for further school wide implementation in following years.

The difficulties this presents appear to be further exacerbated by the absence of any formal recording of implementation and outcomes of MindMatters either across the curriculum or within pastoral groups.

### **7.3 Student reaction to introduced change**

Most students did not recognise the term 'MindMatters' and most were not able to point to any particular changes either in curriculum or otherwise. Reflecting that there was very variable uptake by teachers, other students were aware at least of changes in the curriculum even though they were uncertain about whether these were labelled 'MindMatters'.

*S1 (MindMatters) Wasn't it about bullying or some crap?*

*S2 Wasn't it about peer pressure and bullying in schools, how it affects your home life and stuff like that.*

*S3 Basically what I think, it's just youth problems. A lot of us young kids go through hard times and stuff. Students 2003*



## 8 Issues identified at the fourth visit in 2004

The status of MindMatters at the fourth visit is that as a formal curriculum resource it has been in decline but it is still seen as a useful set of resources and is used opportunistically by teachers in the middle school and in the senior school (Year 10). Whereas previously MindMatters might have been seen as providing the rationale and impetus for school change, such changes are now occurring without reference to MindMatters as a primary reason. A number of factors contribute to this different state of affairs.

### Impact of leadership changes

The principle reason for a diminishing focus on MindMatters is that two strong leaders for MindMatters were absent from the school during the latter half of 2003 and most of 2004. The deputy principal who has been quoted widely in this report, provided leadership and management structure for MindMatters. The senior teacher in Year 10 was also a strong advocate and provided inspiring leadership within her team of teachers.

*Two trained people in MindMatters and two senior people have been away. (The year 10 coordinator) has been on leave and has only just returned and (the deputy principal) who is also a key driver of the project has been away. That kind of has two effects, number one it takes away our knowledge base and a certain amount of energy for the project and certain amount of ownership. (The deputy) would consistently be in the staffroom saying have you done this, have you done that, don't forget this, and there are meetings like senior management meetings who would raise issues concerning MindMatters etc. And (the senior teacher) would do the same thing but within her sphere of influence which is a year 10 programme. The replacement for both of those, they have to step in and pick up on a lot of activity and a lot of jobs and a lot of things so it's a very steep learning curve and you know that they've been around the school for a long time and even though both people have got a huge focus on kids' welfare but some things get put aside, you've got to expect that and MindMatters has been one of those things that hasn't been pushed. Still the focus on student welfare because we've always had that, but the MindMatters in parentheses hasn't been brought up as regularly as it has in the past. School executive, 2004*

The acting deputy principal was recruited from within the school but had not previously worked in any year level that had used MindMatters and had not been exposed to any training.

*I probably don't have a really good knowledge of the Kit itself. Whilst I sought of had seen it going on, and often witnessed a lot of the lessons, the year 10s were doing it first-hand because they'd come and visit us. I definitely agree with the philosophy behind it. I think we do a lot of things, there are restructured I think is you know working towards all that sort of stuff as well, the relationship approach and the Pastoral Care. And you know having just a few staff members with a small number of kids and working on it that way rather than the actual formalised lessons. (The deputy principal) had a big push for it I think because he was in on it in the beginning whereas I guess for myself, not being as familiar with it, you know, I heard that some things sort of get lost along the way when you're taking on a job and I think that's probably something that might have fallen by the wayside, not because it's not valued and we don't*

*want to do something with it, just maybe there just wasn't that back-up or you know, (someone reminding us) 'what are you doing?' You know? Staff 2004*

It appears that without an effective leader, even a program which is valued can be replaced by other things on the agenda in a busy school, particularly when other leaders are committed to promoting other programs. This appears to be the case at Phoenix High where the principal is a strong supporter of the Restorative Justice project, commonly referred to in this school 'as 'Real Justice'. To be fair, however, the two projects (MindMatters and restorative Justice) are not seen by the school as competing alternatives. Rather both are seen as having similar origins in their underlying values and outcomes.

### **Training issues**

The principal's commitment to and leadership of Restorative Justice is reflected in his support for in-house training in the school, thus ensuring that the focus on this program remained strong. In contrast, no staff had attended external training for MindMatters in 2004, and the in-house training provided in earlier years by the state-based officer also did not continue during this third year of implementation.

*(The principal) organised (training for restorative Justice) a couple of times during the year, he's been and just had a short afternoon session where he inducted the new staff or if it wasn't him it was someone that ran it from (capital city) and came down and inducted staff, usually after school.*

*So it is where MindMatters isn't really inducted when they come in, not like the Real Justice is.*

*Why not?*

*Probably because (the principal) was sold on the idea of Real Justice at the time and brought it into the school and he wasn't the Principal at the time when MindMatters was brought into the school and therefore he hasn't got the underpinnings of the ... or the enthusiasm of it.*

*Staff discussion, 2004*

In fairness, the principal has always been supportive of the deputy who was advocating for MindMatters and sees Restorative Justice as a means to achieve similar aims as MindMatters. One member of the student services team was, perhaps in response to the focus on MindMatters caused by the evaluation visit to the school in 2004, arguing for a renewed focus on training for MindMatters. This person was one of the early promoters in the school along with the deputy principal and the year 10 coordinator. Her comments below reflect her good understanding of the program and its potential relevance to the school.

*I think with Mind Matters the staff really need to have that professional development and see how it can be fitted into everyday teaching, not just Pastoral Care. It can be brought into anything and that's why I think (the year 10 coordinator) does it. It just sort of increases the knowledge of the students, especially the older students because she's looking more into the mental health areas of it. ... But I think right across the board, it also gives teachers techniques on how to address bullying within the classroom because the bullying section is very good and it's got a lot of good information and ways to work with it. So it will be beneficial to all the staff to have that PD, so that they're comfortable with doing it. ... As I said to (the principal), it really needs*

*to have a whole school training or information for MindMatters again to get the juices flowing, for the new staff to understand what's in it and not be frightened of the process. Staff 2004*

### **Staff turnover**

The last comment above points to the continuing difficulty that has been experienced throughout the evaluation of a significant level of teacher turnover.

*Our staff turnover isn't that big compared to other schools in town but it's enough to make a difference if you've got someone missing from each area across the school at the start of the year and then maybe someone will go in the second half of the year, so gradually... Staff, 2004*

In Year 7, three of four teachers were new to the school in 2004. In the middle school, only six of twelve teaching positions were working at the school in 2003. While the problem affected Year 10 to a lesser extent, this year will be affected by the intended resignation of two teachers at the end of 2004.

*In mid term we lost I think about 6 or 7 teachers, so there's a huge turnover in the middle of the year. Staff, 2004*

Being in a reasonably remote area, teachers are often recruited from Australian and overseas travellers who wish to visit the area for a year or less and then move on. The school executive, in order to fill the teaching establishment, has really no alternative but to recruit from this itinerant workforce.

The other main reason why teachers leave apart from this phenomenon is for promotion. Given the hardships of the school's location, successful teachers were often identified and recruited by high schools in the capital city.

It was also acknowledged that some teachers just did not like the style of teaching in teams required of them at Phoenix High, preferring a more traditional style of teacher alone in the classroom with a set group of students.

*Some people don't like the team teaching but there's not very many because (the principal) makes it quite known to the person how the school operates, and if they can't work in that atmosphere there's no need them coming. They have to be able to adapt to what they're doing. Staff, 2004*

The school's commitment to its approach of team-teaching is reflected in its recruitment practices described below in which team members are given the opportunity to meet with prospective candidates to explain the team approaches prior to them attending a formal interview.

*And in other instances, we've recruited young people, we've sat them down, had members of the team come in and interview them and say look this is what we're on about. Before we go any further are you still interested, knowing that if you are you're expected to come and fit into this? And if they say 'yes', then we do the interview. 'What can you bring to us?' And that's been really successful. The challenge we've had has to be teach people how to work in a team, really work in a team. School executive, 2004*

### **Impact of changed structures on the PC period**

While one of the main outcomes of the school's struggles to be more responsive to the needs of students was introducing teams of teachers and creating very flexible teaching arrangements, these same factors seem to have contributed in 2004 to a possibly negative change in the formal pastoral care structures, replacing them with more informal approaches (see section 6).

For example in year 10:

*I think because the way that it works is that the kids go off. We've got mess time, which is pretty all day, much from lessons 1 to 6. But the kids go out during that time off to certain classes and their elective I suppose type classes. And they might be at (another school) doing construction, or hairdressing, cooking, whatever it is over there. Or they might be here doing history or English, or classes like that. They've got a choice of about 20 odd each semester anyway. But it's actually finding a slot where we can all be together that there are no other classes going on and it became restricted there because of the lack of maths, because we didn't have a maths teacher as such. They decided that they would all teach maths. So they ended up having to pull that (pastoral care) time out so that they were all going to do it together at the same time. So it just became the time. Staff, 2004*

### **Competing priorities**

Staff also mentioned that the range of issues that the school was required to deal with that often originated from outside the school (eg from the department) resulted in little time to be given to maintaining an existing program like MindMatters. Older processes sometimes get displaced by newer ones because of time pressures.

*Things coming in from here, you need to do this, the Department says you need to do that, someone says right you need to do that. And the list just gets about that long, of things you're supposed to do and you've got everything else that's happening. Whilst it (MindMatters) could be a resource that could help with a lot of stuff that's going on, and alleviate some of the problems but you just, to be honest you forget. Staff 2004*

### **The cyclical nature of program adoption**

One staff member pointed out that the novelty of programs sometimes wears off, leaving staff looking for interest perhaps from newer programs or initiatives. Later when the need arise, staff recall its usefulness and readopt its implementation.

*I think it (MindMatters) is good, and I think it's just one of those things, like lots of other things, that just go away for a little while and then it can come back again. And it just depends how it fits in with each team, how they pick it up, I mean we're going to pick it up again next year probably full on. I think there are a couple of other teachers that have come from other schools that have used it before and are quite happy with the programme as well. I mean in the senior school anyway, they've got a big push for it. Staff, 2004*

### **Changes in student enrolment**

Staff reported that the school had experienced an increase in enrolment of indigenous students which, together with the creation of the Indigenous Transition Unit (mentioned in Section 6) was creating its own demand on the time and attention of school leaders.

*One of the biggest changes in our demography is that we've gone, for the past 9 years, we've hovered between 35 and 40% Indigenous, we've gone to 48% Indigenous throughout this year. We started about 40 but we're now at 48%. Our previous schools are telling us that they're sitting on 60 or 70% Indigenous. So all that is going to mean for us, is that we're going to get more Indigenous faces. School executive, 2004*

### **Attitudes of teachers**

As reported earlier (previous section) teacher's attitudes to the changes in teaching approaches at Phoenix High remain very mixed. Teachers who have been at the school for some time perhaps understand the context and rationale for the school's very flexible approach to engaging and retaining students in education. Newer teachers from interstate or overseas arrive at Phoenix with more traditional teaching approaches and without previous experience, either of the degree of disadvantage faced by many in the student population, or of the history of school change. The positive or negative attitudes of teachers impact on the success of programs as these attitudes determine the teacher's willingness to support them.

*I don't think everyone feels that the Restorative Justice is the answer, and that's just from talking to teachers who are more likely one on one to say things I think. People feel that there is a lack of structure and I think it's brilliant, the ideas and the ways that they're working with kids. My personal belief is that there's a place, I believe in structure and boundaries and that these are children who really need to learn them because they often don't have them at home so it's about how we do that then respectfully. I don't think an authoritarian approach is going to work with them, a really laissez-faire is not going to work with them either, they'll run riot. Some teachers are concerned what they perceive as the lack of respect but that's probably the teachers who are going to be more authoritarian or who have their buttons pushed and lose it and then yell at kids anyway, then wonder why it doesn't work. Staff, 2004*

Despite this, the school executive were very positive about the staff and their overall responses to the range of changes that were being implemented in the school. It appears that the experience of change may make teachers more prepared to consider further change.

*I'm incredibly proud of this group of people. We've talked about change and there were some people who saw change as more of the same but just done in a*

*different classroom sort of thing. And there were some people who were fairly negative about the whole process and I reckon that there was a main core of people who really pushed it. This year when we talked about change again, they could visualise and say, 'yeah I can see that we need to take the next step'. Whereas last year it was come on boys you need to take the next step and give them a bit of a push. This year I just went and sat down and said, these schools are trying these sorts of things why don't we have a bit of a go and see what we can do. I really intended to focus on one team, that team took it and said yeah let's do it and the other two teams said, whoa hang on a minute, we want to try this so it was don't you dare try and change without us. Whereas in the past it was yeah let them do it. I just had a buzz, a tingle from the response I got from the group. School executive, 2004*

### **Lack of clarity about role of the counsellor**

The position of school counsellor has been a significant initiative to support the wellbeing of students, particularly those already experiencing or at risk of mental health problems. Recruitment of a suitably trained person to fulfil this role has been an issue and although the position has existed for only one year, there have been periods of time when the position was vacant. Staff are yet to come to understand fully the role of the position and this may impact on the efficacy of the person in the role to play a fully supportive and preventive role.

*I think teachers see some of my role as anger management and responding to crises within the school and doing testing. I'm not a registered psychologist so I can't do testing. Sometimes people want to send people to me to discipline. And I say I don't do discipline' and it's very much not the counsellor's role and it's not going to help our therapeutic relationship so there's still a few teething things happened with that. ... I think there's some kind of expectation that kids will come and you'll fix them and that's not what happens.*

*I see myself in a prevention role, also and picking up on things, just seeing things from a different angle. A few kids are quite defiant and next year I'd like to be seeing some in-services on how to work with kids who are defiant, because just standing there and yelling at them you've just lost them. Counsellor, 2004*

Teachers who have never worked with a professional counsellor before also reveal that they are unaware of the limits of confidentiality, which is perceived as a critical issue by the counsellor.

*Some teachers get really involved and then want to know what we've talked about when I see them and that's been really interesting because they'll ask in the staffroom or something and we've got an in-service on confidentiality, I think it's next week, for staff. Because there's just that different relationship and I was reading something last night, it was saying that teachers share information so they expect that to be what happened and as counsellors we can't share, don't want to share information. Counsellor, 2004*

### **Particular cohort of kids**

One issue that is reported to have had an impact on the changes made in the foundation sub-school (Year 7) is that in 2004 the intake seemed to include a particularly difficult group of students whose behaviour seemed to be particularly challenging. This, together with the relative inexperience of the Year 7 teachers led the team to revert back to traditional classroom practices, abandoning their experiment with team-teaching approaches.

*The other aspect that has been really a major aspect to us this year has been a year 7 group that we picked up. You know how every now and then you pick up a group of kids that have got some fairly dramatic problems. This year 7s has been one of those. We had some big plans to implement some real change in our year 7 and the teachers in the first 10 weeks found themselves so flooded with other issues that they reverted back very quickly to a more traditional base. I think that was a mistake. I think if they had have gone, gee these kids are difficult and different and had have done something less traditional, they would have met the needs of the kids more. But the teachers felt more comfortable in going back to what they knew. School executive, 2004*

### **Availability of Kits**

Above it was reported that teachers described that they used MindMatters opportunistically, dipping into the it occasionally for a useful curriculum idea as the need arose. One of the ways in which this was made possible was the availability of the Kit. The school made use of funds from a project about Values Education to purchase Kits for each classroom.

*Its handy to have the kit that you can just flip through and there's an activity you can do. I'd hate to see it go.*

*So does each team have a kit?*

*There's one on the shelf behind me.*

*We bought quite a few when we did the Values Ed.*

*There's probably quite a few up in the library.*

*Yeah there are.*

*Teachers, 2004*



## 9 What impact did the changes arising from MindMatters have?

### 9.1 Impacts on students

#### Supports for students

On the whole most teachers at Phoenix High have come to recognise the need for them to provide a great deal of personal support to their students.

*I think, as (name) just said, I've worked in a few schools and I've never come across a school that has been so supportive for the students and I've never worked in a school where so many students need that support as well. Staff, 2003*

As a practical example of this awareness of the support needs of marginalised students, staff indicated that students who had high levels of absenteeism or truancy were often doing so because of parental acceptance of that behaviour, and that the traditional approaches to these students was further disadvantaging them.

*(We were) disadvantaging those kids and putting more pressure on them to truant because they miss out on something, they come back, they're further behind, they miss out on something . . . therefore they get this sense of unworthiness, frustration, 'I can't do it, therefore I won't do it'. Staff 2002*

For some of these students, the increased flexibility at Phoenix High was enough to enable them to move to successful completion of competency requirements. For others, for whom even this degree of flexibility was inadequate the capacity to transfer to an annexe provided further individualised support. In this annexe the most at risk of failure to complete Year 10 students were offered support in the form of a change to a correspondence model. The students mainly work through a booklet but can access teacher support when they did attend school. Staff reported improving attendance, the enabling of school success and a reformation of self esteem for students who had formerly failed.

*We're actually finding these kids think a lot more of themselves and achieving a lot more. It might take them a bit longer but they're getting there and it's quite exciting stuff. It's just working around the issue rather than saying, 'we're going to change the culture of our community', sure we can work on that but what about the kids that are coming through right now? Staff 2003*

Parents of Year 10 students indicated that MindMatters had transferred new skills to cope with stress that their children found very supportive around exam time.

*(It) gave the teachers a way to give the kids the skill that were needed. Like I know we were coming up to do the one on Coping With Stress, and some of the kids said, "Oh we're really glad we're doing this because I'm having a lot of trouble sleeping at night worrying about exams and stuff". We spoke to the kids a few weeks after we'd done the bit and they all said, "Oh every night when I go to bed, this is what I do." And well, how useful was that, that the teacher had that information there at the time the kids wanted it for their exams and (were) able to just go home and do it without any equipment, without anyone talking to them, they've got the tools to cope with their stress . . .*

Teachers in year 10 indicated that the new arrangements in the senior school had allowed very supportive relationships to develop between teachers and students and that these were recognised by the students themselves.

*They are valuing it, they've been like, I've had so little rudeness. I mean, you get the occasional little splurges but most of the kids are appreciative of what you're doing for them. Like a few of them are quite cute, they'd say to me, No I don't want you to do anything but I know you're there for me and they feel that very much. And like (student's name) when he spoke yesterday, he said that he knew the support was there, didn't he? He was really nice, in front of 70 kids he got up and said that and that was pretty impressive. Staff, 2003*

### **Open communication**

The substantial changes to timetable and the creation of a study hall environment meant that students could find more opportunities to have conversations with teachers and support teachers than previously (when they were in one teacher classrooms for periods that lasted over 100 minutes). These conversations provided opportunities for students to communicate openly with those adults whom they trusted.

*I've found though with the kids, you know, like with the freedom they have when they're walking around, my interaction with them probably has increased because I find that I can, you know, I talk to them in a way out of class, you know 'What's the matter?' and they'll tell me. Whereas I think before they were more in the classroom and if they walked out they'd be angry and they wouldn't want to talk to you whereas I find I'm doing a lot more work now in the corridors and when I see them and whatever and they're talking to me and in not an angry way now but they are opening up a lot more. And because I've seen them out in the breezeway and they're not sitting in a room like this, they're a little bit more open. And issues that seem really big issues we can settle out there in the corridor and if I, through talking with them, realise that, you know, we need to sit down somewhere else, well then I'll take them in my room, and in doing that, I find that they're not so hostile either because they have realised that you've identified that there's something more important and so you're taking them into a room whereas I found before, if you said to them come in and we'll talk about, 'Oh what for? What am I in trouble for now?' Staff, 2003*

### **Bullying and harassment**

Teachers reflected that the use of MindMatters curriculum resources on 'Bullying and Harassment' complemented other strategies (including the schools use of restorative justice approaches to conflict resolution) so that this issue is now dealt with more effectively at school.

*I think it's gone hand in hand. MindMatters and the changes have gone hand in hand and I think the teachers in different areas, you know, especially at the start of the year, with trying to address bullying and teasing, it's usually addressed especially at the year 7 level. Because when the primary school, as (name) was saying, things are dealt with differently and so we have to encourage, you know people to talk about what's happening to themselves to come and you know let somebody know rather than just put up with it. And it's*

*also given the teachers some activities where they can get on a different basis with the students , you know making things more interesting for them. Staff 2003*

Staff indicated that the constant anti-bullying messages, curriculum and behaviour interventions were beginning to generate a culture that was becoming increasingly intolerant of bullying, and students were demonstrating an increase in awareness and skills.

*T1 I think it can only help for something (like bullying) to be talked about than to not be talked about ..*

*T2 It's heightening kids awareness of it and some are still.. (They'll still ) tease and intimidation and so forth but they're far more aware. (Victims are ) far more aware and they know how to take action and the victims will feel more confident.*

*T1 Yeah it's quite interesting actually. What came up in my (class), was bullying in the workplace. Some of the students felt a little more empowered. 'No we're not going to put up with this' Some of the students felt a little bit more empowered I think because they realised what they were putting up with at (company name) or whatever wasn't on and some of them were getting quite Yeah, that shouldn't be going on, so I thought that was really good. Staff 2002*

This same impact on students approaches to bullying within and outside of school was commented on again at the third field visit.

*We've had quite a few kids will come up now and say that things are going on, yeah, and you know, they've gone away with information now. Especially too, we asked how many of them have jobs out of school and we spoke about how this happens in the workforce and a lot of kids have come and spoken about how they've been harassed out where they're working and they didn't realise that that's what it was. And so they've been given strategies on what they should do about that. So it's not just helped them here, it's helped them out there. Especially the females, with regards to you know, sexual harassment. But even some of the young boys that have got jobs at different places, you know, KFC or McDonalds, they've been having problems, being picked on. Staff, 2003*

Students reflected the emphasis on bullying by indicating that they thought that the school is serious about bullying and harassment

*S1 They handle it pretty harsh.*

*S2 Sometimes - it depends on what it is but sometimes it's bad and they can get like school suspension and stuff.*

*S1 And sometimes like if they get and interschool suspension some kids like don't care.*

Nevertheless, the students admit that there is a level of teasing that remains and is not dealt with. Some of this teasing takes the form of racist taunts, which persist despite the school's open and firm views against racism.

Teachers reflect too on the need for them to be constantly vigilant and to be identifying alternative approaches to dealing with bullying.

*At the beginning of the year - it's very good that they've said that - because we had a bit of a hassle with poor (name) and (name) who were actually getting quite badly harassed by some of the other year 7 boys and yet they weren't game to say anything until I actually just saw something happening and I thought, Oh what's going on here and pulled them down and I had them in here in this room, had a big long talk with them, but found out that they were too scared to say anything because they figured if they say anything, then of course the bullies are just going to be bigger bullies because they'll find out that you've been talking to somebody. So really with those two, it's a case of you just - not just those two, but the whole school - it's a case of keeping your eyes and ears open to what's going on and addressing the problem but not necessarily in a whole class situation. Doing it quietly. Staff, 2003*

*And have you ever heard of a magic wand to get rid of bullying in a school, you just let me know mate and you and I will go into a partnership. Staff 2003*

### **Drugs and alcohol**

There is little evidence that the issue of drugs and alcohol overall has changed other than in Year 10, where teachers in 2003 reported their perception that the number of students attending parties and drinking at these parties has increased, although the students' perception was that although party attendance had increased, this reflected more social cohesion among the group and that the actual amount of binge drinking was lower than the teachers thought.

### **Behavioural problems**

Teachers in Year 10 who had piloted the new structure in 2002, were convinced by the end of 2003 that their new teaching arrangements in the senior school were enabling them to manage behavioural issues far more effectively, while creating an enhanced attachment to teachers and to school.

*You have to be positive. I know the current year 10 team is amazing like that. We still do have behaviour management problems. We still do have the occasional student that tells us to f\*\*\* off or whatever but we deal with it differently. Like they're not suspended for doing that. We discuss with them why they've done it. We've worked through the issues and it's never.... When they've said it, they've been freaked out that they've said it too because they know that they've hurt someone that really gets on well with them and supportive so...*

*The smaller group size helps*

*And supportive team as well though, that's what it is though. The way that the teachers up here work together, it diffuses a lot of the behaviour management. I think once or twice this year we've had to send someone down to Andrew to the time out area. And that's been it.*

*And that's different to previous years?*

*Yeah, well in the past the kids were going down (to the office to be disciplined) all the time. So I think in other parts of the school, you'll probably find this afternoon, that behaviour management is still a major issue or different teams would suggest it is. Staff 2003*

In 2003, a teacher introduced Chess as a new activity to try to engage some of the marginalised students. Certain students whose behaviour was very problematic were encouraged to participate with reportedly very positive results in terms of their self-esteem, positive peer relationships, and general behaviour.

*I think the behaviour of the children has changed too. Seeing them get that one on one with playing Chess, their behaviour's settled down a lot. Kids like (name) and (name). They're all kids that have had problems, maybe they get bullied a lot you know. But it seems to have settled down their behaviour a lot. They seem to be happier. Staff 2003*

### **Truancy, attendance**

Staff comments in 2003 indicated that the new cohort of Yr 7 were far less challenging in terms of behaviour than previous years but that truancy was a major concern. Other staff indicated that changes in their approach such as moving the location of the lesson to a room where the students were more confident and secure resulted in decreases in truancy.

Another successful strategy employed by one staff member in the senior school was to call absent students and speak to them rather than a parent and invite the student to attend school:

*"Come to school, come on, we need you here, you've got an assignment to do." And the next day they're there. Like rather than getting them into trouble with their parents, it's just a different approach that you can do with older kids." Staff 2003*

*With just talking about the attendance with year 10, I don't think we've got the same results with the middle school yet, because the history of, as I was saying before, has happened, is different but they had, as (name) was saying, 94% attendance in year 10 and they haven't lost any student except one. Staff. 2003*

The following staff comment is indicative of the way in which staff interpret the changes made for Year 10 in 2003 as having shifted the focus from classroom behaviour control issues to creating a learning space of opportunity for students to complete the Year 10 qualification. Their perception is that their more flexible approaches has increased the likelihood that students will attend and engage with their school work.

*There is a lots happening here and I think for a lot of the kids this is a safe place for them and that's probably why. And even though they're being hounded for their work and thinks like that, they still realise that they know they have to get it done even though there's lots of things getting in their way. And when crunch time comes they're all sitting in front of the computers madly trying to get on and hand their work in. But they do just have so much going on in their*

*lives, If it's not hassles with their families, they're working. We have quite a large group of Year 10's this year more so than I think any other year, that aren't even living at home, or (are in) other sorts of accommodation so that has to make it hard for them and it's not a social priority for them, their academic school life anyway. So you know they're coming for that social thing. And even when the kids come in late, I suppose we don't ask them where they've been and things like that. It's like, "Hi, great to see you type of thing. But because you're not hassling them about that, then they're still getting on with their learning when they get in there. I mean half the time we get up there and our class is already going before we've even got there. They're in there going. Because I think they feel comfortable in that room. They just come up and off they go. Staff 2003*

### **Attachment to school**

Overall, the interviews with students indicated positive attitudes towards school at all visits. Of course it needs to be acknowledged that the students who were interviewed may have greater levels of attachment to students who were more marginally involved with the school, although teachers did indicate that they had attempted to recruit a range of students for the interviews.

### **Self-esteem**

The school's efforts to create flexible arrangements for Year 10 students who are at great risk of disengagement from school are reported to be showing positive results in that some of these students are actually attaining a qualification and employment options that previously they would not have attained. The positive impact on their self esteem was noted by one teacher who said:

*There's four of them that they took away from the main group and actually worked more intensively with them and the ..... now have come in and checked them and worked with them and they're actually offering them an apprenticeship out at the (name of business) for \$20 an hour. And that's for the next 40 years, you know, so things like that. They could have been told 'See you later', you know. So he's found his feet and they loved him and it was really hard to get him in because he'd missed three units, three first parts. But I was able to convince them that he was smart enough to pick it up. Now they just love him, and he loves it and he's found his feet. And with the indigenous kids doing the course, here at the school, you know the kids will get a statement of attainment or a certificate with the modules that they've done and for these indigenous kids it's something, probably the only thing they'll never get but hopefully it will be something to hold them in school to see this is what happens when you come to school, you get this. Staff, 2003*

### **Increased autonomy**

The whole purpose of the changes in the learning environment at Phoenix High was to promote a greater engagement of students with their schooling by giving them far more autonomy in choosing their preferred learning style.

*And some of the kids are picking up too on the increased choice that they do have, which is where, and so we've got to make ourselves more vulnerable as teachers and be prepared to accept that some kids won't work very well with us. One girl, she's a good girl, she's quite independent - and these are little anecdotes but I think they are important - it just happened to me in the corridor - and she came down, I could see her heart was racing. She said I need to talk with you and I said, Oh what's happened? And she said, 'I just don't learn anything at all in science with that teacher' - I won't mention her name - 'I just don't find the way she does things meaningful to me, if we cover any things that we've done before, so I've asked her in the past, Just give me the work and I'm happy to work down in the mess hall and just do it'. She said, 'I thought we had that agreement last semester' but now I think the girl had been working in the mess hall - had gone up to the library where the class was, and said, 'You should be up here, you know, you're supposed to be in class'. And so she got really - her heart racing as a result of an encounter that was too strong and I said, 'Well you know the way we're working now, if you can achieve the outcomes and you feel you can achieve the outcomes working independently down here in the mess hall, then we're supporting that as a school'. So we're trying to say that in a way, where you're not undermining the teacher. Like we'll have to speak to the teacher, whom I think is struggling with that one because the kid's not wanting to be taught by her. They see it as a kind of a challenge for them. And this is not a girl who is a, you know, it's the girl who lost her little brother. She's not somebody who is that type of 'A' student and yet she came down, as I say, heart racing and feeling as though something was being imposed upon her which is unnecessary and the fact that we've got that flexibility, there's always 2 or 3 people in the mess hall, because kids go out in smaller groups and there's usually some who are in there, there's never the whole 60 there working the whole time. If she works well, that's fine. It's getting teachers to loosen boundaries in that way too. Staff, 2003*

### **Opportunities for leadership**

Another example of the impact on student's self esteem is given by this teacher who reports one student's reaction to the changed learning environment which had been implemented in the middle school in the months immediately before the 2003 field visit. This increase in confidence seems to have resulted in the student taking more opportunities to be a leader in her classroom.

*One of our students who I have seen... Last year, I worked a few times in her class. (She was), very quiet, not really withdrawn but she wouldn't really talk to you, she'd maybe answer the questions if you asked her, and (now she's a) completely different student. Now she's just gone ahead because of her confidence and she's helping students that know less than her and she's much more confident and she'll speak to you. And that's (student's name) I'm talking about, who used to be a very withdrawn little girl who wouldn't look at you. She would sit quietly, never was a behaviour problem. Just no confidence and now she's coming up and asking me things which she wouldn't do before. She speaks to other students, she sits up straight in class and she's helping lots of other people with their work and she's producing wonderful work on the computer and*

*attempting things and doing things which she would never try before and I just think for her obviously it's been a wonderful experience and she's now going into year 10 and I feel very confident now that she will be able to complete year 10. Staff 2003*

### **Improved learning outcomes**

A number of examples of teacher's reports of improved learning outcomes, particularly for Year 10, were provided in the interviews conducted at the third field visit in 2003 and some are reported above. At that time, the middle school had only recently restructured to reproduce the new learning arrangements that had been introduced in the senior school. Teachers in the middle school, while acknowledging the temporary chaos that the changes had involved, were acknowledging the positive benefits for classroom management and for learning outcomes.

*T1 Yes, it's been really good. Sorry I'm comparing it because I was of the old system for the first semester and definitely the amount of relationship building and the amount of learning has gone up.*

*T2 Well I don't have anything to compare it with but, I mean, I just noticed that it was a bit of a nightmare for me because I was new and with all the changes but I know this term I feel a little bit more positive about the outcomes the students have achieved.*

*T1 You can imagine if you'd come here in the first semester, you would have had those 30 kids with you all day, those 30 kids for a 100 minutes at a time. And these kids need small groups, they need small groups with almost one on one learning for anything to occur sometimes. In fact one on one would be really good with most of them. It would be great. Staff exchange 2003*

### **Talking about mental health problems or illness**

Teachers reported that changes made in the school had increased opportunities for students to open up to them about their personal worries and concerns.

*T1 I think this group, because we've really made an effort to really get to know them all and find out what their interests and likes are.*

*T2 We're (now) seen as authoritative, not authoritarian.*

*T1 They'll feel comfortable to come and sit next to us and if you're doing your maths work, they'll have a little yarn about what's happening in their lives and you know stuff like that. So you do find out a lot of stuff that we've gleaned I guess from the MindMatters stuff, purely because we have a good relationship with the kids and they feel like they can trust you.*

### **Life Skills**

Teachers acknowledged that the impact of MindMatters may be seen later when students have left school and are exposed to life situations in which the insights and skills that they learn from MindMatters can be more useful.

*I think it's the nature of the programme, like the MindMatters programme, and other social/moral type programmes that it's really exposing kids to ideas which they might not get in other settings. But when the penny drops for them you can't say that. It might not be in school, it may be when they're 22, 23 or young adults something happens there. Staff 2002*

*We've been exposing them to new ways of thinking, but exactly when that kicks in will depend on the individual and their life experience. Staff 2002*

### **Improved school attendance**

The school leaders noted a dramatic improvement in attendance in the senior school where the majority of the changes made had been implemented. It was explained that not only had attendance improved, but also overall retention of students to the end of Year 10 and, more importantly, that when students did attend they were actually more actively engaged with their schoolwork, rather than passively attending do avoid being in trouble.

*That cohort I think had about 74% to 75% (attendance) last year and they're now 94% across the board and that's been kept rigorous. To be perfectly honest, it's not 94% of the time sitting in a classroom in front of a teacher. It's 94% of the time engaged in school. I think with the 74% of the time that we talked about last year, I think if you really put down and said how much of that time were those kids engaged in learning, it would have been about 50%. Staff, 2003*

## **9.2 Negative impacts on students**

Some staff and parents, in 2003, indicated that the changes made to focus on the wellbeing of needy students were achieved at a cost to students achieving high academic standards.

*My whole argument is, yes we go on about this bad behaviour and Restorative Justice. What about the good students? Often we forget about them. And if there's one bug that I have, it's that. And I'm not wanting a bunch of goody-goody-two-shoes in the class, that's not what I'm saying. But at the same time as well as giving the special needs a chance, and lower ability a chance, is it not just as important to give the higher ability (students) a chance? I think that gets forgotten about a lot and I've been damned and slammed for (saying) it. I'll tell you now, you know, people automatically assume when you say that, that (when) you're talking about the academic ones or the high (achieving) ones, that you're slamming the lower down ones, when you've not said anything of the sort. There's an automatic assumption that that's what you're saying when it's not. Staff, 2003*

### 9.3 Positive impacts on staff

#### Increased knowledge and skill

A growing range of experience in implementation of MindMatters both intrinsically and extrinsically, along with some limited experience of PD, clearly indicated that staff at Phoenix High had engaged to some extent with MindMatters and that this had increased their awareness and knowledge about mental health and wellbeing.

#### Positive changes in approach to teaching

Most of the staff (but not all) report greater satisfaction with new structures and, while acknowledging the considerable workload involved in teaching in a team setting with considerable reduced time for lesson preparation, it was acknowledged that teachers found their interactions with students less stressful than they did when they were required to deliver 100 minute periods, alone in a classroom with around 30 students.

The following informant reported the remarks of a year 10 teacher who was addressing the middle school teachers when they were considering adopting the senior school model.

*'Guys if you're going to do this, you've got to understand it's hard work. You will go home tired. You will go home feeling more exhausted than you've ever felt before because you need to be better planned, you need to be better prepared, you need to work together, you need to take the lumps and the bumps that come with people saying, Hey, it comes with being in a fishbowl. Because you're sitting there and you're working with other people and they're looking at you and what you're doing and you're going to find that taxing, because it's not what teachers do. Teachers go in and close the door behind them'. They still do, even here. But she said, 'what you will find is you won't go home stressed, you'll go home happier but you'll go home tired'. And that's what we have seen develop in those people that are working (in this way). Staff 2003*

#### Positive self-worth

A number of teachers reported a greater sense of worth in their improved relationships with students and in the apparent improvements in the learning environment in the middle and senior schools. The following is an illustrative comment:

*'Yeah I've got a couple of relationship with a few Indigenous girls. They tell me everything, they feel so comfortable you know and I guess they see more as a friend rather than a ..... support teacher and yet they just tell me everything and I help them in their work whenever they need to get through and we just sort of take it from there. It makes me feel that they respect me and that they have the confidence enough in me to disclose things that they would probably not say to certain other teachers. So that makes me feel that that's a really strong relationship now and it's almost a bit nice. Respect. They feel that they can just disclose that sort of important stuff in their life. Support staff, 2003*

### Increased teacher awareness

Staff reported increasing awareness of signs that students might not be coping and asking questions about what they can do and what they should be looking for. There are also indications of teachers wondering about ways in which schools can best respond to kids clearly suffering some mental trauma, receiving support and still attending school. The need for acknowledgement of individual difference and the attendant need for individualised teacher response to help create safe and healthy learning environments was articulated by a number of staff.

*It's not whether that approach is right or wrong, with this particular student, and it comes back to what I was saying about having to make so many judgements about every child, you can't have you know, one size doesn't fit all.  
Staff 2002*

Another staff member observed that teachers were increasingly able to notice behaviours that indicate students reaching points of inability to cope with the challenge of the normal classroom and following procedures such as time out to prevent the crisis of a major behavioural event

*I'm often having to respond to a bit of fallout when, like the other day a teacher attempted to take a football off one of the kids in class and it was basically a confrontation. It was a cross-gender one, a significantly cross-age one and (they needed to find) another way of responding to it, to get the same outcome that you want, which is basically to remove the danger, you know, and quite often it's just to take a different tactic. I know that's not explicit MindMatters stuff, but it's actually the spirit of the MindMatters stuff. Where just some sort of interactions with students... Without sort of being laissez-faire and letting people get away with blue murder. It's trying to capture those stories that kind of resonate that sort of 'Resilience'.  
Staff 2003*

## 9.4 Negative impacts on staff

The degree of change implemented at Phoenix High in the course of this study appeared to be well accommodated by the majority of staff but there was a degree of dissent and this change impacted negatively on some on staff. Some staff indicated that there were some significant differences between the type of support they were being offered and the type they would prefer. Some staff also indicated that they were increasingly aware that as student wellbeing took priority in the school, they felt that their own needs as professional teachers were being overlooked. Indeed some asserted that the promotion of student esteem and capacity to engage with school was at the price of the staff themselves:

School leaders, on the other hand were convinced that any unhappiness that staff may have felt was due to the dissonance between the school's directions and the teacher's personal views about schooling, rather than that the adopted model of schooling in itself caused teacher distress.

*I think as a school we have become braver in being able to say to some teachers that there are many buses in this world travelling in different directions for different purposes. Phoenix High is just one bus. You might not like the Phoenix High bus, the direction in which it's travelling or the purpose that it has to fulfil - a purpose which is not abstractly determined but actually emerges out of the needs of the community which it serves. Don't squander your life here if*

*this is not right for you! Catch another of the many buses available!  
Correspondence from staff, 2004*

## 9.5 Impacts on whole of school

### Enabling the change process to occur

School leaders who were highly committed to the adoption of MindMatters, saw in it an articulation of the philosophy and values underlying the way in which the school wished to support their very needy student population. In asking staff to adopt MindMatters they were more insistent on them adopting these philosophies than simply complying with a directive to adopt the curriculum resources.

*In one sense, it's the symbolism of the MindMatters programme which I think we've been able to embrace and use it as part of the banner of what was going on here anyhow, and I'm saying to teachers now, you know, the materials are a resource that we use as we can, or modify them as we can, but it is that whole approach and so I think it has been important. I think MindMatters, for me, because it addresses the whole issue of how we relate with each other, and how children are both affected positively and negatively as a result of their interactions with teachers, you know, and there's legions of stories about that. Staff, 2003*

Further, the MindMatters program, along with the restorative justice program introduced in 2003, provided to the school leaders, a level of legitimacy for the way in which they wanted to make the school work.

*We're involved in MindMatters I think possible because it's exactly the same reason we're involved in Restorative Justice because it is the direction that we see the school going in, it is the direction we believe is going to impact most on our young people. But the value of both of those programme, as I was saying to people before about Restorative Justice, it's what we do anyway. It gives us a name for what we do and instead of running around going we're doing this stuff and it's working, we don't know what it is that we're doing but it's working. We can actually say we're involved in this real Restorative Justice process and we're implementing MindMatters. That in itself gives further impetus to what we're doing, gives further credibility to what we're doing and I think we can both therefore argue positively with new staff and with the powers that be with our community and we can gain from the publicity that we can gain from, which pushes our school that one step further. Staff, 2003*

### Creating a common language for well being

Leadership staff were convinced that MindMatters had created an opportunity for the school to talk about student well-being in a legitimate way.

*Because we never would have had that name (MindMatters), that basis in research. We would still be doing things intuitively rather than saying, 'Look*

What impact did the changes arising from MindMatters have?

*Have a look at this' and it does back up what we're doing so it gives us the credibility.*

*And that's so important. As I was saying to yesterday, you have your own ideas and develop your own language but it's idiosyncratic. You talk to people who you acquaint, so you start to talk the language of the community.*

As an indication of the extent to which the school staff had accepted this language of wellbeing, a n example was cited of an Arts teacher encouraging her students to enter a competition to design postcards with messages about wellbeing or mental health. The students won all three of the prizes awarded, reflecting not only capacity in artwork but also a depth in their understanding of the underlying messages. The leaders pointed out that this was an example of the type of adoption that they wanted because it did not depend on their constant promoting and reminding.

*They don't feel that there's a need to ask permission in a lot of these cases because of the ongoing conversation that we have about mental health issues and about the direction of the school and all the rest of it.*

*But consider this, would a young teacher such as (name), have felt comfortable in tackling those very difficult issues in a school such as Phoenix High School if she didn't have that? If those conversations hadn't been held and she didn't understand that the school valued relationships and valued....Staff, 2003*

It was also perceived that needed changes had progressed more quickly since the school had introduced MindMatters as an underlying philosophy in the school.

*Can I just say that that concept of Pastoral Care being across every class, every interaction with young people, is something that we've been pushing for a long time but very seldom have we seen it in the past. I haven't I seen it any way - being implemented. Always when people talk Pastoral Care, and Pastoral Care time, they've always said, 'Well we need, to do Pastoral Care properly, we need to have a 50 minute block per week of Pastoral Care time' and not saying the opposite, I'm saying to do Pastoral Care properly you need to do Pastoral Care in every lesson. And I think there is a shift. Staff, 2003*



## 10 Further views on impacts at the fourth visit

Given the comments made at the beginning of Sections 5 and 6 of this report about the extent to which changes made at Phoenix over the three years of the evaluation are attributable to MindMatters, it is logical that the same dilemma exists about the extent to which the impacts of change can be seen to be a result of MindMatters. This seems an impossible task from the point of view of the school.

*I don't think we need to harp on the fact that we can't determine whether MindMatters or Restorative Justice or whatever else we're doing, it all becomes part of what we're doing. School executive, 2004*

It needs to be sufficient to say that MindMatters is seen by the school as having played a significant but not a single contribution to both the changes made and the impacts observed to have arisen from those changes.

### 10.1 Impacts on students

#### Behaviour of students

Overall, teachers, community members and school executive agree that in 2004, while behavioural problems are still an issue for teachers, the overall behaviour of students is much less of a problem than it was in 2001 when this evaluation began. Students seem to have responded well to the greater flexibility of teaching approaches, resulting in fewer confrontations with teachers. They also are being equipped with negotiating skills, and a less rigid punishment/reward system results in students having opportunities to set goals for improvement and to get support in achieving these goals.

*(Behaviour is) less demanding I think than has been in previous years. I think the students are learning, if they have problems, how it's dealt with in a mediation way and confrontation. We still have the few odd confrontations, having the counsellor here to assist as well and now we have (name) who is really great, and she's more across the adolescent area. School executive, 2004*

#### Fewer suspensions

Changes in the way behavioural problems are dealt with, including the transfer of responsibility back to the classroom teachers and the teaching teams, and the provision of training to teachers in the restorative Justice approach, have resulted in fewer suspensions. The presence of the school counsellor as an additional option to provide support to students is also seen to have contributed to fewer suspensions.

*Yeah (suspension is) our last resort. If there's a problem they may have time at home but only for a short period or they'll do an in-house suspension but we don't seem to have had as many this year as what we've had in previous years, especially the in-house suspension.*

*You used to have to take a number and wait to be called.*

*Yes it's been quiet the last few weeks. Having (the new counsellor) here is good, as far as the therapy part of it for the kids. I think is important.*

*And (the counsellor)'s been with us now for 5 weeks. The numbers have definitely gone down.*

### **Increasing enrolment and attendance**

The school has always experienced fluctuating enrolments. In 2001, it was reported that as many as 50% of students enrolled at the beginning of the year might not be enrolled at the end of the year, with new students arriving in town replacing them during the year.. This situation seems to have changed somewhat with teachers reporting that the overall enrolment of new students during 2004 has grown. Factors seem to include students in the town expressing a preference for Phoenix High due to the reputation of its flexible programs, and parent satisfaction with the school.

*We've been getting a lot of admissions through the year of students coming from other schools to our school, in town. And there were quite a few that came from other schools to year 10. I think (name) said they've got about 96 up there in year 10. The admissions have been constantly coming in whereas before, with people leaving town and the kids going to another school - it was usually because they were leaving town - were sort of all on an even par to the ones coming in, where now it's different. There seems to be more coming in than what they are going out. And I think it's because of the way the school works and the parents are happy with the support that students are given here and the follow through of these problems. Many times the students have been taken from another school because they weren't given any support if there was a problem in the playground, or it wasn't dealt with in the right way. Staff, 2004*

Overall attendance rates on the other hand have not been as good but this is attributed to the effect of low attendance rates in the new Indigenous Transition Unit.

*The other thing that's done is that it's dragged our attendance statistics down to blazers because that little unit has an attendance rate of about 45% and we've always sat between 80, 88, 90, 91, 92% but when you sit and have a look at the figures, is your glass half-full or half empty? The kids are coming to school 40% of the time now when they didn't turn up at all. Now we've got to improve that, there's no doubt about it. But we saw that, once we started the unit, half-way through last year, we saw the decline in our stats. We've held it pretty stable, around 85%/86% but a big unit of that is those kids. I think if we pulled those out of our stats it would be back up to the 89/90%.*

### **Bullying and harassment**

Students observe that teasing and bullying, including physical bullying, continue to occur regularly in the school. Teachers and the school executive agree that bullying continues to be a problem due to the high level of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack the ability to resolve conflicts in any other way than through confrontation. They maintain that they can nevertheless see improvements in individual students as they gain insights and negotiating skills through the restorative justice program.

*But what we've found is that over time, in dealing with young people, that we can alter that bullying behaviour or at least control that bullying behaviour so that a*

*kid who might come to us in grade 7, who exhibits incredibly violent bullying, nasty sort of behaviour, will change by the time he walks out of here in year 10. But it doesn't mean that we eradicate it from the school because there's always kids coming into our school with that sort of behaviour and that sort of behaviour pattern. And I'm not degrading what's going on in primary school but we feed from five different primary schools in the town, plus the Catholic system, plus (independent school), plus out-of-towners plus kids who come to us with very little schooling.*

Students recognise the Restorative Justice approach, attesting to its profile within the school. Some students are ambivalent though, believing that this strategy can sometimes actually make things worse for students.

*They have this programme if you have a fight or something you have to go and talk about it.*

*You're in the room with the person that you fought with and sort it all out.*

*You're asked if you'd like to bring your parents in and sort it out. It doesn't work really.*

*In what way doesn't it work?*

*Because it makes it worse. Because the person that was bullying you for instance, they get more angry that you told on them.*

*Yeah exactly.*

*Students, 2004*

As with students with other schools, these informants believe that while the school deals with bullying it cannot stop recriminations from those who are reported for bullying.

### **Drugs and alcohol**

While overall rates of smoking and drinking, have been no higher at Phoenix High compared to other schools in the case study sample, teachers and students in the school report that they believe these are increasingly prevalent behaviours not just in the school but in the surrounding district.

*There's been an increase in under-age drinking right across the whole town. We haven't had the problem during school time, it's more outside school time, you know, down to kids in year 8, they're wiping themselves out but that's not just in this school, every school's doing it. Community member, 2004*

Students varied in their reports about the prevalence of smoking. Year 7 students estimated higher rates of smoking than did students in years 8/9. From year 8/9 onwards, students estimated quite high proportions of students would drink alcohol occasionally.

In contrast to this, rates of reported marijuana use have in the past been higher at Phoenix High than other schools in the sample. Nevertheless the school reports that the impact of marijuana use on life at school seems to have diminished.

*But compared to previous years where we've had kids that have been stoned or drunk at school, the levels have dropped. We've hardly dealt with any assessment on kids as much as I have in previous times because normally if someone suspects that their kids are not quite right, I'm always asked to do an assessment on them. And most of the time, the kids have had too much coke at recess time and they're just a bit high from that, but a couple of times that we have had kids, they haven't smoked it at school, they've gone off the school premises to somebody's house and then come back. Staff, 2004*

### **Help-seeking**

Despite the turnover of staff in the position of school counsellor, teachers and students both revealed that there were low levels of stigma associated with students' seeing the counsellor, who has gone to some lengths to be very visible and open with students.

*I think that they'd like to see it as someone they can drop in and see and someone that they'll come and see when they've got serious problems and they'd like to determine when they came and saw me. And other kids just like to come in for a chat. It's worked well spending time out in the yard. People come up and talk to me. A few year 7 boys have come up and say, when are we going to see you miss?*

*Can they book in?*

*Yes. Well usually they catch up with me and kind of self refer. Some kids will talk to the teacher and say that they wanted to see the counsellor and that's been more successful really than when people ask (me to see a student).  
Counsellor, 2004*

Students reveal very accepting attitudes towards the need to seek help for personal problems.

*No. Because lots of kids have to go see her but it's not a real shame because at public school a lot of people have background problems and stuff. Students, 2004*

A member of a community support service, located close to the school also reported examples of the students' willingness to reach out for help.

*We're over there so we're in close proximity to the school which is great for accessing and someone was at the door and it was two young girls and they said: 'are you the lady that did the Peer Helpers programme?' And I said 'sure'. And they came in and they disclosed some abuse to me, which absolutely threw me because that's not my field - I'm an educator and administrator - anyway I had to deal with it professionally and we did but that's one outcome from the Peer Helper programme. Community member, 2004*

### **Greater involvement of parents**

As mentioned above, the reputation of the school seems to have improved due to a higher level of satisfaction of parents with the way the school supports their students and the restorative Justice approach to resolving conflicts. Teachers also report that the parents were more willing to participate in the school and to respond to requests for their involvement.

*I think too the families have been in contact more with the school. They're easier to contact and seem to be taking more ownership of the child when before it was a school problem, you deal with it. But now the parents seem to be having a turnaround in the way that they're supporting the school and the students, not like previously where it was a big problem. Parents just didn't want to know what was going on when the kid was at school, which was rather frustrating.*

*And a lot of families will come and say they're having problems with the child at home how can the school help with putting something in place here and carry it over in the home. Teachers, 2004*

This turnaround seems to be partly due to the school's newly adopted approach of being more proactive in contacting parents to keep them up to date with their child's progress, and the accessibility of the school principal and other executive members.

*But (the principal), that's one of his requests that we at make contact with parents two or three times a term, whether it's good news or bad news or just to say hullo, I'm their teacher.*

*One thing I guess (with the principal), if he's around; like if a parent comes in to see the teacher, if (the principal) comes in he always comes over and introduces himself. I've noticed that with him. Oh I'm (name) and he'll shake hands. I think that's really good for a principal to do that. And the parents say oh it's meeting the principal, it's PR and I think that's really important. Staff, 2004*

## **10.2 Impacts on teachers**

### **Teacher support**

Teachers who have been at the school for some time feel that the level of support they receive is much higher than they received in the past. Of course it must be acknowledged, that these teachers views may be somewhat biased in the sense that teacher who have not felt very supported may have left the school. It has already been acknowledged that the team teaching approach suits some teachers more than others. Those who do like the approach, feel very supported by it. The member of the Student Services Support team have allocated responsibility for providing support to one of the teams of teachers in the school.

*I think the teachers have got a lot more support now, especially the way the structure of middle school is now. Like I'm attached to Team B, we're all attached to like a team or to foundation so the teacher's got a little bit more support, which I think makes a big difference to them, just in the knowing and I think they pass it on (by being) more relaxed in the class and their teaching is more relaxed.*

*So each team relates specifically to one of the members of the members of this committee?*

*Yeah, it's made a big difference.*

*And we attend the (team) meetings each week when they have them and discuss any student matters or bring back any problems they may have or just keep them up-to-date with what we know which is going on with the kids without breaking any confidentiality. But it just gives them a better understanding where the kid's coming from. And I think you hit the nail on the head with the Real Justice because a lot of problems are dealt with before they get out of control by just sitting down and talking about it. And they tend to do more about it in their teams now and if it's something that they can't deal with then it comes further up the line.*

### **Staff wellbeing**

Both teachers and school executive members acknowledge that staff appear to be happier now than they have been in the past. While not all members of staff can be interviewed when the evaluator visits the school, it was nevertheless possible to detect a marked contrast at the last visit in the more relaxed demeanour of staff in interviews, in the playground and in the staff room compared to the first visit in 2001. It is difficult to attribute reasons for this, other than to indicate that the many changes that have occurred at Phoenix over three years seem collectively to have produced this result, as revealed in the following collection of quotes.

*No I think it's working well and I think the staff are happier.*

*Because of the way it's been changed in structure and they're not sitting for 105 minutes with one lesson, and they've changed it to make it more accommodating for the students and the teachers, I think it's working well.  
Staff comments, 2004*

*I think I've got the best staff that I've ever taught with. Now whether or not that's because of the new way we're working or whether or not it's just a terrific mix of people or whether or not it's the way we recruit, it's changed a little bit, I don't know. But I think they're very happy. I think they still work damn hard and I think at times they're still very stressed, depending on the nature of teaching. I can only see teaching and dealing with young people getting harder, I don't believe its going to get easier. But I have a feeling that they're the most together and happiest staff have ever been in the three years, that's a gut reaction. School executive, 2004*

*I think it was partly because we changed our teaching approach too. We're not alone in front of a classroom of 30 kids. That's not happening and that's a huge stress thing, when you're one teacher in that classroom situation, there is bad behaviour and we've gone beyond that. That's probably a factor as much as anything else. Staff, 2004*

The situation in year 7 appears to be a little different. It has already been acknowledged in this report that 2004 had been a very difficult year for Year 7, both due to a particularly difficult intake of students in this grade, and a high degree of teacher turnover at the beginning and

during the year. Consequently informants from teachers in this year level were less likely to agree that staff were happier, although they are not in a position to compare back to the situation in 2001. Nevertheless, the informant does acknowledge that there are sources of satisfaction to balance the effects of stress.

*Definitely, stress is a very high issue and it would be a main factor in year 7 teachers to be dissatisfied with teaching, it attributes to a high turnover. So yes it certainly might be for foundation teachers a number one issue. However, I'll say at the same time, positive relationships with students is one of the redeeming things, good relationships, ability to have those relationships, you know, that the kids are open to it and it's supported by the ethos of the school. Staff, 2004*

### **More active support for students**

One effect of the school's three year campaign to place a higher priority on student wellbeing is a change in teacher's willingness to identify and respond to welfare or support needs of students, with more referrals being reported.

*The classroom structure's changed with the teachers. I've seen that over the time I've been here. I find that they'll actually come to our student services team a little bit more now. Staff, 2004*

*The problems are still there but I think the staff are more aware and I think it's become more across the board understanding these days regardless of where you are, whereas three years ago, things in society have changed a lot haven't they? But also having a counsellor in the school as support. Staff, 2004*

### **Changes in ways teachers teach**

Given the radical restructuring of the school over the previous three years, it would be difficult for teachers not to have modified their approach to teaching. They are no longer in a traditional classroom, but rather spend the majority of their day, along with other teachers in 'study-hall' or 'mess-hall' conditions with between 40 and 60 students, all of whom may be self-directed and working on different activities. In particular this has caused teachers to relate more personally to students, needing to respond to their individual needs and study agendas.

*We found that it had a huge effect on the way teachers taught, on the concept of teams, because we had vision right the way through all the teaching areas within a particular term. Staff could look up and see another staff member. The structure with what commenced as mess hall but we changed the concept to teaching/learning area, to give it that other bit of credence I suppose. It's important, naming is important, as well as the physical layout of the place. In the last term, once again we spent some time talking about what was happening; talking about pockets of traditional approaches that were going on, and getting to each of the teams and coming up with further ideas. We sent some people to schools down south to have a look, particularly the one in Adelaide. They came back with some really good ideas and we started to implement them and once again, just by fine-tuning, we're seeing a real change. Yes we still have some of our kids who are suffering ADHD, who are suffering from major sorts of issues*

*and concerns, that cause us problems. But I think we always will have but there's a lot less in your face sort of stuff going on, there's a lot more calm work, a lot more self-directed work by kids and teachers are slowly learning how to become educational facilitators. In my opinion, good teachers rather than givers of content, you know deliverers of content. So I think we've come a long way this year. School executive, 2004*

### **10.3 Impact on the whole of school**

#### **Change in the role of the assistant principal**

Given the reallocation of responsibility for behaviour management back to the classroom teacher and to the teams of teachers, the role of the assistant principal has changed. Whereas previously, this position dealt with all behavioural disturbances, in 2004 this was far less common. Rather the role is one of supporting the systems that have been put in place, including restorative Justice to enable other to play this role.

*But what I'm observing more and more is that the Assistant Principal is taking on more a coordinator's role of student welfare. They're still doing a lot of the welfare themselves. I'd like to see them go further down with coordination and the support role. My vision for this position and one of the reason why I put the AP in this position, this particular one, is that she had a lot of credibility with other staff and I had hoped that she would actually go and sit in the classes and talk to people about how they're teaching and what they're teaching and whether or not it's suitable. School executive.*

## 11 Indicators of change from student questionnaires

Two questionnaires (Healthy Kids Survey and Help-Seeking Questionnaire) have been used to assess key outcomes from the school's use of the MindMatters resources. From these questionnaires, a number of variables have been selected to indicate changes in: protective and resilience factors, help-seeking intentions; and drug and alcohol use.

To examine whether any of these indicators have changed since MindMatters was implemented at Phoenix High, the scores for each sex in each grade in 2005 are compared to the scores of students of the same sex and grade in 2002.

### Note

Differences between age and sex groupings in 2002 and 2005 were examined for statistical significance. For Tables 1 and 3, the *t*-test for independent samples was used while for Table 2, Chi-square was used.

Positive or negative changes in variables are described as 'little' if they are between one quarter and one half of the standard deviation of the national mean, and as 'moderate' if they are between half and three quarters of the standard deviation. Changes greater than three quarters of the standard deviation are described as simply 'higher' or 'lower'.

Please note that it is not possible to attribute with certainty any positive or negative changes in these indicators simply to the school's use of MindMatters. It is likely that other important factors might also impact on these variables. In particular at Phoenix High there is a very high annual turnover of students due to the school being located in a city that has a very high population turnover. School reports indicate that in some years 50% of students who are enrolled at the beginning of a school year will not be enrolled by the end of the year. Consequently, exposure to MindMatters or to the changes associated with MindMatters is difficult to ascertain.

### Changes in protective and resilience factors

The Healthy Kids Survey has 2 main scales each of which has six sub-scales. Not all of these are considered to be target variables for the MindMatters program. Four key variables have been selected for the purpose of this report, as likely indicators of changes that might be attributed to MindMatters. These are:

- the "School attachment" sub-scale;
- the "Autonomy Experience" sub-scale;
- the "Self-esteem" sub-scale ;
- the "Effective help-seeking" sub-scale

Table 1 indicates that there was only one comparison between students in 2005 compared to students of the same sex and grade in 2002 that was statistically significant (indicated in bold) namely:

- female students in year 9 in 2005 had a lower mean score for 'autonomy experience' than their counterparts in 2002 ( $p < .05$ ).

Other comparisons that are worth some comment but are not statistically significant are:

- females in year 7 and males in year 9 (2005) had slightly higher mean scores for 'school attachment' compared to students in the same years in 2002;
- males in year 9 and females in year 10 in 2005 had slightly higher mean scores for 'autonomy experience' compared to students in the same years in 2002;
- males in year 10 (2005) had slightly lower mean scores for 'autonomy experience' compared to students in the same year in 2002;

- females in year 7 (2005) had slightly higher mean scores for 'self-esteem' compared to students in the same year in 2002;
- males in Year 8 and females in year 10 in 2005 had slightly lower mean scores for 'self esteem' compared to students in the same years in 2002;
- females in year 9 (2005) had moderately lower mean scores for 'self esteem' compared to girls in the same year in 2002;
- males in year 9 and females in year 10 in 2005 had slightly higher mean scores for 'effective help-seeking' compared to students in the same years in 2002;

**Table 1: Resilience and Protective factors in 2005 compared to the control group.**

		School connection	Autonomy experience	Self esteem	Effective help-seeking
Year 7 (2005)	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	A little higher	No difference	A little higher	No difference
Year 8 (2005)	Males	No difference	No difference	A little lower	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference	No difference
Year 9 (2005)	Males	A little higher	A little higher	No difference	A little higher
	Females	No difference	<b>Lower</b>	Moderately lower	No difference
Year 10 (2005)	Males	No difference	A little lower	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	A little higher	A little lower	A little higher

**Changes in help-seeking intentions**

In the Help-Seeking Questionnaire, students are given a scenario depicted in a cartoon format and are asked to indicate what type of help-seeking responses they might use if they were in the situation. For the purpose of this report, two variables have been examined for change. These are:

*"Willingness to Talk to Someone at School"*

Students were given a list of individuals (friend, mother teacher etc) or organisation (eg Kids Help Line) and asked to indicate whether or not, if they were confronted with the problem depicted, they would talk to anyone on the list. They could select as many as they wanted. This variable identifies the students who had indicated that they would talk to a teacher or some other adult at the school.

*"Positive Attitude to School Counsellor"*

Students were asked to indicate whether they considered that a school counsellor, student welfare teacher or pastoral care teacher (abbreviated to student welfare) could help with the problem depicted in the questionnaire. Those who indicated that a counsellor would "help quite a lot" or "would definitely be helpful" were classified as having a "positive attitude to the school counsellor".

**Table 2: Help-seeking indicators in students in 2005 compared to the control group.**

		<b>% who indicate they would talk to someone at school</b>	<b>% who indicate that student welfare would be helpful</b>
<b>Year 7 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 8 (2005)</b>	Males	A little higher	No difference
	Females	A little lower	No difference
<b>Year 9 (2005)</b>	Males	A little higher	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 10 (2005)</b>	Males	A little lower	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference

Table 2 shows the differences in help-seeking indicators for males and females in each grade in 2005 compared to students of the same sex and grade in 2002. There were no statistically significant differences.

Comparisons which are worthy of note even though they are not statistically significant are:

- slightly higher proportions of males in year 8 and in year 9 (in 2005) indicated that they would talk to a teacher or some other adult at school, compared to students in the same years in 2002;
- slightly lower proportions of female students in year 8, and male students in year 10 (2005) indicated that they would talk to a teacher or some other adult at school

### **Changes in drug and alcohol use and intentions**

In the Healthy Kids Survey, students were also asked to indicate the number of days of drinking, smoking and use of marijuana they had experienced in the previous three months. Three variables are reported as potential outcomes of the MindMatters program:

“mean number of days of drinking in last three months”

“mean number of days of smoking in the last three months”

“mean number of days of using marijuana in the last three months”

Table 3 shows the mean number of days of use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana for students in 2005 compared to students of the same sex and grade in 2002. (Statistically significant differences are shown in bold).

**Table 3: Drug and alcohol indicators, 2005 compared to 2002**

		Mean days of alcohol use	Mean days of tobacco use	Mean days of marijuana use
<b>Year 7 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 8 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 9 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 10 (2005)</b>	Males	Lower	Lower	Moderately higher
	Females	Moderately higher	<b>Higher</b>	Moderately higher

The only comparison that proved statistically significant was that female students in year 10 smoked tobacco on a higher mean number of days that students in the same year in 2002 ( $p < .05$ ).

Other comparisons that were not statistically significant were:

- males in year 10 in 2005 had a lower mean for days of using alcohol and days of smoking tobacco compared to students in the same year in 2002, but had a moderately higher mean for days of using marijuana, as did females in year 10.

### **Comment**

As mentioned above, these data are very difficult to interpret. The only statistically significant results do not reflect an improvement in wellbeing indicators. The reasons for this are most likely complex and would be related to factors such as itinerancy, high Indigenous enrolment, low income, high unemployment and high levels of drug and alcohol use in the local town.

MindMatters may have made a contribution to student wellbeing in the ways outlined in the previous two sections, but this is not reflected in these data from student questionnaires.

## 12 Key Learnings from this school

*In schools where a process of change is ongoing in parallel with the adoption of MindMatters, it is not possible to separate out the specific impact of MindMatters from impacts that may have emerged by the structural changes that were imminent at the time of adoption. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus that all of the changes outlined have had some positive impacts on the school, and that MindMatters has value-added to the school's increasing emphasis on student well being.*

*MindMatters can provide an underpinning philosophy and legitimacy that allows change agents to communicate with school staff about changes they desire to introduce to provide for the wellbeing of their students.*

*Teachers in very needy populations are increasingly called upon to provide in their classrooms and schools a community of physical, mental, emotional and social safety. Some staff who perceive their role in this way, indicated that MindMatters supported and legitimised their efforts to do this. Others who disagree on philosophical grounds with this view, are seen to resist change.*

*Teachers who, by virtue of significant change in their teaching arrangements to allow more informal contact with individual students, appreciate an improvement in relationships with students and report improvements in behaviour in their students.*

*Reorienting a school towards an emphasis on engaging students in their schooling and supporting their well being, can create significant benefits in terms of greater attendance and more profitable learning experiences for students, especially where the students are significantly affected by adverse social circumstances, or are socialised into negative views of school.*