



# **Evaluation of MindMatters at St Cuthbert's High School**

(Fictional Name)

## **Report on a study from 2002 to 2005**

**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

**St Cuthbert's** is a church-based independent school set in a rural area. Located on two campuses, the high school actually consists of a middle school (Years 5 to 8) and a senior school (Years 9 to 12). There are very few students who are from diverse language or cultural backgrounds.

Prior to the school adopting MindMatters, St Cuthbert's had a well established pastoral care system based on students being grouped into home rooms, with the home room teacher responsible for providing care and support to the students in his or her class. Home rooms had one 'Pastoral Care' period per fortnightly cycle. In the middle school, home room teachers also taught two or more subjects to the students in their group. In effect, the Pastoral Care period had become free time for students and teachers, and only a handful of home room teachers attempted a structured curriculum.

MindMatters was identified late in 2001 when the Head of middle school and three other staff attended a two-day professional development workshop. The workshop inspired this small group to develop plans to introduce MindMatters curriculum resources as part of a new curriculum for the Pastoral Care period.

The plan was based on introducing MindMatters gradually into the school. In 2002, only Years 7 and 8 would do MindMatters, in 2003 Year 9 would commence and in 2004, Year 10. A formal scope and sequence for the Pastoral Care period was developed. As the Head of middle school was the key proponent of MindMatters she could ensure that Year 7 and 8 home room teachers implemented the program as planned. Implementation in Years 9 and 10 was dependent on the voluntary cooperation of home room teachers in these Years.

By 2005, the school's original plans were still in place and firmly supported by the school leadership. Implementation by teachers, however, was seen to be incomplete; although most teachers were addressing the scope and sequence topics in some way. The school continues to value the MindMatters resources three years after initially adopting the program. It is seen to be an important complement to the school's existing supportive structures, and to be addressing a previous gap in curriculum to support social and emotional development.

*You really are talking about the essence of their vocation, and I think that's what it comes down to. Teachers here and in many other schools, it is a vocation and there are easier ways to make money, so most of them are here because they want to be here, not because they have to be here. School executive, 2002*

*That's the only thing I can look back on and say we are dealing with it (bullying). I won't say I have dealt with it because it's ongoing. We've never dealt with it; but we are DEALING with it and I think we've come a long way down the track to dealing with it and bringing it out there as an issue. Staff, 2004*

*(MindMatters) being in Pastoral Care is better than not having it at all; and I had a sense that the door was open though a Pastoral Care program. The door was firmly shut if I went through curriculum areas. Senior staff, 2002*

*I'd say the effectiveness of the program does rely on the teachers and the way they teach. Student, 2004*



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

## **1.1 Overview**

Located in picturesque surroundings on the outskirts of large coastal town, St Cuthbert's is an Anglican Co-educational School, which caters for students from Early Childhood through to the Higher School Certificate year.

The school is divided into three schools – junior school (pre-school + Years K–4), middle school (Years 5-8) and senior school (Years 9-12). Junior school is located on the original school site, which is level and attractive. The newer campus, home to the middle and senior schools, is separate and sited on a steeply sloping site. The senior school began on this site in 1996, and the middle school joined it in 1997.

The school is open to students of any denomination. The fees are moderate for a school of this category.

There are approximately 100 students in each year from Year 7 to 10 and somewhat fewer in Years 11 and 12.

## **1.2 Administration**

A single principal oversees the three 'Schools' but each School has its own Head of School. The school is also supported by a Council, which comprises a nominee of the Church, the principal and other nominated members. The Council is responsible for overall policy direction while the principal is responsible for all academic matters.

There is a stage coordinator for Years 5 and 6 and another for Years 7 and 8. The Head of Middle School is also the coordinator for Years 7 and 8. A similar structure exists in the senior school with the Head of Senior School also acting as stage coordinator for Years 11 and 12.

The school offers a wide curriculum program structured into a fortnightly cycle of seven periods per day. A member of the school executive described St Cuthbert's as a 'timetable driven' school, which is taken to mean that the crowded timetable permits very few changes.

## **1.3 Curriculum**

The school aims to develop the whole child and so offers a wide range of activities ranging from the traditional high school curriculum through to a variety of extra curricular experiences. The school appears to place a strong emphasis on the performing arts. Whilst some students indicated that they would like to see the school become a stronger sporting school, the nature of the site is a constraint to extensive sporting field construction. Peripatetic staff visit the school to provide extra tuition and there are also out of school hours groups.

## **1.4 Educational context**

The school acknowledges that not all of its students wish to pursue an academic future so it provides a wide variety of non academic activities as part of its program to develop the whole child.

Religious Education is a compulsory subject, and a 'Chapel' period is timetabled in to the fortnightly cycle. Nevertheless, the school asserts that it does not have a fundamentalist agenda but rather concentrates on the fostering of Christian values

## 1.5 Annual turnover

The school draws its students from a large geographic area, resulting in complicated bus timetables and the considerable hours that some students spend travelling. Because of its close proximity to a state border, St Cuthbert's also draws students from the adjacent state.

The school is experiencing rapid growth across all three of the Schools. There is an ambitious building program underway as well as many other changes occurring to accommodate the burgeoning student population.

Staff and student turnover each year is very low.

## 1.6 Pastoral care arrangements

Pastoral Care is structured into the timetable of St Cuthbert's which in itself signifies the value that the Council places on this aspect of schooling.

At the beginning of the evaluation, there was one full Pastoral Care period per week over a two week cycle and two ten minute sessions daily in the morning and the afternoon. The home room teachers are responsible for the pastoral care of their classes. In the middle school, home room teachers often take their class for other subjects as well, so that the Pastoral Care teacher could be in face-to-face contact with his/her class for up to 17 periods per week (Year 7) and progressively less as the higher years are reached and the students choose their electives.

It is apparent that different students have different experiences in Pastoral Care classes. Some teachers allow students to finish homework and read quietly. Some other teachers appear to seriously try to impart genuine pastoral care in the form of teaching study skills; or engaging in discussions about issues of concern to the students, or to the school. In general, the students interviewed on the first visit seemed to resent these attempts. The students claim they don't want more 'stress' in their week and appear to hold the view that Pastoral Care is a 'bludge' period.

It was noted from the early interviews that not only the students, but also members of staff do not always see the merits of the Pastoral Care program, particularly if it operates at the expense of more 'academic' subjects. The teachers interviewed indicated that they would give priority to an academic subject over Pastoral Care if they were running short of lesson preparation time.

The school executive perceives the role of the Pastoral Care teacher to be wide ranging and of great importance to communication within the school and also with the parents:

*The Pastoral Care teacher is the first point of contact, or should be the first point of contact with both parents and students if they have any queries, any concerns. The Pastoral Care teacher is responsible for contacting parents a number of times throughout the year, just to touch base with the parents, you know, even if there's no problem. You know, it's just calling, making sure that you've got no concerns. So it's a very, very big responsibility and quite a bit of time is involved. They do now get a time allowance and it's specifically for Pastoral Care, which has only occurred this year (2002). Staff, 2002*

The apparent effectiveness of this system is reflected in the comments of one of the parents interviewed at baseline.

*....the teachers are approachable, which is a big thing. There's always some sort of system, you know, where they can go to either their class teacher or they can go to the next person up, or really approach anybody. Parent, 2002*

The Head of Middle School coordinates the pastoral care 'curriculum' for the whole of the middle school and is an advocate for reform of the use of the pastoral care period in higher years. In effect, many of the students in the senior school see her as an important source of support throughout their higher years at school. The teacher in the senior school also recognises her unique capacity to identify and provide support to students.

*But quite often it will come back to me (a) because I have knowledge of the students that have come through here; (b) because I just have this ability to find out what's going on. I've just got a lot of contacts amongst the student bodies, so I can find out what's happening. Head of Middle School, 2005*

## **1.7 Behaviour management arrangements**

The school's handbook sets out very clearly what is expected of the students in terms of their behaviour towards staff, other students and the community in general. Parents interviewed had strong views on the amount of time that can be wasted dealing with bullying incidents and that it could be better used:

*I think that (better management of bullying) is a thing that schools like this can probably introduce because I think parents do want the best for children and the children here are given a lot more opportunities than there are at other schools. There's lots of equipment, there's lots of teachers that work after school with different clubs and they put a lot of effort in. So they really should all get as much out of it as they can. Parent, 2002*

The students interviewed were cognisant of the strength of the school's attitude to behaviours that went against the school's ethos:

*If you get three warnings in one day, maybe even just for talking if you're a chatterbox, if you get three warnings in a day you get lunchtime detention and like that's pretty on-the-spot impact so you can imagine what would happen if a teacher caught somebody smoking or taking alcohol. Student, 2003*

One parent commented that in their view, the school was possibly a little too caring about disruptive students:

*They've got a very high tolerance of children that misbehave. They're very caring, but perhaps the feedback from a lot of parents is 'too caring'. There's been a few families that have actually taken their children out. Parent, 2002*

## **1.8 Other welfare support structures**

While the school does not have a school counsellor, it is willing to call in outside professionals as and when required. In particular, the school has negotiated an arrangement with a nearby university whereby students in the Masters of Psychology program would see students under supervision and the experienced clinical supervisor would also see more difficult cases requiring more experience.

The school also has a welfare officer, who does not have professional counselling qualifications.

The school chaplain is heavily involved with the school and its Pastoral Care program. One staff member informs that Religion lessons are essentially an extra opportunity to address pastoral care issues, and spoke highly of the chaplain's personal strengths in supporting the wellbeing of students.

*He's a remarkable man. We're so fortunate to have him. He certainly doesn't fit the spirit of a priest, in many ways he'd be one of the most successful priests I've ever worked with; and just his understanding of those interpersonal issues with adolescents, as well as with staff, and also just the rapport that he has with kids. And the way Father (name) runs his Chapel, Chapel comes under the guise of an RE period, but it is very much a pastoral period. Staff, 2005*

## 1.9 Relationships with parents

Parents who were interviewed for this evaluation repeatedly mentioned the importance of the newsletter that comes to each home. Newsletter articles may be written in-house or taken from writings of academics or experts in a particular field. They are intended to raise the awareness of parents, and as a result, students, of relevant issues such as drugs and bullying.

*....one day a newsletter came home and it was talking about drugs – I think that one of the children in the community, or a number of them, had gone to a party where ecstasy was freely available and drink, and so the notice came home from our Principal, saying look, before your child goes to a party, check if you know the parents, do you know the situation and I found that approach really good and it gave me the strength to sort of do it.... Parent, 2002*

Parents placed a lot of weight on the information that came into the homes from the school. A parent directory, initiated by the school, came in for a great deal of praise from parents.

*They send lots of information home to us. They have talks on at the school. I guess, especially seeing the HSC is changing or has changed so much over the last couple of years, you know, they try to keep us informed. Parent, 2002*

## 1.10 Links to the community

The school has in place a 'Community Service' initiative whereby students can elect to take part in a community help organisation. It was noted that most of the students' first choice is to go to the Aged People's Hostel. A school executive member reported that the school had an excellent relationship with the local office of the state welfare department.

Staff acknowledge that the parents at St Cuthbert's want a lot for their children from the school:

*The clientele here, they want it all. Staff, 2003*

*There is an incredibly high expectation from the wider community that we give our heart and soul and I think most teachers – one way or the other – they really do School executive, 2004*

Parents were generous in their praise of the efforts made by the school to accommodate the wide range of parents' requirements in an independent school:

*Well I think they're quite proactive in encouraging parents to have a voice and be part of what's happening in the school, like the weekly newsletter and this sort of thing and they run functions here to get parents together. Parent, 2003*

One parent appreciated the fact that when his/her family had suffered a death and a marriage breakdown in quick succession, the school had not only counselled the children and supported them at school, but had also maintained contact with him/her out of school hours, offering support specifically to the parent.

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

Interviews conducted for this evaluation with students across Years 7 to 12 reveal that there was a predominantly positive view of the school. The students do appear to appreciate that they are in a school that cares for them and nurtures their development and sense of achievement.

*I don't think many people find it hard to come to school because it is a pretty good environment. Student, 2003*

The senior students showed a mature respect for the work that teachers do for them and were able to put personality issues aside when assessing their effectiveness as teachers:

*Like we have some amazing teachers, they know so much and they just give so much to the students as well and there's teachers who you can go to like sometimes you've got a bit of an issue with someone, like there's sort of got a bit of a friend in a lot of teachers. Like I find I'm friends with teachers, which is really unusual. Student, 2003*

*And even if there's a teacher you don't like, you've got to respect them for how much they do know about and the love of the subject that they do. Seeing they love what they're doing I think that's what makes them different. If they like coming here. Student, 2003*

Students admitted to liking the school uniform because it puts all students on an equal footing and it is respected in the wider community.

Finally, one student acknowledged that things aren't always 'just perfect':

*I love this school, except for the stairs. Student, 2002*

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

During the 2002 interviews all of the staff professed to be totally supportive of the school's ethos:

*Basically it's a school that caters for the whole student. Across many different areas – their academic, their religion side, their sport side. There's quite a lot of the whole development of the child, which obviously their mental health falls into. Staff, 2002*

Nevertheless, staff expressed a distinct undertone of weariness, a feeling of being overwhelmed with workload, arising perhaps because of the explicit expectation of the school executives that staff should be involved in some form of co-curricular activity on top of their regular teaching load.

The young school is experiencing some losses amongst the teaching staff due to workload pressures:

*...the workload and the stress that they're going through, they burn out at the end of term. And the staff turnover's been a lot in the short time that the school has been going but that's what the school wants and the staff who do stay on for the long term need to cope with that and obviously that affects their mental health. Staff, 2002*

In the light of the worn out feeling that many of the staff were experiencing, one member suggested:

*...an evaluation of the staff's mental health would be a good feedback too. Staff, 2002*

Nevertheless, despite some negative impressions arising from parts of the interviews, staff displayed considerable professional tenacity and overall support for the school.

*A tremendous school, as (name) said, it tries to produce a person that is so well-rounded. They would have to come up citizen of the year. There's an emphasis on as much as possible being done and being done in an equitable, Christian way, a community-minded way, a health conscious way. Staff, 2002*

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

In the wider community the school is seen as adhering to higher standards than the local state-run high schools, according to parents, students and staff interviewees. The students claim that they have a better opportunity of gaining part-time employment in the local area if they wear their school uniform to the interview because of the high esteem in which the school is held in the local community. Staff and parents' comments reinforce this view.

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

Four school visits were made in June 2002, June 2003, June 2004 and July 2005. 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.

Sustainability of school change is a key focus of analysis for the data from the fourth visit.

The following interviews took place at these visits:

Interviewees	Number interviewed			
	1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	3 <sup>rd</sup> visit	4 <sup>th</sup> visit
Principal	1		1	1
Deputy or Assistant Principal	1	1	1	2
Senior teacher	1		1	
Teacher or assistant teacher	6	6	4	6
Student	12	12	14	16
Counsellor, social worker etc				
Parent	3	1	1	2
Community member	1			
Other			1	1

Over the two years of the evaluation, one telephone interview was conducted with the person nominated by the Principal as the key contact person.

Student questionnaires were administered in July 2002, July 2003, July 2004 and August 2005.

At baseline, the following participation rates were achieved:

Year 7	100%.
Year 8	69%
Year 9	79%
Year 10	49%
Year 11	35%

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

These data are reported in Section 11 of this report.



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

#### 3.1 Community context

Located in a regional town whose main industry is tourism, members of the school community are aware that many students who want a tertiary education or employment in an industry other than hospitality will have to leave the town and go to a capital city.

It was acknowledged by all categories of interviewees that there is a high level of acceptance of alcohol consumption and drug use in the surrounding areas.

One school executive member believed that it would be a good experience for the students of this school, who otherwise may be seen to live in a fairly protected home and school environment, to have an understanding of the wider community and the problems that may arise for other people.

The school saw aspects of MindMatters that would help them to address these issues.

#### 3.2 Student well being issues

##### Mental health of students

While some of the teachers and the students admitted that until recently they had only ever heard mental 'illness' discussed (rather than the term 'mental health'), they were becoming increasingly aware of it. The MindMatters Professional Development days which were attended by four of the staff in 2001 had raised the awareness of mental health issues in the minds of the staff.

The teachers seemed to embrace their role in facilitating some degree of mental health awareness amongst their students and had begun to consider the ramifications of home and school stress on mental health.

*I guess with me, ....that empathy task. I have to admit that was the first one that made me stop and think, 'Gee they really do walk in here with an awful lot of baggage that affects who they are and how they perceive themselves and how they behave that day'. Staff, 2002*

*How come, when things go wrong, some of us bounce back and others don't. And I just believe as an educator, being inside this school and the kids spending an awful lot of time here, it's not just about the reading and writing and arithmetic. And it worries me. Staff, 2002*

*In this school, I believe the staff work incredibly hard, not just in teaching the students, their academics, but in supporting them.....I realised what we do. We put so much energy into plugging the holes. I thought, surely there's a more efficient way of building this, so it's not just plugging the holes. It's actually putting something in place that could be long-term and as they said in the workshop, I was left with that impression that it (MindMatters) was doable. School executive, 2002*

### **Bullying and harassment**

The school has a bullying policy of which the students, staff and parents are fairly well aware. There are mixed views, however, about the actual incidence of bullying at the school. Parents who were interviewed voiced concerns that there was not enough being done, or seen to be being done, to remove bullying from the school. Some students indicated that there was quite a lot of bullying, others said that there was hardly any, reflecting perhaps different understandings about what types of behaviour the term 'bullying' actually includes.

Those who had been victims of bullying seemed to see more of it than those students who were not. Most students and staff felt that once teachers were made aware of the problem, they would act on it. Interestingly, quite a few of the students interviewed were wary of reprisals from the bullies if they were 'dobbed on'. This attitude could be partly responsible for the number of reports of bullying being kept at a figure below the actual incidence.

*Yeah, there's bullying going on and there's threatening going on, there's standover tactics. Parent, 2002*

*I've seen the effect of it, (bullying). I've seen kids who became school phobic as a result of it. School executive, 2003*

Of all the problems raised in the 2002 interviews, with all parties, it is apparent that bullying is the single biggest issue in the minds of parents and is an issue of considerable importance to students. The teachers felt that they had control over bullying because of their belief that students would always report incidents to them. The MindMatters' attention to bullying was particularly welcomed by parents.

Teachers and parents identified the bullying behaviour of girls was characterised as 'bitchy' where exclusion from the group was the preferred means of making life miserable for another girl. Boys, on the other hand, were more physical in their bullying.

### **Gender specific needs**

The Head of Middle School said that it would be good if the students, boys in particular, were able to feel happy about telling somebody about any personal issues they may have:

*I just often think if only we could tap in on more of them, just put the wall down just for a little while and know that it's okay to come and talk to someone about it. School executive, 2002*

The teachers mentioned that the emerging sexuality of middle school students often caused them confusion and isolation.

*Gender evaluation is very much coming into their lives, be they up to that stage or up to remaining separatists, quite deliberately. And with the separatism comes your awareness that you have to mesh this class into one unit and put gender aside. Staff, 2002*

A better understanding of adolescents' sexual identity was regarded as an important part of the MindMatters program.

### 3.3 Adequacy of student support approaches

Generally at the first visit, the interviewees had a positive regard for the existing support structures at St Cuthbert's. Over and over again, parents and students rated the approachability of teachers very highly in ensuring student welfare.

One staff member, however, raised the possibility that students were over protected at the school:

*St Cuthbert's is a safety net and a protective haven for some and maybe we're ignoring the realities of the real world in how we treat some of our special students. And then when they go away from here it scares me that they're going into the real world and that's beyond our (influence)...Staff, 2002*

Consequently, according to staff, by placing a focus on the development of student resilience, using MindMatters as a vehicle, it was hoped that students may be better prepared for the rough and tumble of the 'outside' world.

### 3.4 Consistency with school direction, ethos

The MindMatters program was seen as being very compatible with the existing ethos of this school, which promotes a positive self-image and the development of the 'whole child' to the very best of his/her ability.

Firstly, the curriculum resources were seen as being very useful in furthering the relationship between the pastoral care teacher and their students and between the students themselves.

*I say to my staff that you should have a relationship with your students whereby that student needs to think that if they left that class then the class would no longer be whole, that they are an essential part of that class.....that to me is the key to it. If kids are negative about themselves, you'll never get the best out of them....They may well achieve, but they'll never achieve to potential and we don't know what the potential is but that's going to be the goal. Head of Middle School, 2002*

Secondly, the program was seen as offering a set of ready-made curriculum resources that would support both the existing pastoral care policies of the school and the perceived need to develop in the students certain skills for life. The MindMatters program seemed to encapsulate and refined much of the general pastoral care work which had been going on in the school for years:

*It's not that we don't all have Pastoral Care programs. We do. But it was just tying it altogether. And I think that's the thing with MindMatters is we can see it as a way of bringing it altogether as a whole school. Staff, 2002*

Following the attendance of staff at MindMatters training, it was recognised that the direction of MindMatters was in line with existing school directions.

*It wasn't one of those things that we were talking about where we went 'you've got to be kidding, get real, who could do that?' You know? I could pick up enough (from the training) to think this is doable. Staff, 2002*

### 3.5 Perceived need to emphasise student well being

The existing pastoral care lesson was seen as effective in providing a general level of support to all students. While certain teachers may devise a program of lessons for their students, based on existing programs such as 'Lions Skills'. There was no formal program and many teachers did not structure the period at all.

The Head of Middle School, however, perceived that the pastoral care lessons were an opportunity to specifically focus on building knowledge and skills for resilience, as these were not formally addressed in the normal curriculum.

*You know, it's not something we're doing because we've got to take up some time and it's not something we're doing because the Board of Studies is saying we have to do it, there's a need for it. Head of Middle School, 2002*

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

Even in 2002, before the in-depth implementation of MindMatters, certain of the staff of the school held the view that a confident, happy, stable child would have a greater chance of maximising his/her potential than a child who was not mentally healthy:

*If I can get them mentally up to speed then the results will come. I'm pretty confident. I can't exactly say why I feel that way, just by experience. And then get them positive, get them to feel good about themselves and to what to contribute and the rest will come, well that's my philosophy. Staff, 2002*

The connection between the promotion of students' well-being and academic outcomes seemed to strike a chord with the teachers who attended the MindMatters training in 2001.

*That (the training) made me really think about what happens before kids get to school and the issues with their families and things like that. I thought if I could learn more about how students... what's going on up here and get them focused or whatever you want to call it, that that would help me in a classroom for management and also would then have a pay off academically, and things, so that's what my goals are. So if I could develop those skills and share those with other teachers and perhaps get them thinking the same way, perhaps it would have benefits. I guess that's probably one of the key things that came out for me. Staff, 2002*

*When I went to the training, it was able to perhaps crystallise and give some kind of real detail to things I had experienced over many years of teaching before. And that's the aspect of I've always thought that to get students to do well academically or socially, or whatever, you've really got to have them mentally focused and mentally up to the challenge. Staff, 2002*

### 3.7 Early expectations of problems

Members of staff interviewed were all supportive of the content of MindMatters and its goals, but they were mindful of the possible negative effects on staff mental health of having to absorb the workload of teaching yet another curriculum initiative:

*I think it's a good program but I mean it's yet another thing that fairly busy staff have to become aware of. Staff, 2002*

One staff member made the point that the school had already invested considerable resources in Lions Quest, and yet, here they were, about to change tack:

*I'll be honest and say well I thought 'Oh no. Not another program. What was wrong with this one where we spent all our time and money?' And we've just got used to this and now we're going to stop that and do this. Staff, 2002*

Those who were undertaking early planning anticipated that there would be obstacles to the integration of the program across the curriculum implementation revolved around teacher attitude, effective monitoring and finding the time within existing curricula to integrate MindMatters:

*The only other challenge I see is with the integration into the curriculum. (Will) the Heads of Faculty make the time because they will have to work with their faculty in looking at how to adjust their current curriculum to allow for the new curriculum content. Staff, 2003*

Others saw a problem in relying on pastoral care teachers to implement the program during a period which they were previously treating as free time.

*You're going to have some kind of monitoring system. Is it done? And then what happens if it's not done? I mean, are those kids going to miss out? I don't think it's going to be the program that's the problem; it's just going to be people doing it and monitoring the school with difficulty and the time. Staff, 2003*

Some staff expressed reservations about how they would prioritise the program:

*They really enjoy it, I don't think we'll have a difficulty in the students doing it, it's just I think it's time, commitment and what, in a busy day, is your perceived highest priority. And I have to say that, from my perspective, at the moment, my biggest or highest priority is my academic subjects. Staff, 2002*



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

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

It is not exactly known how the MindMatters Kit came to be ordered by the school. The Head of Student Welfare received a flier advertising MindMatters professional development opportunities. When discussing this with other staff it was remembered that the head had seen the Kit sitting on a shelf in an office.

*Now I do remember this part of it, (Head of student welfare) was flicking through it and he picks it up and he says 'MindMatters, I've seen that word somewhere before'. And he sat there and he said he just visualised it up in (name's) office, and he thought 'I just had a feeling I'd seen something up there to do with MindMatters'. So he takes himself up and sure enough, there's the Kit sitting there. We hadn't seen the Kit. Staff, 2004*

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

It is thought possible that the Principal's secretary or the Librarian may have responded to the initial mail-out offering schools a free copy of the MindMatters Kit. When certain staff discovered the existence of the Kit and saw what it contained they became advocates for the implementation of the program.

*So he went up and he got the Kit, and he came back and he sat down and he went through it and he looked at the flier about the workshop and saw they were free. I think after that he came to me and we talked about it and we said, we'll put it to (the principal). 'Can we go and take two others?' Staff, 2004*

The Head of Middle School said that after going to the first training sessions it heightened her awareness of the need for the school to complete its Critical Incident Management policy.

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

For this school, the cost of attending the MindMatters professional development courses was quite significant because of the travel and accommodation involved, even though the courses were free. Initially four teachers, 'staff drivers', including the Head of Middle School, went to the two-day training session. By 2004, a total of 11 staff members had received training.

The teachers who had attended Professional Development claimed to have left the sessions feeling highly motivated to implement MindMatters.

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

The staff of the school was originally informed at a Staff Professional Development Day early in 2002. The name of the program was not mentioned until after a workshop of introductory activities was completed with the staff as a group.

*....it was probably about an hour and a half I spent with the staff, just giving them an overview of the rationale behind the MindMatters program, did a couple of exercises or activities that I knew would really make them stop and ....Head of Middle School, 2002*

After the initial outline to staff, several months elapsed before the actual planning process was underway in earnest:

*I've already requested to (the principal), that three pupil free days be spent on MindMatters....But we basically have got to get the paperwork out of the way and in some ways it's going to be fairly straightforward....We want to get the staff together as a whole to rekindle their motivation and their enthusiasm...It's just that we have to make sure that they accept - genuinely accept - the importance in the place of it, because if we do we've got them. Head of Middle School, 2002*

Parents were initially informed by newsletter when the school was asking them to sign the consent forms for their children to take part in the MindMatters evaluation. The item began:

*Our school is making plans to implement the MindMatters program over the next few years. The purpose of MindMatters is to help the school to promote the mental health and well being of all in the school. (It) will make the school a happier place for all who attend and that every student's experience of being at school will be more beneficial.' June 6, 2002*

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

Following the decision to implement MindMatters, a small group was formed in 2002. It consisted of those teachers who had attended training in 2001 (or at least those who were still at the school) as well as a Year 7 teacher who was coopted onto the group. However, beyond 2002, the process of planning essentially fell to the Head of Middle School who initiated meetings with groups of leaders and teachers to build momentum and support for the program.

*I can't tell you how many meetings we've had both with the core team, with heads of faculty and with classroom teachers. And had their input. 'What do you think about this? Do you think this would work?' They tossed around ideas. Head of Middle School, 2003*

*I've had meetings with heads of faculty. I've had meetings with the whole staff We've done activities with the whole staff. I've had obviously meetings with the Pastoral Care group that I work with. Head of Middle School, 2003*

#### **4.6 Efforts to inform parents**

The Head of Middle School, following the existing practice of this school, went to some lengths to inform the parents and to build support from them for the adoption of MindMatters in the Pastoral care period.

*We've had meetings with the parent body, where I've actually...sort of...it's almost been like an information night. It's not so much on MindMatters although, I'll tell you now, that was what I used, but I just didn't necessarily call it (MindMatters). I think that was very, very important to pre-warn parents, this is our program, this is what we're going to be covering. 'Do you have any concerns?' 'Do you want to come and talk to us about it?' Head of Middle School, 2003*

#### **4.7 Early plans for change**

In 2002 the Head of Middle School decided that MindMatters would be introduced in Years 7 and 8 in the Pastoral Care period.

It was planned that in 2003 this use of MindMatters in Pastoral Care would extend to Year 9 and in 2004 to Year 10. This plan would represent quite a change for Years 9 and 10 who had not experienced a formal Pastoral Care curriculum before.

Implementation would begin in Years 7 and 8 because the Head of Middle School also held the position of Coordinator for these years.

*I've had a chat to my Pastoral Care group. Prior to this actually going into the classrooms at a Pastoral Care level, we need to not just hand it to the teachers we've got to say, now okay, here's your scope and sequence, here's what you need.*  
Head of Middle School, 2002

It was also hoped early on that MindMatters would be incorporated in the broader curriculum.

*We're having another Staff Development in a couple of weeks time where I'll be working with the Heads of Faculty and one of the things they have to do is once we've gone through the content of each of the units, correlate it with what's currently in the syllabus and what parts of it can we put in there and at what age.*  
Head of Middle School, 2002

In particular, it was hoped that the Health faculty would take up the MindMatters resources in various ways.

*....the head of the PE, Health PE faculty would be one of them and I chose him because I perceive that once it's integrated into the syllabus that that will be one of the key areas that we'll be looking at, particularly with the older students and the aim is that the program will run from 7 to 10 in an integrated form, as well as a separate Pastoral Care program.* Head of Middle School, 2002

#### **4.8 Views of professional development**

The positive experience of the professional development training was important in establishing an initial motivation to implement MindMatters:

*It wasn't that we got wonderful teaching ideas or anything like that. That was secondary. It was walking away with that sense of 'Gee, this is really important'. It wouldn't matter if it was the MindMatters program. It didn't matter what it was. It was having put in your face what you've known all along and yet still not seen. And that is, that this had to be a priority.* Staff, 2003

Staff who attended praised the sessions.

*There was a variety of activities. There wasn't too much theory. There were exercises and also for having a large group there was a lot of interaction with other people, you got to sit down and discuss things.* Staff 2002

#### **4.9 Review processes**

Initially a clear process of review was not evident from the interviews, although systems were later developed (see below). Unplanned staff changes eg, transfers, promotion or leave left the initial core committee rather bare of members.



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

### 5.1 Changes in pastoral groups

From 2003, interviewees reported that the character of Pastoral Care classes was changing as a result of the implementation of the MindMatters lessons. While the morning and afternoon roll marking still occurred as usual, the teaching of the one Pastoral Care period per week became more formalised.

Students in Years 7 and 8 accepted these changes quite well as they had been introduced to the concept of MindMatters based Pastoral Care lessons in 2002 and had not experienced the previous regime of pastoral care periods being largely free time.

For the Year 9 students however, the experience of a 'lesson style' pastoral care period represented a major cultural change for many of the students who had regarded Pastoral Care as a free period for most of the previous two years (despite the report by teachers that they had implemented the 'Lion's Quest' program during this period).

From the scope and sequence chart, it is noted that the Lion's Quest program was integrated with MindMatters particularly in Years 9 and 10. Those students who had already had exposure to this program in general had an acceptance of it.

As time went by, however, it was apparent that school activities made inroads to Pastoral Care time. For example, diary signings had to be checked each week and choir and dance groups were regularly taken from Pastoral Care classes for rehearsals. Often, the numbers of students who were left made the running of the class unviable.

Changes were put in place to address these issues so that the students would see Pastoral Care classes as being equally important as eg Maths lessons:

*When there was concern that so much of the Pastoral Care was taken up, which meant MindMatters time, with the checking of the diaries, you know, we sat there and we got together and we found a way around it. The choirs do not go out during Pastoral Care time but now I've got to address the next lot (dancing). Head of Middle School, 2003*

Despite that commitment, in 2004 there were changes in the Pastoral Care timetabling which meant that some weeks, there was no Pastoral Care class at all, and then a double class the following week.

### 5.2 Changes in structures and processes

Two important changes were made to reinforce the introduction of lessons based on MindMatters (and other programs) into the Pastoral Care period.

Firstly, from 2003, Pastoral Care was included on the students' report cards to validate it as an important area of the curriculum. This was intended to send a clear message to teachers, students and to parents that pastoral care periods were not just to be used for administration and other 'fill in' activities.

*We've trained them now to realise that Pastoral Care means business and we actually treat it like a real subject and we even report on it. So that's okay, they can take it seriously now, they don't have an option. Staff, 2003*

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

Secondly, in Years 7 and 8, the Stage Coordinator required Pastoral Care teachers to be accountable for that lesson time:

*They actually hand into me a registration and evaluation of their term's work which we go through, we have a look at, partly for the evaluation process because I want to see what's working and what's not. Head of Middle School, 2003*

### **5.3 Changes in curriculum**

#### **Changes in pastoral curriculum**

Prior to the adoption of MindMatters a rather informal approach to the teaching of curriculum in the Pastoral Care period was in place.

*There was a program but it really wasn't followed through with staff religiously. Staff, 2003*

Staff promoting the program were concerned that some of the staff (and indeed the pupils) would not take MindMatters seriously enough and would only implement it on a hotch-potch basis, in the same way as other aspects of Pastoral Care had been done in the past. So the program for Pastoral Care with MindMatters as the anchor point became much more formalised and structured.

In 2002, following the first evaluation visit, a scope and sequence was developed by the Head of Middle School (who was also the coordinator for Years 7 and 8) in conjunction with a small team of teachers.

*So we still do the diary checks but the Pastoral Care is definitely now far more structured. Definitely in Year 7, it's far more connected to their teaching curriculum. We know that Year 7, for instance, this term, are doing (work on) Indigenous people so the Pastoral Care unit they're doing is related to that. Staff, 2003*

The details of the scope and sequence are shown in the table below. As can be seen, the Lion's Quest resources which had previously been used by some pastoral care teachers are still included as a complement to the use of MindMatters resources.

The Head of Middle School put in place a plan to commence the implementation of the scope and sequence in Years 7 and 8 in 2002 and to commence the Year 9 program in 2003 and the Year 10 program in 2004. As she was the Year 7 and 8 Coordinator, introducing the program in Years 7 and 8 was not considered to hold any difficulties. Introducing it in Years 9 and 10 would depend on her successfully advocating for the program to the Year 9-10 Coordinator.

By 2004, the group promoting the changes in the pastoral curriculum were becoming increasingly concerned that some teachers in a particular year group were not implementing MindMatters conscientiously into the Pastoral Care classes.

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

*Some will be more effective than others because of their teaching skills, and I think that's something that we have to look at and if there are some aspects of the program that literally are too hard for our Pastoral Care teachers to cope with, rather than battle with it all the way, than say to the kids there's always another way of doing things, you've just got to find it, then we'll do what should have been done, I guess, in the first place. We'll move whole sections of it into the curriculum. That's it, it will be done. Head of Middle School, 2004*

**Table 1: Scope and Sequence for Pastoral Care Period**

	<b>Year7</b>	<b>Year8</b>	<b>Year9</b>	<b>Year 10</b>
Term One	Creating Connections Team Building Games (PC & camp)	Bullying and Harassment - Facing Facts (done in PC and PDHPE)	Bullying - drama unit (to be done in PC and English)	Recap on Coping with Stress, Team Building and Bonding Activities and Bullying from Resilience 2
Term Two	People, Identity and Culture and Harassment of Minority Groups. Link to HSIE	Giving Voice- Bullying, Harassment, Teasing (PC and English)	Loss and Grief (junior section 1 - 6) PC lessons with a minor link to English	Loss and Grief- Sessions 7-10- PC lessons link to RE
Term Three	Friendship/Belonging PC with a major link to English poetry section	Coping and Stress Busters - PC	Lions Skills Program: Changes and challenges and being the best you can be - selected activities from units 3&4	Mental Illness - stress and anxiety Links to English themes, HPE, PC
Term Four	Lions skills: Peer & group pressure, Decision making and goal setting PC and PDHPE	Coping with Stress continued - PC with stress buster activities on camp	Continued Units 3&4 activities from the Lions Skills Program	Lions Skills Program: job skill activities such as resume, letter writing, interviews, life after school etc.

Thus began a determination to integrate MindMatters across the Key Learning Area (KLAs) that would be suited to the program.

### **Changes in health curriculum**

When it was decided to integrate MindMatters into the subject areas, the Health curriculum area was a logical starting point:

*Now obviously there's no problem with what's happening in Years 7 and 8 and I do believe it's making a difference but, having said that, the issues that are dealt with in the older years are every bit as important as those in the younger years. So I have put it to (the principal) and she agrees with me that, particularly with the 'Understanding Mental Illness', that will be moved straight into the PE curriculum. Head of Middle School, 2004*

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

With the fact that in the middle school, pastoral care teachers were much more likely to teach other subjects to their home room students, some connections began to be made between the issues addressed in the Pastoral Care period and other subjects.

As early as 2002, Year 7 teachers were looking for pathways for bringing MindMatters issues into KLAs such as HSIE:

*With Year 7 we looked particularly at the history focus in terms of different cultures' identity and trying to integrate people effectively and what we can do to help. And we were doing that because we were doing (work on) Indigenous people in history and then we moved into that with Year 7, in the last term, looking at different emotions and how to cope and we integrated that with a poetry that we are doing as well. Now I thought that went quite well. Staff, 2003*

*So she (an English History teacher) looked very carefully at how can we get these topics to overlap so instead of taking the MindMatters into HSIE, they brought the HSIE themes into MindMatters. So that they ran concurrently so that to me was the first step. Head of Middle School, 2003*

### **5.4 Changes in other supports for student mental health**

Early in the MindMatters implementation, it became clear that it would be a very valuable resource to integrate with the activities of the Year 7 Orientation Camp. The camp, which was run early in first term of Year 7, is an opportunity for all of the newcomers to the school (students who attended primary schools other than St Cuthbert's) to meet and form friendships with existing students who completed Year 6 at St Cuthbert's. Teachers of Year 7 also attend the camp and get to know their young charges.

The Year 7 camp is perhaps St Cuthbert's most successful initiative; interviewees were unanimous in their praise of the value of the camp to the happiness and well-being of the students and teachers involved. Even the older students reminisced fondly about the pleasure and benefits of their Year 7 camp.

Not surprisingly, MindMatters activities in such areas as teamwork dovetailed well with the existing program for the Year 7 camp and the Orientation Day which was held for prospective Year 7 students late in the student's Year 6.

*....with Year 7 and 8, if anything, they seemed to really refine the material that they're presenting and the approach they're taking to the point of when we had our orientation day last year, for Year 7, we actually based the number of our activities under the team building that we see in MindMatters so I guess that you would say that, even prior to coming to the school, that students had their first taste of it. We also looked at, on camp, which is very much the rationale behind the Year 7 camp, is to start building connections both within the peer group and with the school and the staff. And again they were using some activities there. School executive, 2003*

### **5.5 Efforts to include parents**

The Head of Middle School included the parents in the introduction of MindMatters by speaking at P&F meetings and through newsletter items. The purpose of all contacts was to emphasise the emotional and social well being of the students, with MindMatters being seen as one of the vehicles for focussing on these issues.

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

*I've actually discussed with the P&F the results from the (evaluation) survey. I've talked to them about that. So when it's that it's very much the MindMatters program. I've given them an overview of the MindMatters program, how it came about, just the structure that we work with when we're using the program and also in the newsletter I put out a series of information type reports on what we're doing what it's all about.*

*They really don't know that it's targeting the emotional and social and physical wellbeing of their kids so I did a presentation to the P&F based on the Safe School Policy but in actual fact it was a background on 'Resilience' and 'Bullying and Harassment' and what do we do.*

*Other than mentioning our Pastoral Care program is based on the MindMatters program and the MindMatters material, I didn't place a huge emphasis on it. However, much of the information I gave them and that I discussed was based on the information from the program. Head of Middle School, 2003, 2004*

In particular, these communications focussed on the Safe School Policy, accompanied by the publishing of a pamphlet, clarifying the definition of bullying. In this tract, bullying is not confined to physical attacks but includes verbal and social abuse.

## **5.6 Awareness of reactions to changes**

### **Students' awareness or reactions**

Students who were interviewed for the evaluation in 2003 showed some very mixed opinions about the progress of MindMatters and about bullying in particular. Attitudes to Pastoral Care in general were varied according to how a particular teacher was implementing the program, if at all.

*I think it's (Pastoral Care classes) interesting, I think it's relevant to what we should be knowing. It helps us a bit to understand probably what we're already doing now but what will most probably happen to us later on. Student 7&8, 2003*

*We don't really have anything like that in our class. It's I suppose, those particular periods are a bit boring, there's no better word. The Pastoral Care teacher doesn't really teach it very well I suppose. Makes it sound uninteresting and if it's not really a particularly interesting topic (in relation to bullying). Student 9&10, 2003*

In later interviews, some of the students told the interviewer that they were well and truly bored by the repetition of the bullying unit. Staff later recognised this as an issue and attempted to deal with it in the revised programming of MindMatters.

### **Staff awareness or reactions**

Staff reactions to the introduction of MindMatters seems to vary according to the year that they relate to in the Pastoral Care period.

It seems that the home room teachers in Years 7 and 8 adopted MindMatters seamlessly into the Pastoral Care curriculum and into other curriculum areas for which they were responsible (see above). From 2003 onwards, the students in these Years were accustomed to the

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

MindMatters lessons and didn't have an established attitude that Pastoral Care equated with free time.

*Like with the Year 7's last year, it was really well and truly set up. It was very well established with the Year 7's. They knew it wasn't homework time, they knew they couldn't get away. It wasn't a bludge lesson. Staff, 2003*

The older age groups, however, appeared to not want the former system to change, and when curriculum was introduced into the Pastoral period in Years 9 and 10, this seemed to put considerable stress upon the teacher:

*Well they used to look at it as a bludge period where they do all their homework or anything else that I have outstanding. That's my view and I'd spend 15 minutes knocking people back. Can I go to the library and use the computer? Can I ... I say, 'No, this is Pastoral Care and we're going to do MindMatters and we're going to talk about such and such'. So every lesson started off like that, with conflict. Staff, ?*

## 6 Sustainability of changes at the fourth visit in 2005

### Changes in Pastoral Groups

The changes in Pastoral Care implemented in 2002 as a part of the adoption of MindMatters were still in place in 2005. If anything, the commitment to effective pastoral care has been strengthened with the employment of a new principal in 2005 whose positive attitudes towards this aspect of school reflected in the following comment:

*I was talking to him yesterday about Pastoral Care, and my concerns and where I really want to see us going and he is very supportive of that. His words were 'well you have to say, in a lot of ways, the Pastoral Care program is probably more important than your academic programs. If you can't get that right, and the kids (are) constantly dealing with the very heavy baggage they're carrying around, how can you ever expect them to perform well?' which is something you can't argue with. Staff 2005*

Further, the principal has removed one of the frustrations experienced in previous years in which certain co-curricular activities were conducted during the Pastoral Care period, meaning that some students never experienced a pastoral care lesson.

*In the past, Performing Arts have always been allowed to use the Pastoral Care (period) and it's been a sticking point through all of this. Pastoral Care period is the Pastoral Care period, and choir and dance and all those things have to be done at lunch time or after school, so that is the one very positive thing, is that we won't have a situation, and I might use my daughter as an example, who's managed to go to Year 12 and has virtually done no Pastoral Care lessons because she was in the choir. Just gone. And she was quite resentful of it. She would have been happier to do it at lunch time than to miss out on class time. So in that sense, I guess, it really is positive the way it's working with the new timetable. Staff 2005*

The supportive role of Pastoral Care teachers has always been a feature of St Cuthbert's, but the provision of support to students is not, of course limited to the Pastoral Care teacher.

*And one of the things we emphasise to both kids and the parents if there's anything wrong, talk to someone; and I always say to the kids somebody who you think maybe able to make a difference but when it comes to staff, I would say, it doesn't matter if it's me, a Pastoral Care teacher, somebody that taught you three years ago, they'll always be there to support you. Staff 2005*

### Changes in structures and policies

With the arrival of the new principal, a new timetable has been designed and will have been introduced in Term 3 of 2005. While the purpose of these changes centred around creating more time for face-to-face teaching and a greater emphasis on literacy, for Year 12 the changes included a day free of lessons on one day per fortnight. In part, the purpose of this was to provide some flexibility for students with the intention of reducing the stress associated with the final year of school.

*And he is a realist; we all are; we know that for some of the kids, it will be 'the surf's up'. But, as he said, they'd probably be doing that anyway in terms of as soon as they get home from school; they'd go down and do it anyway. And the other thing is if they do go to (place) and spend two hours standing in the mall, and*

*then come back and sit down for some serious study, it's probably doing them good. Staff, 2005*

### **Curriculum Changes**

While the school remains committed to using the MindMatters resources in the Pastoral Care period, the original scope and sequence is followed more closely in Years 7 and 8 than it is in Years 9 and 10. Having said that, there are at least some teachers in each year who are adhering to the topics set down to be covered during the year for their year.

The Stage 7-8 Coordinator has encouraged the Pastoral Care teachers for these years to adhere to the set topics but does not insist that they only use MindMatters as a basis for these lessons. As long as the broad topics are addressed, teachers are free to experiment with their own ideas for teaching or to utilise lesson ideas from other packages.

The school's use of 'Bullying and Harassment' in Pastoral Care periods was continuing in 2005, particularly in Years 5 to 8. Year 8 students undertook a survey on bullying in Term 1.

Staff at the school hold the view that it is important to persist with a focus on bullying despite the relatively low prevalence in the school. Overall, the sustainability of the school's efforts is summed up well in this quote from a student in Year 8:

*The school really focuses on bullying but we just sort of totally focus on it and we don't really cover the other things. That's why the school's so good. Bullying's bad and we get it drilled into us. Student 2005*

Further, comments from teachers in Years 7 and 8 indicate that at least most of the Pastoral Care teachers in this year are still following the original scope and sequence of topics and incorporating elements of MindMatters into these lessons. Teachers also use certain ideas and activities that they have learned from using the MindMatters materials as the need arises, for example, when new students arrive at the school.

*In any given class there might be five or six new kids which come from different schools so ice breakers and those sorts of activities, it's probably good for those new kids to be involved in that. Staff 2005*

It is interesting to note that while no formal MindMatters curriculum is planned in Years 11 and 12, students remain positive about the opportunity that Pastoral Care period provides to develop a close relationship with their Pastoral Care teacher and to discuss issues that are important to them.

*Having Pastoral Care classes where you don't do things, I think it's working on that process faster, because while you're sitting there doing nothing, the teacher walks around and has a chat with you. And so I think (for) younger students that has a lot more value for them than this is how you deal with things, kind of issues, whereas once you're more mature, it's then that they start taking those kind of less structured lessons. Student 2005*

One concrete example of this opportunistic learning was described by another student:

*A perfect example recently. There was a car accident and a boy (not from the school) our age in Year 12, died and our Pastoral Care teacher and Mr (name) were all in the room and talked about the importance of not drinking and driving and it was incredible, like it was really ... They started crying, that's how compassionate and worried and how devoted they are to us. Student 2005*

### **Changes in counselling arrangements**

As previously mentioned, throughout the first two years of the evaluation period, the school had in place an arrangement with a nearby university whereby students in the Masters of Psychology program would see students under supervision and the experienced clinical supervisor would also see more difficult cases requiring more experience. This arrangement ceased in 2005, due to changes at the university. While new arrangements are in place they are considered less than adequate.

*And then there was a period of time, throughout first term, for instance, when we did not have access to any counsellor or behaviour management consultant. Towards the end of last term we made contact again with one of the consultants that came in here. We've got an arrangement now where, at this stage, she's coming in still once a week, only for a couple of hours. Staff 2005*

The school is therefore required to carefully prioritise the neediness of students to access this limited counselling time. For other students, parents often pressure the school to make recommendations as to where they could access counselling support in the community.

*But you've just got to prioritise and recommend - because we don't hesitate to recommend to parents that they seek support outside of the school. They often ask us for recommendations and both (the chaplain) and I are loathe to do it. We very rarely make a recommendation other than to the consultants that we worked with at (the university) and then we did (recommend) a private practice - depending on what the concern was and we would refer parents to seek advice from them. Staff 2005*

### **Access to general practitioners**

The issue of the school's relationship with general practitioners was raised for the first time at the fourth visit. It is apparent that the school has throughout the evaluation period had on occasion referred students to general practitioners and has in turn been approached by medical practitioners in relation to students with particular needs.

*There have been times when one of the local paediatricians makes contact with us, either because they want our input into some observations of particular students and their behaviour prior to them being more comfortable with a particular diagnosis. There are also times, more recently, where I was working with a student who was a senior student, who I ended up on her behalf, making contact with a GP and organising - and actually I was with her at the time and speaking to the GP while she was there. And he did believe that she was suffering and needed treatment for depression and she had come to us - actually her friends had firstly said something and then she came to us - so first of all, first we rang to ask his advice. Staff 2005*

In this instance, the GP who was approached by the school was known to the school as he was a parent of another student.

Other contacts between the school and medical practitioners are more often mediated by the parents as illustrated in the comment below:

*I can think of two parents that have come and spoken to me about having consulted the GP and the work that the GP has been doing with their child in terms of - a part of it was, I suppose, prior to a diagnosis but then after a diagnosis has been made, in the treatment their child - and it was a physical illness - one was to do with Attention Deficit Disorder and the other who was working in consultation with the specialist, but it was with Asperger's, and there was another one in relation to an adolescent - now in Year 9 - with depression and in each of those cases it wasn't a matter of .... Almost a diagnosis. When we give medication.  
Staff 2005*

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

### 7.1 Issues that helped

#### Positive professional development experiences

As indicated earlier, four staff attended professional development training organised by MindMatters late in 2001. This experience resulted in a strong commitment to introduce the program by those who had attended and the formation of a small team to plan implementation.

The group were highly complimentary of the way in which the two-day training was conducted, acknowledging that teachers are a very critical audience.

*I don't know if you realise this but the worst thing you can ever do, or the worst group of people you can ever present to are teachers. They are so critical. If you're presenting and they sit there and they either are thinking 'I've got better things to do with my time' and half of them don't want to be there anyway. Although, I think (it was) different with the MindMatters (training). I think that's because they wanted to be there. So the presenters I was very impressed with because they really did keep us engaged the whole time and that was important and it was well timed. The breaks were just when we needed a break. Staff, 2002*

Later in 2003, a further seven teachers attended formal in-servicing on MindMatters.

Despite this level of training many of the pastoral care teachers seemed to be struggling for direction, particularly with reference to the topic of 'Loss and Grief'. To address the problem, the school's chaplain was enlisted to speak to staff in a group situation and then to take the students through the first session of 'Loss and Grief'.

*I have to say I still think some of the staff were only skirting around the issues (with loss and grief) but it was a first step for them. We also realised at the end of that that it would be of great benefit if we could get more training for the staff. And we did...*

*So I thought that we'd address that in as much as we had Father X, who himself is an outstanding teacher and a priest who is so in touch with kids and reality. He spent time with the staff, talking them through the whole process. Head of Middle School, 2004*

The teachers who were interviewed in 2004 seemed to appreciate the lead given to them.

*Somebody was actually able to give me some key words that I was going to look for because prior to that it was all just 'hey I have no clue what to do here' so the in-servicing and the group getting together before hand is very important so we did a better job. Staff 2004*

#### Positive staff attitudes or reactions

St Cuthbert's school has a clear policy direction of supporting the pastoral care of the students and teachers who are recruited to work at the school take up their positions knowing that they are required to support this policy. On the whole, students reflect that their teachers' attitudes towards them are very caring and supportive.

*Like guardian angels, they watch over you. They're like looking at your footsteps, like where do you think you're going and they'll guide you in the right direction.*  
Student 2002

In view of these general attitudes, the adoption of MindMatters in the Pastoral Care period was generally supported by staff, despite the fact that certain difficulties arose in some years.

There were real concerns during 2002 and 2003 that some teachers were somewhat resistant to the introduction of MindMatters for various reasons such as having too many things to teach, and feeling that the content of MindMatters was outside of their area of expertise.

By 2004 the Head was more than satisfied with the efforts that teachers in Years 7 and 8 had made to take on board the new material:

*There's been no wall going up and even though they've all had to step outside of their comfort zone in some way or another they have been prepared to do it.*  
Head of Middle School, 2004

However, it was clear that this was not the case for all teachers and the Head also expressed very serious concerns about staff attitudes (see below).

One student was very perceptive when commenting

*I'd say the effectiveness of the program does rely on the teachers and the way they teach.* Student, 2004

### **Helpful leadership**

The wholehearted commitment of the Head of Middle School to the introduction of MindMatters and the more general reorientation of the Pastoral Care period is a key factor in the school's successful adoption and maintenance of the MindMatters resources into the curriculum.

Further, this staff member appears to have the general support of the principal and school council as revealed in the extent to which solutions to implementation policies were broadly supported and the emphasis on bullying in the curriculum was supported by policy and practice.

*We've had a principal that once a commitment is made, then it's a commitment, and that was how I felt, once I agreed to be (involved). That once that commitment was made it was a professional and a personal commitment.* Head of Middle School, 2004

Staff members rarely directly expressed either positive or negative comments about the leadership, but in summing up, one teacher was full of praise for the executive for its administrative support and public relations efforts in support of the work going on in the classrooms:

What issues did this school face during implementation?

*One of the things that I noticed, when we did the 'Bullying and Harassment', the school really backed it up. Fantastic it was in the newsletter for months, the school's bullying policy, zero tolerance ra ra. And I think what the kids got out of it, if they do get up the courage to go and tell of some unacceptable behaviour, something will happen as a result of it. Staff, 2003*

As previously mentioned the school chaplain, a man held in very high regard by all in the school community, was very supportive of the school's plan for MindMatters and was prepared to extend leadership and support to Year 9 teachers in addressing their awkwardness about teaching students the 'Loss and Grief' module.

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

In essence MindMatters philosophy runs parallel to St Cuthbert's overall ethos, so it was to be expected that it would slot into the Pastoral Care program subject matter without too much fine tuning. This was especially so because the school had been using Lion's Quest up until the arrival of MindMatters and there were some common areas between the two. The school sensibly integrated the two programs for the older classes in the evaluation years in an effort to ease the Year 10 students into the MindMatters scheme.

The MindMatters program seemed to strike a chord with the staff who went to the in-service courses. Quite likely, it explicitly targeted both the underlying aims and concerns that the staff have for their students:

*The reason I like it is because of all the PD stuff I've looked at, by golly it's user friendly. And when I say user friendly, I don't mean that it's easy to implement, although it is, it's actually easy to implement. It doesn't get caught up in the jargon, you know, basically if you're a literate person and if you have experience with teaching, or if your classroom management is working well, there's no need to second-guess. It's a very user-friendly program. Staff 2003*

### **Accountability mechanisms**

From 2003, the students' report card was amended to include a report form their Pastoral Care teacher about the material covered and the individual student's participation in the discussions and activities in the Pastoral Care class.

*They've got a section in the reports and are now called Pastoral Care activities and in that section they actually report on - firstly what they've done - an outline of what was covered over the semester and then some sort of comment on the students' level of engagement in the activities. Staff, 2005*

Further, at least in Years 7 and 8, teachers are required to report in writing to the Stage Coordinator on their coverage of the material outlined in the scope and sequence document.

The effect of these accountability strategies means that for those teachers who are required to report, have come to take a more serious approach to the Pastoral Care period, including students to have a book for the subject, just as they would for any other.

### **Support for Pastoral Care teachers**

In line with the importance placed on Pastoral Care at St Cuthbert's, Pastoral Care teachers are given additional support in the form of an extra release period, thus ensuring that they

have time for preparation, or at least ensuring that the issue of time is removed as an excuse for not addressing the content teaching aspect of Pastoral Care periods.

*The Pastoral Care period is actually a part of your teaching load so when you have X amount of periods teaching under this current timetable, I think for every four teaching periods you get one release period. So not only is it a part of your teaching load, you get subject preparation time to compensate it and, as well as that, and it's since the MindMatters program came in, we have actually allocated all Pastoral Care teachers one extra preparation period. So if you're a Pastoral Care teacher....all Pastoral Care teachers are given one extra - on top of everything else - one extra release period. So under the current timetable if you were teaching the whole time and didn't have any executive duties, but you were not a Pastoral Care teacher, your teaching load out of the possible 70 periods - 58 would be teaching, you'd have 12 release from face to face. If you are a Pastoral Care teacher, 57 are teaching, you have 13 release from face to face. So it would be very hard for them to (complain). Head of Middle School, 2005*

### **Participation in MindMatters evaluation**

The Head of Middle School acknowledged that being part of the MindMatters evaluation process had been a benefit to her in the implementation phase. This mostly related to keeping the program as a high priority in her own mind, which kept her working on it energetically and constantly reflecting on it. Perhaps the interviews with the teachers also had the effect of promoting their reflection on their teaching and the progress of MindMatters over the evaluation phase:

## **7.2 Issues that hindered**

### **Negative professional development issues**

There were no overtly negative statements about the school's leadership, but it became apparent during the interviews that there was an undercurrent of disappointment and irritation that most of the teaching staff had not been better prepared for their task in terms of practical teaching strategies.

A significant proportion of staff interviewed expressed concerns throughout the evaluation on the lack of professional development for a program that took staff into hitherto uncharted waters. Many of the teachers felt almost incompetent in tackling some of the sensitive issues such as 'Loss and Grief' and 'Understanding Mental Illness'.

*We're going to get back and do another unit on depression, unless somebody comes up and gives us some really good groundwork there I'm going to be very frightened about delivering that as well. Staff, 2003*

*We were very uncomfortable about doing grief and loss, without any training in any counselling methods at all. Staff, 2003*

*I would feel for my own personality, I'd like to be prepped up on the difficult subjects. I wouldn't mind someone else like a counsellor say, this is what you could expect in loss and grief and if this came up it might be a good idea to handle it like this. Staff, 2003*

### **Communication issues**

Despite the fact that a comprehensive scope and sequence document had been prepared for Years 7 to 10, and despite the assertion by the Head of Middle School that this had been made available, there were a number of statements by several teachers that they had not been made aware of the units that were being covered in years other than their own.

*With the MindMatters program you get this little chunk and I haven't really got an idea of what the big scope is, even for Year 9. I've only heard rumour that I'm doing 'Loss and Grief' next. I haven't seen anything. So I feel like it's with the people who are developing it too, they don't have time either, they're just developing this little chunk. 'Here you go'. Whereas we don't always see what's the big picture or.... Staff, 2003*

*I don't think there has really been that continuum explained. I know that Year 7 teachers coming in have just been told, this is what we're doing in Year 7, (you've got to do it on Thursday, go for it. Staff, 2003*

By 2004, more of the teachers interviewed seemed to be aware of what they were at least expected to be teaching in each term, even though they may be unaware of what is taught in other years. It is possible, however, that this perception may not be generalised to Year 10 teachers who were not interviewed as revealed by the following:

*I met with all of the Year 7, 8 and 10 Pastoral Care staff because the 9s were away on camp and the Year 10 confirmed that they had done no work at all on 'Understanding Mental Illness', on 'Loss and Grief', they were quite unsure as to what I was talking about. Head of Middle School, 2004*

Individual teachers in particular years indicated that they felt they would benefit from having the opportunity to discuss the problems they were experiencing with teaching MindMatters with their colleagues. It is apparent that there is little time for pastoral care teachers to meet and discuss these issues in the same way that, for example, mathematics teachers or language teachers might regularly meet.

*I still think that we need to discuss this and we literally don't get a lot of time. We're not just making excuses there and we certainly don't have the formal time. Staff, 2003*

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

There seem to be three main reasons why certain staff appeared to have developed negative attitudes towards the implementation of the MindMatters resources.

Firstly, as reported previously in this document, staff members frequently felt as though they were out of their depth and ill equipped to be presenting some of the program to students, particularly those who were required to teach 'Loss and Grief' (Year 9) and 'Understanding Mental Illness' (Year 10).

Secondly, in the early years of implementation (2003 in particular) it became apparent during the interviews that some of the Year 9 and 10 students were extremely resentful, even hostile towards having structured activities forced into what had previously been their 'free time':

*I had a lot of trouble getting it started with my class, getting them to participate, they say a lot, why do we have to do this stuff? Very negative, wouldn't discuss it, wouldn't contribute and very hostile. They would say 'Why do we have to do Pastoral Care?' Staff, 2003*

By 2004, most students in Years 9 and 10 would have experienced a Pastoral Care period in which curriculum related to the original scope and sequence would have been taught by their home room teacher. Nevertheless, many had also experienced that some home room teachers did not teach anything during these periods. This inconsistency in teaching the set pastoral care curriculum served to perpetuate resistance in older student groups.

Thirdly, negative reactions may be due to the very heavy workloads of teachers in this school where as well as a normal teaching load, they are expected to support co-curricular activities outside of school hours.

*I was saying that it is a very busy school and with that goes a degree of stress. There is no doubting that and I don't think there's a teacher in the school that hasn't experienced that, you're bordering on being overwhelmed because it is full on. There is an incredibly high expectation from the wider community that we give our heart and soul and I think most teachers - one way or the other - they really do, so when it comes to having to do this, particularly if it's out of their comfort zone, like asking a maths teacher to go and take an extra and go and teach Calculus - well they mightn't want to do it but it's certainly not as stressful, but asking that same Maths teacher to now familiarise themselves and present work on something like this, that takes extra energy and effort, both emotionally and physically. Staff, 2004*

Some school leaders appeared to accept these difficulties and adopted a laissez faire attitude towards teachers who decided not to teach the set program. There appeared to be no repercussions for teachers who simply opted out of teaching the required curriculum during Pastoral Care periods.

The expression of such feelings of inadequacy was seen by some school leaders as an excuse for not being prepared to give the MindMatters program a fair trial. Given the clear and explicit nature of the MindMatters lesson resources, it was seen that any teacher with a commitment to Pastoral Care, and who had good pedagogy and behaviour management skills should have been able to overcome these difficulties.

*I have got staff sitting there saying, 'I'm a maths teacher, I shouldn't be doing this'. My immediate response is, 'Excuse me, you're a teacher so you are interacting every minute of the day with kids'. You know, these are just basic teaching skills. Head of Middle School, 2003*

By 2004, however, this leader was prepared to acknowledge that for some teachers, the discomfort expressed was really genuine and hence acknowledged the need for more support.

*So anyway, my impression was that it wasn't totally resistant, it was 'I need support'.*

*I mean once I validated that I appreciated the difficulties of walking into an area without background knowledge and training I think that (the teacher) then felt that there was some, not just empathy, but validation of her concerns. Head of Middle School, 2004*

Certain teachers reported a perception that to teach some of the Pastoral care curriculum authentically would require them to expose themselves somewhat to their students and having feelings of discomfort about this.

*I think there are some teachers, not just in this school, wherever, it's too hard for them, not because it takes effort or anything but because they are so uncomfortable with it. You know, there has to be a degree of personal honesty,*

*Emotionally you've got to connect and you've got to give of yourself before you can make the connection and I think one of the factors with that is there are some teachers who aren't able or aren't prepared to do that. They're so far out of their comfort zone. Head of Middle School 2004*

### **Lack of resources**

The school's successful implementation of MindMatters may have been enhanced further if it hadn't been constrained by a lack of resources. St Cuthbert's charges moderate fees compared to other similar independent schools, and as it is a new and still growing school, a lot of its capital must go into large scale infrastructure.

This may have had the effect of limiting the funding available for such things as Professional Development and 'nuts and bolts' resources like novels the themes of which dovetail with both the English and MindMatters curricula.

*One of the areas that we were certain that this could be integrated with very successfully, was obviously English, particularly the bullying and harassment thing. The restraint there has been the financial one because it meant buying new books and this wasn't going to happen. Staff 2003*

### **Changes of staff**

The MindMatters core team, established early in 2002, was meeting infrequently in 2003 because of a number of losses or changes in staff that were the 'drivers' of the program.

Further, from year to year, different teachers may be chosen to be pastoral care teachers for a particular Year. Someone who has a Year 7 homeroom in one year may have Year 10 in another. Such changes may work against the accumulation of experience with certain curriculum topics and the building of confidence in teachers in addressing those topics.

### **Change fatigue**

Issues relating to heavy workloads have been dealt with previously in this document, but it is fair to say that both the Executive and teachers suffer additionally from stresses associated with the pace of change in modern educational institutions, particularly one that offers such a variety of activities and support services as St Cuthbert's.

*I know there are restraints. They're every time you turn around the Department's coming out with a new syllabus document and they're making more and more things mandatory. head of Middle School 2003*

One teacher reported on a number of occasions that while accepting the introduction of MindMatters, it was seen as a somewhat unnecessary change.

*Well I appreciated working with it for 3 years and therefore I just feel the old one (Lions Quest) which usually worked with the year 7 group for me was the safety net I could fall back on. But that's not to say I don't appreciate the MindMatters one and would go ahead with it, just maybe hoping for structures and advice or pre-prepared term programs for MindMatters as we have (had) for that one. Staff 2003*

### **Crowded curriculum**

Teachers of course are highly committed to teaching their academic curriculum for which they are formally accountable, and it is understandable that in a competition has number one priority when they are squeezed for time:

*And it really comes down to preparation I think and I mean if I had to choose between preparation for that (MindMatters or Pastoral Care period) and preparation for an English class, then I'm afraid I'll probably choose the preparation for the academic subject and hope that I can get by. Staff 2003*

Even a senior student recognised the full-on curriculum and the difficulties it can present:

*St Cuthbert's sometimes offers too much in a way because we've got so many other extra curricular things to choose from that sometimes I think people suffer from being involved in too many areas and not focusing on the academic, so sometimes they could be a bit more focused on going to school to learn things. Student 2003*

St Cuthbert's relies on staff being highly dedicated and to contribute to co-curricula activities and to be there to support the students.

The teaching of a pastoral care curriculum based on MindMatters and other resources also needs to compete for time with the less structured role of the pastoral care teacher.

*There're times when we like them to also just liaise with their classes as well and talk about things and have a chat about the uniform and even have a look in their diary and see what's been happening. And to put all that in, you might find that you don't have time to go through the MindMatters program. There's a lot of constraints outside of class but also within the class, getting the things that you want to get done. Staff 2003*

### **Unplanned duplication**

Both teachers and students raised the issue that the issue of bullying is programmed across the Years which gives the impression of repetitiveness.

*(They're) finishing with bullying and harassment in Year 8 and then straight back in Year 9, we're doing the same stuff but slightly different. The kids are bored. Staff 2003*

The Head of Middle School recognised this as a problem with the programming of MindMatters and indicated that it would be looked at closely and remedied.

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

According to the student interviewees, who ranged from Year 7 to Year 12, reactions to the MindMatters implementation varied according to the age of the student. Students in Years 7 and 8 were, by the third visit, much more accepting of the teaching of a pastoral care curriculum than those in higher Years who had experienced a more unstructured pastoral care period.

Some students reported that they did not enjoy the experience of airing their feelings in front of their fellow students, especially about a subject such as bullying. Some believed that it would make them a target for the bullies. Others said that they didn't want to say anything that might put them off side with their group. Being accepted by 'the group' was apparently more significant than their fear of being bullied. The students' willingness to talk about these issues appears to be related to the style and personality of their pastoral care teacher.

*Yeah some Pastoral Care teachers you can't really bond with them because they just don't really open themselves up to you ...*

*Because they're so different from you.*

*And you don't really want to open yourself up to them so you can't really talk to them.*

*Students 2004*

Almost all students rated the quality of the Pastoral Care teacher as the most important the barometer of the success or enjoyment of Pastoral Care and, hence, MindMatters.

*They've got to tell you stuff so that you can trust them and they can trust you.*

and

*They've got to be fair and they always give you another chance.*

The issue of the students' openness for and comfort with disclosure in class discussions was also raised by some teachers. The training of students to know when and how to speak, when and how to listen is a whole learning unit on its own according to several of the teachers.

*I've had to make up a whole series of how to discuss things, like techniques and things for discussion we've ranged far and wide with a continuum and also things like that so that we can actually discuss properly. We started off in a big circle. That's the only way we could do it, with the hand in the air and now we're actually to a point where we can just sit normally in the class and have a decent discussion in depth.*

*but when you're in discussion, I think Year 8's especially, they're quite reticent to actually say anything in front of the class. Staff 2003*

### 7.3 Other issues

#### Role of School Environment

There was a consensus among parents, students and teachers in regard to the difficulties posed by the steep site on which the school is located and the consequent spread of the buildings down the slope. This creates problems related to : too many stairs, heavy bags being lugged great distances, buildings being far way from one another; lack of wet weather protection when travelling between buildings; and a lack of seating and general weather protected areas for congregating.

In turn this situation could put pressure on students who are too crowded or uncomfortable in their environment.

*I would say from an environment it's just a bad spot for a school. But I suppose it's relative. We came from a school that had huge amounts of soccer fields, rugby fields, cricket pitches, tennis courts, space for kids to run and play and I think, in some instances, a lot of issues that kids might have maybe because they're all on top of each other. Parent 2002*

*Can I just say my class is what my class is depending on the weather. Staff 2003*

*There's no shade, there's no seating, the kids are very much what they are as a product of their typical environment. Staff 2003*

*And our discipline and our lessons' successes stem from whether they're sodden, whether they're mud-spattered or .....Staff 2003*

#### Confidentiality Issues

Students repeatedly mentioned their fear of confiding in a teacher in case that teacher divulged information to others. This is perhaps why the personality of the Pastoral Care teacher is of such great importance to the students. They need to be sure of the teacher's rock solid trustworthiness.

*You'll go to them and then they tell you something, they give you advice but they won't go in and talk to the other person. Student 2004*

On the other hand, one student pointed out to a teacher that she intended to keep her personal views to herself. Perhaps the teacher should be commended for her sensitivity in determining that her student did have a right to keep her counsel.

*one of them said to me I'm not telling you what I really think, that's not your business, because I didn't know them very well and I thought perhaps that's really a good point to, perhaps it's not my right to ...Staff 2004*

#### Resilience of staff

An underlying assumption of the implementation of certain elements of MindMatters is that students can learn much about life skills from the experiences of staff. Yet this can be difficult for staff who do not have positive mental health for whatever reasons at a particular time.

A member of staff confessed to having some resilience problems of his own which made it difficult for him to communicate resilience techniques to his students:

What issues did this school face during implementation?

*I can't handle Resilience, I can't handle making kids resilient because I'm not resilient myself and you can only take so much and you can't just keep turning the other cheek all the time Staff 2003*

### **Choice of PC Rooms**

Staff who were forced to use the Library for Pastoral Care classes said that its lack of privacy (this is a large area with people constantly coming and going and other staff around) worked against discussing personal issues or opening up about feelings.

A teacher who used the Art room said it was totally unsuitable because of its size and set up. Once again, it was difficult to feel an intimacy with the students and their issues in such a spread out arrangement.



## 8 Issues Identified at the Fourth Visit

### Positive school ethos

As identified in the earlier visits to this school, the positive school ethos provided a fertile ground for the introduction of MindMatters. Further evidence of this ethos, and the type of openness and trustfulness that exists in the school is provided in the following excerpt from a teacher who is talking about her senior English class and a discussion that arose from the text 'Looking for Ali Brandi':

*One of my boys, who's a seriously cool character – seriously cool – we're talking about the problem that one of the kids committed suicide .... And he said oh that wouldn't happen here. I said, come on... no, no, no, at St Cuthbert's where we all love one another bla bla bla. He was deadly serious and it blew me away. I just thought, here's this kid that's out there and all t his sort of stuff and he, as far as he was concerned, everyone here loved one another. I thought .... I just walked off .... I t was wonderful and what else was good, not a single kid in the class poo-poo'd him. Staff 2005*

This story reflects not only the willingness of a student to be open with his classmates but also the respectful way in which his classmates received his comments.

### Teacher reactions to MindMatters (positive and negative)

The issue of teacher discomfort with teaching the Loss and Grief material (programmed for Year 9 or 10) was ongoing in 2005.

Reasons for discomfort range from fear that the material was not relevant to fear that raising the topic will raise the emotional level of the class. It was reported that one teacher argued that she should not teach this topic because 'none of the kids have actually experienced it'. Another teacher refused to teach the topic because 'what's her name has a terminal illness, she has terminal cancer, I'm not teaching it'.

Other teachers are wary about raising even more general issues which they fear might 'open up a can of worms'....

*...with Year 9 and 10 kids where loss of boyfriends and girlfriends and stuff like that is often enough to send them over the edge. Staff 2005*

... and then worry about whether or not they have handled these 'tricky' situations competently.

*but when you walk out and think what should I have done there, how should I have handled that and all t hose sorts of things, Staff 2005*

The Head of Middle School and main advocate for MindMatters remains determined that the issue of Loss and Grief is adequately addressed.

*And it would have to be the one thing I have got one goal before I either depart from this school; or take a role change, it would be to get professional development, not for individuals but for the staff on this whole issue, because I honestly believe that would take away a lot of that (reluctance). Head of Middle School 2005...*

Teachers themselves proffered to the evaluator a plausible solution to the difficulty posed by varying teacher confidence with handling sensitive topics like Loss and Grief. They suggested that, as some teachers have strengths in this area, they be the ones who are appointed as PC teachers for Year 9.

*I mean there'd be people in the school here who would be great at probably dealing with loss and grief but you put them in a situation where they'd have to start talking about team work and relating to other people and all those sorts of things, if they don't have those skills then they probably... Well everyone's got different skills in different areas. They'd be great Year 9 Pastoral Care teachers but probably not as good with a Year 7 class.*

*What (name) said there, too probably goes back, what sort of areas you're comfortable in teaching but also the kids you're relating to, because there are teachers who can relate pretty well to younger kids, and teachers who can relate to older kids. Staff 2005*

Some teachers express a positive reaction to the MindMatters resources, identifying the advantage of the lessons being clearly structured and well thought through.

*I was speaking to some maths and science teachers about this the other day, particular the maths teacher, they were saying they find MindMatters a Godsend because it's structured. Teacher 2005*

The convenience of MindMatters is obvious to other teacher who realise that fifty minutes is a long time for a totally unstructured pastoral care period and that MindMatters is useful in helping to provide valid activities to fill this time.

While many teachers mentioned that students whined about the repetition of the theme of bullying in their Pastoral care lessons, one teacher reflected on her own positive experience of teaching a class on bullying:

*I know we had a discussion on harassment that we were doing last week and the time just flew but at the end of the lesson, the bell went and there were still hands up, they still had things to say but we had to finish there. So the kids were all into it and they would have kept going for the next lesson; they were keen to sort of keep going with it so I guess it just depends on how they go about. And I think as long as you don't do it to death either, it's one of those ones that a lot of the time it's good in small doses. Staff 2005*

In earlier visits, it was identified that the implementation of MindMatters was positively enhanced by the attitudes and teaching ability of certain of the PC teachers. In 2005 students themselves, while providing verification that MindMatters is actually used in PC classes, comment on the effectiveness of their teachers' abilities.

*I can't believe that because Ms (name), she's the nicest person - you don't get any nicer than Ms (Name). She's my Pastoral Care teacher, and at the start of the year we started doing more homework in Pastoral Care but now we've got onto the subject of stress, why you get stressed, stressed with different people and what it does to you and different ways that you can try and relieve stress.*

*Last year we had a fantastic teacher (Mr Name), he was very personal and he covered bullying, harassment, racism, all of last year and that was in the first term. He communicated. Sometimes it was a personal experience, sometimes he did a play with us, where we would act out problems of smoking. He had a great way of communicating it to us. Student exchange 2005*

### **Inconsistent implementation**

From the outset it needs to be acknowledged that teachers have always been given the freedom to decide whether or not they use MindMatters or in fact introduce their own ideas or borrow from other curriculum packages, so long as they adhere to the topics contained within the Scope and Sequence.

*I use it (MindMatters) as a back-up. I don't use it as the main part of my Pastoral Care program at all but I've been teaching Pastoral Care program for quite a long time. In 1979 I was with a group of teachers that trialled Lions Quest. Which was the first self-esteem program introduced into Australia. So I've got a very long background. Staff 2005*

This obviously leads to a considerable variation in the way in which topics in the Scope and Sequence are addressed and the extent to which the individual teachers use MindMatters.

Students themselves commented on the fact that PC teachers needed to exhibit particular qualities for PC lessons to really work.

*In Pastoral Care when you're trying to tell them about bullying and stuff like that, you can't just be a teacher, you have to be a friend.*

*Some of the teachers need to work on it a little bit better but some of the teachers are really good. Student exchange 2005*

Of more concern is the evidence from earlier visits was that for some PC classes in Years 9 and 10, very little of the planned Scope and Sequence of lessons based on MindMatters was actually implemented. This was confirmed in 2005 when talking to Year 11 and 12 students and with teachers.

Teachers who did implement the program pointed to the problems it creates for them when other teachers do not follow the Scope and Sequence.

*To me, if you have a program, and everybody follows it, I think, regardless of the program, and you know, it's a valid program, there's are you in it, at the implementation I thought, yes the package looks good, if we all do it, enthusiastically embrace it, then this will be good but you still see students saying well why do we have to do this when that class doesn't do it, that does make the students I think wonder about the validity of the program and the merits of it if other people are not doing it, but then I'd have to say there's probably other aspects of the academic courses that I could probably say they should be taught and are not, so the Pastoral Care program is really no different. Staff 2005*

This teacher held the view that the school needed to increase its accountability structure to make sure all teachers toed the line with Pastoral care.

*I think it just comes down to whether the particular teacher is prepared to embrace it totally, as it should be or not and I suppose it's really up to the school whether the school decides to carefully monitor to see it's done or they don't. I mean I suppose it's like any people, anywhere, some will do it by the dotted line. Some won't. Some don't care if there're consequences or not. Some will do it if there are consequences for not conforming. To me, I haven't seen from the beginning, that it's very strict that you must do it; there's been a very much up to you; and so it doesn't surprise me that there are people who are not doing it.*

### **Leadership for MindMatters in the school**

As previously mentioned, the leadership of the Head of Middle School has been critical in ensuring an ongoing commitment to the use of the program in the school. Although other teachers were initially trained, they did not subsequently have any major role in implementation other than to assist with the conduct of the initial in-house training that was provided to teachers.

*There were four of us who went to the first training. (First name) left teaching although he still works at the school; it's not in a teaching role at all. (Second name) is still here - she's the Director of - they call it engineering - but as of next term it will be computing. She has never had any input into the implementation at all, other than when we returned from the initial training, we had a professional development day and we included in that particular day, it took about an hour or an hour and a half; we did a few activities with the staff and (she) was a part of that. There was (third name), who is the Director of English and he was the same; whilst he participated in the day he had no input into the implementation and that was the four original. Staff 2005*

Interestingly the strong support also came from teachers who had not been trained.

*But it was just interesting that probably the two main people that really acted as a support had had no training in it, so they basically took the books home and read through the books and had a look at how it would be appropriate, because at this stage - it was only going to be Year 7 and 8 - how could they mould it in with both the 7 and 8 Pastoral Care and the curriculum. Staff 2005*

### **Impact of staff turnover**

Staff turnover at the school has always been 'Low, very low'. Nevertheless during the period of the evaluation (three years) the school experienced the resignation of the principal and the retirement of at least three senior teachers (that the evaluator was made aware of). In two cases, this did have some impact on the implementation of MindMatters although the Head of Middle School has put in place strategies to try and overcome any difficulties.

*I mean last year it (support from teachers) was very strong because on the second group that we sent down to training, (name) was one of the people that went down and he was such an advocate - he was so supportive of it. He was one of our 7/8 teachers, up until the end of this year. (Name) and his wife (wife's name), she was also one of the 7/8 teachers who was also very, very supportive of it and made sure the programming in both Years 7 and 8 was being presented to the kids and there was follow-up to it and everything like that. They both retired at the end of last year. And he was very, very supportive of it. So it's having that team in there.*

*This year is a tiny bit different only because I've got quite a few new staff there who were finding, in a way, because there was nothing else happening, taught secondary classes before, but it's with the support of those staff and reassuring them that there is a huge amount of flexibility that they can build into the program and you need to adapt it to meet your teaching style. Head of Middle School 2005*

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

### 9.1 Improved student well being

#### Supports for students

According to parents, students and staff, St Cuthbert's has long held 'student support' as a high priority and was seen as doing this job very well. If any changes as a result of MindMatters can be noted, they could be described as a formalising and a 'tightening up' of structures and policies that were already in place.

Both parents and students are more informed about student welfare and support matters through channels such as the school newsletters, the school handbook and meetings (for parents), and via Assemblies and teaching in Pastoral Care and other subject areas (for students).

The elevation of the profile of issues such as bullying (in all its guises) has given some victims the strength to 'break the code of silence' and know they will be supported by the school, and essentially by their peers.

Parents were appreciative of, not only the improvement in the bullying matters, but also the overall attention to life skills and the preparation of students to be a part of the wider community which may be very different in character to St Cuthbert's nurturing environment.

*Preparation for life beyond school ...which has been sadly lacking for so many years. You'd teach them 2 + 2 and how to spell and this sort of thing and how to do essays and compositions but life skills ..... Life skills are so important. Parent 2004*

Subtle changes have been occurring in the nature of the relationships between students and the Pastoral Care teachers. Students have come to accept (some of them grudgingly it would seem) that Pastoral Care is a 'report card' subject and that it has a purpose. Likewise, staff have had to become used to the idea of the formalisation of Pastoral Care lesson procedures and perhaps more importantly, some have had to enter new territory by dropping their guard and allowing their 'soft underbelly' to be shown to the students in an effort to establish authentic connections with their students.

There is at least some evidence that these changes may result in increased capacity for pastoral teachers to bring about genuine social learning in the students as illustrated by the following comment from a Year 8 student.

*Like your Pastoral Care teacher you build a bond with over the year. And then like last year in our class we had heaps of trouble with some of the girls and stuff and our teacher was really good because we tried to build a bond with him and he could kind of talk to us..... so like the boys kind of learnt to respect us and our teacher helped them to figure out the girls' problems as well and so that kind of made everyone's friendships as well. Student (female) 2004*

That this is a direct result of MindMatters is uncertain, although one would think this might be less likely to eventuate if students were allowed to do homework during these periods instead of being required to address the social and emotional content of the MindMatters curriculum.

#### Bullying and harassment

Much of this focus of the implementation of MindMatters at St Cuthbert's has dealt with the issue of bullying.

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

In summary it can be reported that, since the implementation of MindMatters, the issue of bullying is managed better than before the introduction of the program. This is borne out by comments from all sections of the interviewees.

It would be wrong to think that bullying has ceased at the school - there is still a lot of work to be done, as acknowledged by the staff.

*I reckon one thing has really improved here - and I don't know what the cause of it is. If they know they're so-called dobbed on and something happens, they seem to be pretty scared of going for the dobber. Staff 2003*

*But this year I can see dramatic change in 12 months, just talking junior school on the way from the high school year, but there's definitely been a better approach to handling them (bullies). The students are more inclined to know that it shouldn't be tolerated now where as before perhaps if they were bullied they wouldn't speak up. Whereas now they're not worried about coming forward so much and there's been several articles in the newsletter, has been there this year, on bullying and that's made the parents a little bit more aware of the size of bullying because it's got lots of different disguises ...Parent 2004*

*...we were pushing this idea of as long as you keep quiet about it nothing can be done. Help us to help you then we can do something. Then a couple of kids - they weren't connected with each other. They weren't one group of friends that came up and said, Well Mrs ....., you need to know ....Head of Middle School 2003*

The conclusion could be drawn that, if this was a new skill development, MindMatters may have given the students the courage, the understanding, the empathy and the language to defend either themselves or their peers.

All parties in the interviews reported a significant decrease in physical bullying, yet continue to report that bullying in the form of social exclusion is still common, particularly with the older students (Years 9 and 10) and the girls. Perhaps this stems from a new awareness that bullying has a much wider definition than previously acknowledged, and that therefore there is more of a focus on spotting the more covert aspects of bullying.

Staff observed that students have their own definition of bullying, especially up to Year 9, which revolves around 'intent' in the incident (ie intentional versus inadvertent harm). Some students defend themselves with the line, 'It was only a joke.'

Overall, the teachers of Years 7-10 see bullying as a function of maturity. The less mature the students, the more justified seem some of the physical aspects of bullying. For example, 'He threw my hat around, so I can hit him.' Some of the students of those Years reportedly hold a clear belief that if the teachers won't deal with it in a way that the students think is satisfactory, the students WILL take matters into their own hands.

A junior student summed up the dilemma that is faced by some students in taking the MindMatters strategies on board to deal with bullies. The need to be part of 'the group' is often the overriding determinant of the student's reaction to a bullying incident:

*Talking about you've got to stand up to them and stuff but it really is hard like your friends are the ones that are doing it and you either risk losing your friends, or your reputation. What's more important? Your friends or your reputation? Student 2004*

### **Drugs and alcohol**

At the commencement of the MindMatters Evaluation, it was quickly established that drugs and alcohol were not significant problems at St Cuthbert's compared to other schools in the district. All participants in the interviews reported usage of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs as very low. Little change in this picture, if any, was reported and no effect that that could be attributed to the school's adoption of MindMatters.

The students in Years 7&8 who were interviewed in 2003 explained that the low use of drugs and alcohol amongst students was because of the school's influence, even when they were not in the school grounds or in school hours:

*I think our school has a lot more control over what people's actions are and what they do ..... and I think it's cool that this school has like control over those sorts of things.*

*I think the school influences your other decisions that you make outside the school*

A student was describing how he would expect that if he had been caught smoking he would be expelled, and he felt that if this happened his reputation would be ruined for life:

*I think that would stop their decision because it would give you a bad name for later in life, like, 'Oh yeah, there goes Harry, he smokes....'*

From the analysis of the students' interviews, one of the most fascinating aspects of the analysis was the students' fear of being seen as a user of any of these substances and the desire to be valued and trusted by both parents and the school, reflecting the effectiveness of the prevailing pro-social peer attitudes that are encouraged in the school.

*You find that the people that do take drugs are considered disgusting and they're the people that have lots of problems at home and at school. The kids that I know that smoke marijuana, if you got out their records of their school work they're like in the lower classes, they get like 30% and fail. Student 2004*

*St 1: They'd be sort of scared about their parents finding out from the school.*

*St 2: I think .... A huge disappointment in your life, if your parents lost full trust in you.....it would make you feel a bit like hurt inside so you wouldn't really ....*

*St 3: Yeah, like the actual punishment, that makes you feel bad but the main thing is you've lost your parents' trust.*

*St 4: Yeah, you've lost people at school's trust, people who were your friends might not be your friends anymore.*

*Students 2003*

### **Positive response in boys**

A number of the staff who were interviewed, as well as the Head of Middle School, identified positive progress in the boys at the school over the course of the MindMatters program. The improvement of the girls was less recognisable, but staff admitted that they had been more conscious of the boys' need to come to grips with their social relationships, so they may have overlooked the extent of the girls' development.

*Certain classes you could see began to get a sense of self, a sense of ownership, a sense of pride within themselves. They stopped labelling themselves but in a couple of the other classes, not the girls and the bullying I could see the incidents I was hearing of bullying just virtually disappeared with the boys. Head of Middle School 2003*

*I'm seeing in the boys, definitely a greater sense of community. (cf 2001). I'm seeing within them a - before I said to you it was like I could divide them into the angry group, the frightened group, I don't see the angry group. The angry group's not there anymore. Head of Middle School 2003*

### **Communication and cooperation**

Year 7 students on camp realised the possibilities of meeting and getting to know their peers in an environment focussed on wellbeing:

*St 1: ...You get to sleep beside other people, like in sleeping bags and all that. You spend a lot of time like with people around you; you know what all their hobbies are and all that.*

*St2: Yeah everyone changes on camp too; you see their other side. That's what I think anyway. Students Yrs 7/8 2004*

One teacher was very optimistic about the increased openness in communication that emerged when working through issues that students had raised during their frank and open discussions. She saw 'freedom of speech' as an impetus to further learning opportunities in the area.

*I think it's nice for my kids in my group to see that you're allowed to say things like discrimination and sexism at their teacher, I think it's nice for them to say I feel like things are unfair and it's because of all the teachers. So it's a great opportunity for them to say stuff. They still reckon it's not dealt with, they'll still insist that it's not fair and I'm in the middle of working through that. But I like that side of it. Staff 2004*

### **Empathy**

One of the teachers commented during the Evaluation that St Cuthbert's students lived a charmed life because the school was a little oasis of nurturing and homogeneity that they would not encounter again in the outside world. To an extent, MindMatters may have given some of the more protected students an insight into lives that are less comfortable and healthy than their own:

*...one positive thing at least I don't mind though, is the questionnaires sort of changed your outlook, you might be like concentrating on one aspect of school life and then you realise others are doing it tougher than you, because there are problems in the school, like bullying and so on and you don't realise that they need your support. And so you sort of look out for those people. So it has helped, the community as a whole I think. Students, 2004*

The development of empathy in some of the students may help to explain the increase in concern for peers who were experiencing troubles.

### **Help-seeking**

St Cuthbert's students were receiving many messages during the implementation of MindMatters that they need not have any fear in approaching people in the school for help of any kind. Perhaps with increased understanding that everyone suffers insecurities, losses and unhappiness from time to time in their lives and that this is normal life, the students may have begun to feel justified in speaking out and seeking some counsel.

Further, the fact that teachers were being made more aware of their pastoral role might have made them appear to the students to be worthy of confiding in:

*.....we also have evidence, over the last 18 months, that would indicate that there is a pretty clear message going out to the kids in terms of resilience, depression, general mental wellbeing, and it was interesting that you noted the number of cohorts in there were more willing to talk to somebody at school and I would have to say we've seen it. Head of Middle School 2004*

*You'll go to them (teachers) and then they tell you something, they give you advice but they won't go in and talk to the other person. Student 2004*

*These kids, what I find with me anyway will virtually tell me anything of importance and seriousness as it comes up, so while there's all this difficulty - what I think MindMatters and the Pastoral Care program are about - are helping people who really are in trouble. They will tell me and they'll want help. Staff 2004*

### **Awareness of MindMatters**

Few students and parents mentioned MindMatters by name, although both groups indicated that they knew it to be related to the Pastoral Care curriculum. Students interviewed in 2004, when reminded that MindMatters was largely what they did in Pastoral care periods, were very positive about the initiative.

*I think Year 11s going to be different because of the MindMatters experience that happened. Student 2004*

*I think like people who took interest in it (MM) and thought yes, we realised there is something that we have to deal with and something that will help us. I think it really helped them but the people that just sort of said, oh yes just Pastoral Care, .... they don't really care. I don't think it will do anything for them. But with the other people that have changed through it, I think it's like starting to affect them now. They're realising oh we missed out on something sort of thing. Student 2004*

Parents supported it as they had become more educated by the school on the topics of Bullying and Harassment; they appreciated any attempts to improve support structures and life education for their children.

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

Due to the focus of the implementation of MindMatters being on positive mental health and resilience, only a few students during the interviews actually mentioned the term 'mental illness' and that was likely to be related to an experience within their own family.

Nevertheless, it was felt that the school community had become more aware of the importance of and extent of mental illness, and that there was an increased comfort when talking about it.

*We're still learning with it but the gut feel is that it certainly has had some effect in a positive way, certainly in their knowledge and understanding and it being out there, you know, it is something that we talk about and we're not frightened to say, yeah this can and does happen and getting the kids to talk about it. Staff 2004*

### **Students supporting each other**

Representatives of all groups interviewed for the Evaluation commented on the perceived improvement in the willingness of students to offer a helping hand or word to other students who were having difficulties of one form or another. The Head of Middle School has a personal belief about the paramount importance of the peer group in improving social and also emotional well being :

*I've been saying this for years, the answer in controlling this (bullying) or minimising it lies with the peers. Head of Middle School 2004*

She reported that she spoke at an assembly, telling students that 15% of them would be bullied and 15% would be bullies. That left 70% and:

*...your mums and dads will always talk about peer pressure as if it's a bad thing. Trust me, this time it's a good thing! Head of Middle School 2004*

## **9.2 Negative impacts on students**

The reaction of some students to MindMatters reflects the difficulties of acknowledging some of the unpleasant realities of the material that it contains. Not all students (and teachers) are equalling willing to confront these issues

*They get them to look at like a movie maybe too serious or something for school.....all of a sudden this really serious video comes on about the death of someone or Alzheimer's or something like that and it's just like I don't want to have to deal with this while I'm at school. Student 2004*

Some areas of MindMatters were perceived to being covered too comprehensively. In particular, bullying was repeated too often according to most students and teachers and boredom set in, possibly reducing the effectiveness of the unit:

*You've got to be very careful and it's mainly with the bullying and harassment, so the resilience side of it you don't do an overkill because you do get the resistance if they've done bullying in term 1 and then they go on to the next stage for term 2....Head of Middle School 2004*

The Head of Middle School tuned in to this problem and was planning to change the sequencing. She also made it clear to the staff that they could vary their lesson delivery and program as long as the units were treated:

*Yes I really have emphasised with them that this isn't a rigid program by any means at all, that it is quite flexible to fit in with your particular class and what they're ready for and what fits in with what they're doing at that time.*

### **9.3 Positive impacts on staff**

#### **Increased knowledge and skill**

While certain negative views of staff have been reported throughout this document, it is important to note that there was a considerable amount of positiveness about the program and its ideals:

The staff expressed a broad belief in the value of a program like MindMatters in their school. Considering that less than one quarter of the staff had received Professional Development when the 2004 evaluation visit occurred, that is quite a vote of confidence in the perceived worthiness of MindMatters in St Cuthbert's.

#### **Positive changes in approach to teaching**

A number of staff members had felt extremely uncomfortable about going into some of the unfamiliar and emotionally challenging teaching areas. In the cases in which the school executive acknowledged their lack of confidence and took steps to assist eg providing in house PD sessions, splitting up groups of difficult students and assisting with lesson planning, there was an improvement in staff willingness to embrace the programs.

*But last term, when we did our Study Skills, I was really happy and confident with that and they were working very well and the groups have been broken up quite well, with maybe you've got 20 naughty boys and they've been broken up into the five groups, Staff 2004*

Teachers were starting to challenge themselves to find ways to deepen the level of discussions about certain issues.

*I'd like to see them, maybe a bit more guidance .... is required, because I'm finding a lot of (their answers) quite clichéd and I very much wanted them to go beneath the surface level of the discrimination, .....I want to actually get past that and go down to the next bit but I can't with my sort of yobbo set in there. Staff 2004*

### **9.4 Negative impacts on staff**

It is possible that the experience of having to teach MindMatters was, for some teachers, such a negative experience that it may have led to a reduction on self-confidence and a loss of satisfaction with their career as a teacher.

What impact did the changes arising from MindMatters have?

*it's probably a school thing - the program seemed a bit disjointed. Like we sort of ran out now. We haven't been given the next sort of instalment of MindMatters which I've been told is supposed to be Loss and Grief and I'm very uncomfortable about the prospect of me having to teach Loss and Grief. Staff 2003*

*I found it tough. I loathed it myself. I felt it was my worst lesson of the week every week. I've battled the kids and I felt as if the MindMatters program I needed to be a drama teacher in order to be able to deliver it. Staff 2003*

## **9.5 Plans for future Use**

At the end of the third visit, the Head of Middle School gave no indication that there are plans to scrap or modify the MindMatters program, only to integrate it more into KLA's. Parents and staff appear to support the direction of MindMatters, and value it for what it can potentially contribute to the well being of the entire school community.

At the time of writing, the Principal had received a transfer to another school. The future direction of Pastoral Care and MindMatters may depend on the attitude of the replacement Principal.

There seemed to be a consensus of opinion amongst the staff interviewed that the program ought to continue beyond the evaluation period and that Pastoral Care classes should be at least one of the vehicles:

*We've been made very aware of the importance of moving this on to the point where there were some negative remarks about the kids not taking it seriously to the question being imposed oh we'll drop Pastoral Care. I think that would be disastrous. If the school is lovely, as it is, and the kids are better here as they are, and we're more fortunate than if we were anywhere else, it's because of an element of concern that underlies having a Pastoral Care program. So it seems worth saving. Staff 2004*

## 10 Further views on Impacts at Fourth Visit

### 10.1 Impacts on Students

#### Support for students

As in previous years, the high level of teacher support for student is evident in 2005 and the effectiveness of this is indicated in this quote from a senior student:

*I don't know whether it's really good staffing or something like that but they really chose the teachers that can make a connection because I know students who ..... because they're just too rough, all that kind of stuff, and they have teachers who just have a connection with them and every time they feel they have something to talk about, like they don't know whether they feel they can talk about it to someone else, there always seems to be someone that they can turn around and talk to and I think that's what makes it I think really easy to get through. Student 2005*

These views are supported by a younger student as well:

*Like it really helps because Mrs (Name) knows how it is, and like she says you can always talk to me and stuff and at my old school whenever there was a fight like that, the person who was like Mrs (Name), she would say oh go away and sort it out yourself....And you always have someone to talk to. Student 2005*

#### Bullying and Harassment

The school's use of bullying harassment in Pastoral care periods was continuing in 2005, particularly in Years 5 to 8. Comments from students reflect that overall they perceive that the school is serious about the issue and effective in dealing with it when it comes to their attention.

*I think that's why there's so many very good students here because the teachers have been doing everything they can, since the word go, and they've been doing well and the fact that the teachers find out about it (bullying) it's stopped. And if it's a really sort of bad situation. You sit down and you talk to the person and you talk it through, you say what you want to say, you've got to say it civilly to the teachers sitting right there. These kids need to be sorted out and at the end of it, look guys, the easiest option is to leave each other alone and that's sort of how they think. Student 2005*

Year 8 students undertook a survey during the year and upon hearing the results of this the SRC decided to take up the issue as a school-wide initiative

*I think the problem now is that they (the bullies) are becoming sneaky and I think that's why it's up to the students now and that's why the responsibility, you know, they're making it our responsibility. Senior student 2005*

Earlier observations that MindMatters had resulted in students being more aware of a broader range of behaviours that could be considered as 'bullying' is also borne out in the 2005 interviews.

*The ones that hurt the most are the things that aren't seen, like someone could hit you and that's one thing but then someone can strategically draw a whole room*

*against you and that's far more painful than getting hit and that's the stuff that no-one can detect unless you're in the head of the victim or the offender. And I think they're the main things that we need to stop, like try and get into that situation by having peers aware of what's going on because that's what hurts the most, when you have a whole group of people turn against you. Student 2005*

Reflecting on the low prevalence of serious bullying at the school, one group of teachers wondered whether there may be an unplanned negative consequence in that students may not have the opportunity to learn the skills to adequately deal with bullies.

*There's no-one I'd really say intimidates - not that I've picked up anyway - or that other kids are intimidated by.... We sort of had a chat with it here whether it's a good or a bad thing because if you grow up in an environment then you'll learn how to deal with that. If it happens to you when you leave school .... So it's a good school to be at in terms of it's nice to be at a school where you're not subjected to a lot of that stuff, but then when you leave school and you've got to mix with the rest of society, all of a sudden you're subjected to the workplace, there'd be things that are going on that you haven't had to deal with when you were younger, you probably don't have the experience and the necessary skills to look back at previous things that had happened to you that you could fall back on. Teacher 2005*

### **Loss and Grief**

Informants were in conflict about whether the way in which the teachers were dealing with the issue of Loss and Grief was positive or negative. From the point of view of one Stage Coordinator, there was evidence from a student that the treatment of this topic was superficial:

*The young lass, (name), was in here yesterday. I was talking to her about (this topic) and remember she'd only lost her dad a couple of months ago, and I was talking to her mum as well about the loss and grief program and (the student), who (is) a very intelligent girl - she's got a cynicism and the wit to go with it - and she just looked at me with the wry smile and said, 'mmm. They talk to us about losing car keys' and she just had this wry smile. Staff 2005*

The parent of this child was one of the parent informants in 2005. She was of the opinion that her daughter had indeed benefited from the treatment of Loss and Grief when she was in Year 9

*Certainly (name) has benefited from it by her growth as a person and the way she copes with all the big things that have happened in her life and I really think that the MindMatters program - particularly the section she did in Year 9 on loss and grief helped her cope with her father's death. Parent 2005*

One student was able to identify the importance of students learning about loss and grief through her own experience that her classmates did not have the skills to relate to her when she experienced the loss of a parent.

*I know, like my dad died three years ago and when I came back to school I lost more friends than I gained. Not because they did anything, they just didn't know how to deal with it and they didn't know how to talk to me and I think probably at*

*the time, (name)'s probably the only person that came up to me and sort of identified with me. She said if you want to talk about it, it's fine. That's one out of the whole Year. Senior student 2005*

### **Self-awareness and communication skills**

One of the specific objectives of introducing MindMatters into the PC curriculum at St Cuthbert's was that students would develop strong social skills which would contribute to their resilience in later life. Interviews with Year 7 and 8 students about bullying revealed a considerable level of sophistication in their insights into the impact of relationships on one's sense of self and on self-esteem.

*Girl: What makes someone popular? That's just what I can't see because there's all these different groups and somehow people just look up to this one group.*

*Girl: I think it's because of looks. All the girls that are in the popular group are all pretty; they all put make-up on; they all do their nails; they all have beautiful long nails.*

*Girl It's also the fear factor. I know when I was in the public school, we were in a huge community; we didn't have groups; that's why our family came here. It was very different because we never had groups; everyone just played together. You really do recognise yourself when you find your particular friends; it helps you recognise yourself too. But when I was first picked on - in the junior school here - I found that I was very different from everyone else.*

*Girl That's not necessarily a bad thing because that's what my sister feels.*

*Girl Yes but it started to be a problem when I started to get a bit aggro.*

*Boy But it makes you feel bad, and you say 'what's wrong with me?'*

*Girl That's what my sister said because she'd been picked on so much, she had no faith in herself. Self-esteem.*

*Girl That's exactly it.*

Student exchange, 2005

### **Focus on developing social awareness and social skills**

One group of teachers at the fourth visit commented positively on the opportunity provided in Pastoral Care classes for students to have broad discussions of social issues and in doing so to learn how to behave in groups and appropriate ways of discussing such issues.

*I think for them it's nice to have an excuse to work in groups and work on being social. I like that they're allowed to talk about stuff that happens outside of school too. The role play is a great opportunity to talk about positives and negatives happening in social situations and that Year 8 seems to really need to be ...*

*It's much more important than anything I think; they really need to know how to be social. Teachers 2005*

### **Turnover of students and staff**

At the final visit in 2005, it was reported that student turnover had always been at a low rate. Nevertheless, the rate of students leaving the school seemed to one informant to have declined in the previous 12 months (2005-2005) compared to two years earlier, when the school experienced a small loss in enrolment when students moved from the junior campus to the middle school and senior campus.

*Student turnover in the last year? Low. It's certainly nothing that I would raise an eyebrow with or raise an eyebrow to and predominantly those who had, left because of moving from the area. Very few have left because they didn't like the school; some leave for financial reasons - not very many but some do. We do get the ones who leave because they go to an independent school up the coast, for a variety of reasons. But even those numbers have been very low in the last 12 months. If I was going to go further (back), that wouldn't be the case, and staff turnover is still quite low but the rate of students moving was much higher in certain years and partly that was because of some degree of discontent. A very, very small number and of parents and it's amazing the impact of a significant minority, which they did. And they were in the younger years and it happened predominantly where students were going from Year 4 to Year 5 and they were changing campuses. That was about two years ago. Staff 2005*

Truancy is also described as low. The school is in a unique geographic location and it would be very difficult for students to wonder off unless they made arrangements for transport. Most students are bussed to and from the school.

### **Communication about wellbeing issues**

One teacher, spoke about the fact that use of MindMatters in pastoral care had created a greater capacity to discuss issues about wellbeing by creating a language for doing so:

*I like the language that it's giving us as a class; I like that we're able to talk about stress and challenges; I really enjoy that. I like - you know, we did that activity where you have to define what that is and what that is to you and I like that we have to discuss self-talk and we didn't have to use ourselves as an example; we got to talk about the people around us. Teacher, 2005*

## **10.2 Impacts on Staff**

### **Staff capacity to identify student problems**

While not claiming this as a direct result of MindMatters, one senior student remarked that he had noticed an increase in his teachers' capacity to detect any changes in behaviours that might indicate that students might have problems.

*I don't know whether this happens so much, but I've noticed that like teachers pick up on very little things. You'd be sitting in class and you might not be sitting next to the person you usually sit next to, and they'll say are you alright there? Why aren't you sitting next to your usual friend? Student 2005*

**Impact on teaching practice**

One teacher outlined how feedback from the student survey of bullying, caused him to reflect on his approach to teaching a class that was comprised predominantly of boys

*Like I said the bullying became a major issue with the gender equity .... That part of the bullying became a major issue and we did a survey and all of that last year, and the crux of the matter came out to be for them the perception that teachers treated boys differently to girls and mine was a male dominated class last year - I think I had 6 girls and the rest were boys - and it became an in-servicing need; it was very much that way and because I've got as I said a large class of boys, and they're a different sort of group but I didn't want it to be about that again.  
Staff, 2005*



## 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 St Cuthbert's, the scores for each sex in each Year in 2005 are compared to the scores of students of the same sex and Year 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 1 and 2 standard deviations of the national mean, and as 'moderate' if they are between 2 and 3 standard deviations. Changes greater than 3 standard deviations 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.

### 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 2 indicates that there were a number of statistically significant differences in the scores for students 2005 compared to students of the same sex and year in 2002.

Differences that were statistically significant include:

- Girls in Year 8 in 2005 had a slightly higher mean score for 'school connection';
- Girls in Year 10 in 2005 had higher mean scores for both 'school connection' and Self esteem
- Boys in Year 10 in 2005 had slightly higher scores for 'autonomy experience'.

**Table 2: Resilience and Protective factors in 2005 compared to the control group.**

		School connection	Autonomy experience	Self esteem	Effective help-seeking
<b>Year 7 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	A little lower	A little lower	A little lower	No difference
<b>Year 8 (2005)</b>	Males	<b>A little higher</b>	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 9 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	A little lower	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 10 (2005)</b>	Males	Higher	<b>A little Higher</b>	No difference	No difference
	Females	<b>Higher</b>	Moderately Higher	<b>Higher</b>	A little Higher
<b>Year 11 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference	A little Higher
	Females	A little lower	No difference	No difference	No difference

Other differences which were not found to be statistically significant were:

- slightly lower mean scores for females in Year 7 in 2005 for 'school connection', 'autonomy experience' and 'self esteem'
- slightly lower mean score for 'self esteem' for Year 9 boys in 2005
- moderately higher mean score for 'autonomy experience' for girls in Year 10 in 2005, and slightly higher scores for 'effective help-seeking' for the same group
- slightly higher 'effective help-seeking' scores for females in Year 11 in 2005
- slightly lower 'school connection' scores for boys in Year 11 in 2005

### ***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 3 shows the differences for males and females in each year in 2005 compared to students of the same sex and year in 2002

Differences that were statistically significant include:

- A slightly lower proportion of boys in Year 7 in 2005 indicated that they would talk to an adult at the school
- A moderately higher proportion of girls in Year 10 indicated that they would talk to an adult at school girls in Year 10 in 2005 had a slightly higher mean score for 'school connection';
- Girls in Year 10 in 2005 had higher mean scores for both 'school connection' and Self esteem
- Boys in Year 10 in 2005 had slightly higher scores for 'autonomy experience'.

Although not statistically significant, there were slightly lower proportions of students who indicated that they thought a school counsellor would be useful, in female students in Years 8, 10 and 11 and in males in Year 9 section' scores for boys in Year 11 in 2005

Slightly lower proportions of males in Years 9 and 10 in 2005 indicated that they would talk to a teacher or some other adult but again these differences were not statistically significant.

**Table 3: Help-seeking indicators in students in 2005 compared to the control group.**

		% who indicate they would talk to someone at school	% who indicate that student welfare would be helpful
<b>Year 7 (2005)</b>	Males	<b>A little lower</b>	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 8 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	A little Lower
<b>Year 9 (2005)</b>	Males	A little lower	A little lower
	Females	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 10 (2005)</b>	Males	A little lower	No difference
	Females	<b>Moderately higher</b>	A little lower
<b>Year 11 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	A little lower

***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 4 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 year in 2002.

In girls in Years 9 and 11 in 2005, the mean number of days of drinking alcohol in the previous three months was moderately higher and the differences to 2002 were statistically significant. Higher scores for males in Year 9 were also statistically significant.

**Table 4: 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	A little lower	No difference	No difference
	Females	No difference	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 9 (2005)</b>	Males	No difference	No difference	No difference
	Females	<b>Moderately higher</b>	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 10 (2005)</b>	Males	<b>Higher</b>	Moderately higher	No difference
	Females	A little higher	No difference	No difference
<b>Year 11 (2005)</b>	Males	A little higher	No difference	Moderately higher
	Females	<b>Moderately higher</b>	No difference	No difference

Other non-significant differences were as follows:

- male students in Year 8 in 2005 had slightly lower mean days of using alcohol
- males in Year 10 in 2005 had moderately higher mean days of smoking tobacco
- females in Year 10 in 2005 had slightly higher mean days of drinking
- males in Year 11 in 2005 had slightly higher mean days of drinking and moderately higher mean days of using marijuana

**Comment**

A number of these indicators have improved for Year 10 students in 2005 compared to students in the same Year in 2002. This cohort has had the maximum exposure to the changes introduced by the school at the time that it adopted MindMatters, having been exposed to MindMatters curriculum during Pastoral Care period over three to four years of their high school life. Year 11 students (who have relatively little exposure to MindMatters curriculum), show no differences between 2005 and 2002.

It should be noted that informants from the school report that this Year cohort has a smaller enrolment than most other Years and is a much smaller group than the Year 10 cohort in

2002. This may account for a perception among the staff of greater group cohesion among the Year, although the possibility that the MindMatters curriculum resources, particularly those from the 'Resilience' and 'Bullying' units may have contributed to this characteristic is not ruled out.

Unfortunately, there were increases in frequency of alcohol use in students in Years 9, 10 and 11.



## 12 Key Learnings from St Cuthbert's High

In a school which has a strong explicit aim of providing pastoral care for their students, and for the provision of an 'all-round' education, MindMatters has provided a reminder that certain life skills need to be taught explicitly in the curriculum if students are to graduate as resilient young adults.

It is difficult to introduce an explicit curriculum for student wellbeing in a school which is already committed to providing a comprehensive education that includes a focus on pastoral care and a wide range of co-curricula choices. It takes time for even highly committed teachers to accept the validity of the need for such explicit curriculum.

Home-room teachers who are asked to teach a pastoral care period respond well when they are coordinated and resourced by a year coordinator or senior teacher. When left to their own initiative, however, they may not implement the planned program with enthusiasm or fidelity.

Exposure to external professional development improves teachers understanding of the rationale for introducing an explicit wellbeing curriculum.

Some home-room teachers are reluctant to teach certain of the MindMatters units such as 'Grief and Loss' and 'Understanding Mental Illness', believing that they do not possess the content expertise or pedagogical flexibility to address such issues. Such teachers attribute their reluctance, in part, to their lack of training, believing that the MindMatters PD training addresses these issues.

Students are perceptive enough to know when their teachers are negative about the content of the subject they are teaching. When teachers are negative about teaching sensitive issues (such as 'Loss and Grief') it is possible that more harm than good will result.