



# Whole School Matters

## Introduction

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## The MindMatters initiatives

The MindMatters initiatives were developed in recognition of the need to address the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Mental health and wellbeing has been linked to young people's:

- sense of connectedness to school and their academic success
- social development
- resilience in the face of adversity
- capacity to contribute to the workforce and the community.

There is an increasing awareness that schools can engage in deliberate strategies to build a secure and supportive school environment, and to promote attitudes and behaviours which enhance mental health and wellbeing.

MindMatters therefore adopts a comprehensive, Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing, focusing on entire school communities, not just individual students with identified needs. It aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful.

The MindMatters booklets, CD-ROMs and website, together with the accompanying Professional Development, have been widely adopted in Australian schools. Schools using MindMatters successfully have appreciated its 'high-quality, and easy-to-use curriculum resources' and the access provided 'to highly rated Professional Development'. MindMatters has been described as enabling 'a new language about student wellbeing to develop within the school', requiring staff to develop 'new ideas and share strategies' (Hazell 2006).

The MindMatters initiative helps schools and their communities to:

- take action towards creating a positive climate of mental health and wellbeing
- be pro-active in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing for all students
- support prevention and early intervention initiatives for young people with mental health and wellbeing challenges.

MindMatters continues to have considerable success. In particular, it has 'succeeded in its aims to reconceptualise mental health issues positively and to build partnerships and capacity in school communities, and it now forms a support base for any new mental health programs that are introduced' (Rowling 2007).

## MindMatters – the background

The 1996 audit of Mental Health Education in Australian Secondary Schools recommended schools as appropriate settings for the promotion of mental health among young people. The Australian Commonwealth Government funded a National Mental Health in Schools Project managed by a consortium from the University of Melbourne, the University of Sydney, Deakin University and the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. The MindMatters project was the result of a successful Australian national pilot involving 24 schools in the government, Catholic and Independent sectors trialling MindMatters resources from 1997 to 1998.

Principals Australia Inc. (PA) is responsible for the implementation and redevelopment of MindMatters from 2000 to 2010, and has built on the research, advice and initial Professional Development provided by members of the writing Consortium. MindMatters is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

The first MindMatters booklets and CD-ROM were published in 2000 and the accompanying website has supported those resources and the MindMatters Professional Development. The MindMatters website is at: [www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au).

A report from Principals Australia to the Department of Health and Ageing in 2008 indicated that staff from over 83% of all schools and settings with secondary student enrolments in Australia had attended MindMatters Professional Development, involving over 127,000 Australian and International participants. More recent statistics on the uptake of MindMatters can be found on the MindMatters website. A Planning Overview and calendar of the MindMatters Professional Development can be found on the website.

The Australian Council for Educational Research National Survey (2006) revealed that 71% of Australian secondary schools had used MindMatters resources, 52% of the schools surveyed continued to use MindMatters resources and 18% used MindMatters as their key organiser for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention (Ainley, J et al. 2006).

**MindMatters** acknowledges and endorses the goals of the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008). Whole School Matters aligns closely with the declaration's commitment to ensuring the holistic role schools play in the education of our young people:

'Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians ...' (ibid., p. 5).

The ideas presented in Whole School Matters have been developed through many years of MindMatters staff working with schools, from national implementation, through research and collaborations with key stakeholders, and independent external evaluation.

## The MindMatters approach to mental health and wellbeing

MindMatters adopts a universal school-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention approach. Such an approach 'targets the entire school population with the goals of enhancing strengths so as to reduce the risk of later problem outcomes and/or to increase prospects for positive development' (Weisz et al. 2005). Prevention strategies can be universal, selective or targeted and are designed to identify and counter risk factors. Intervention strategies are aimed at students who have some risk factors, mental health difficulties, or who have diagnosable disorders.

Universal approaches or programs are aimed at enhancing the resilience of the whole school and community by increasing protective factors for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Selective programs or resources are aimed at a select group or cohort of students to address developing or potential mental health problems. Protective factors are identified and focused upon to help mitigate the risk factors involved.

Targeted programs or interventions are aimed at those students at greater risk of developing a mental illness, or at those who have already been diagnosed.

Mental health professionals need to be involved in discussion about selective and targeted strategies. (Weisz et al. 2005)

## MindMatters' aims

MindMatters aims to:

- embed promotion, prevention and early intervention for mental health and wellbeing in Australian schools with secondary enrolments
- encourage the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful
- develop social and emotional skills – and spiritual understandings, if appropriate – in order to enhance resilience, resourcefulness, respect, and a sense of connectedness with others
- help school communities to plan and take action to create a climate of positive mental health and wellbeing in secondary schools
- provide information to enable schools to collaborate better with families, communities and the health sector
- describe strategies to enable a continuum of support for students with additional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

## Introducing Whole School Matters

**Whole School Matters** is the cornerstone booklet of the revised 2010 edition of MindMatters. This new **Whole School Matters** has benefited from the incorporation of current research, feedback from MindMatters Professional Development, and formal MindMatters evaluations published in 2006.

Note: All MindMatters evaluation reports can be downloaded from the MindMatters website at:

[www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au).

**Whole School Matters** sets out a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing and its implementation within a school or other educational sites. The key concepts of the Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing are developed further in the other MindMatters booklets and resources, on the website and in MindMatters Professional Development. The Whole School Approach involves using MindMatters in a comprehensive and culturally inclusive way, involving leadership, school core teams, parents, students and the community.

The **Whole School Matters** booklet provides some brief Professional Development ideas for the whole staff and for the core team, leading the initiative within the school. These activities are designed to help staff, leaders and the core team engage with the comprehensive whole school implementation.

## Whole School Matters and the 2010 MindMatters resource

**Whole School Matters** links with the other MindMatters booklets which develop key themes such as schools working with parents and the community (**CommunityMatters and Community Matters handbook and DVD**), or schools providing for students experiencing high support needs in mental health, or curriculum teaching and learning (**Teaching and Learning; Enhancing Resilience 1 and 2**).

The diagram on the following page illustrates the structure of the MindMatters resource, demonstrating the cornerstone status of Whole School Matters and its relationship with the other booklets.



## How to use this booklet

This booklet is designed to be used as:

- a leadership guide for mental health and wellbeing in schools
- a Professional Development strategy
- individual sections, topics or issues reference.

The structure of Whole School Matters is designed to reflect the MindMatters Implementation model, with:

- Section 1 covering the key concepts
- Section 2 addressing young people and protective and risk factors
- Section 3 looking at the four key enablers of leadership, staff knowledge of mental health and wellbeing, links to other initiatives, and evidence-based data and evaluation
- Section 4 considering the nine action areas of the Implementation model
- Section 5 dealing with supporting students with high support needs in mental health
- Section 6 addressing critical incidents within the school
- Section 7 addressing 'Getting started' with MindMatters.

Each section of the booklet makes links with **relevant Professional Development activities** that can be undertaken by the school executive, the school core team and school staff. These Professional Development (PD) activities are numbered 1–44 and signposted in the margins, with the icon below. For a full list of Professional Development activities, see the Appendices and the Whole School Matters section of the MindMatters website.

Professional Development in its widest sense is a key area of influence for schools in developing whole school capacity in mental health and wellbeing. It provides an opportunity for individuals to experience teaching and learning methodologies and techniques with groups, and a chance to connect with the full range of people on the staff. The discussions and activities are intended to help teachers and others unpack the ideas presented to facilitate the practical implementation of strategic mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

The Professional Development activities included in the Appendices of this booklet and on the MindMatters website also enable schools to strategically plan congruent and coordinated Professional Development within their school site plan.

As a basis for introducing **Whole School Matters** and developing staff knowledge about mental health and wellbeing promotion, prevention and early intervention, it is useful to do a booklet familiarisation exercise as a key part of any Professional Development. This can be done using either the previous 2000 booklets or the new editions.



### Professional Development Activity



### 1: Booklet familiarisation

Distribute multiple copies of MindMatters booklets, ensuring staff each have access to a booklet to browse through. Ask for Positive, Negative or Interesting comments.

Note - there will be two editions of most MindMatters booklets from 2010. The curriculum materials are more extensive than the previous books. See page 9, or go to the MindMatters website, for an overview of the other booklets.

## The audience for this booklet

This **Whole School Matters** booklet is intended for use by school leadership, whether that is the school executive, school core teams or individuals. It will also be useful for student support staff and health workers who are seeking an understanding of how to work with schools.

## How members of the school community can use this book

AUDIENCE	SUGGESTED RELEVANT FOCUS
<b>Principal &amp; executive leadership</b>	<p>Provides information on school leadership and how they can promote mental health and wellbeing for all students through whole school management systems.</p> <p>Section 3.1 may provide a focus on personal leadership.</p> <p>Section 4.1 can provide a focus on ethos and environment.</p>
<b>School core team</b>	<p>Provides Professional Development and planning tools for a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing that involves the entire school community.</p> <p>Section 3.3 focuses on links with other initiatives.</p> <p>Section 3.4 looks at evidence-based evaluation, data collection, analysis and action.</p>
<b>Classroom teachers</b>	<p>Clarifies the essential connection between classroom teaching, staff mental health and wellbeing, Whole School Approaches and an understanding of adolescent mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Section 4.2 may be particularly relevant.</p>
<b>School support staff</b>	<p>Outlines leadership and management approaches for students experiencing high support needs in mental health and connects these to the whole school social and emotional curriculum. Section 5 would be particularly relevant.</p>
<b>Community leaders</b>	<p>Considers the importance of community–school partnerships for assisting with building protective factors.</p> <p>Section 4.3 would be relevant.</p>
<b>Allied health workers</b>	<p>Considers ways to partner and support schools and their management systems in a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing. The whole book would be a useful tool on how to support schools, particularly Section 5.</p>

### School core team for mental health and wellbeing

A school core team is a designated school group that includes those with a responsibility or interest in mental health and wellbeing of the school community. The core team can be based on an existing team or be a new group. The core team provides the leadership, the team work, the direction and the accountability that is essential for project sustainability. The core team needs to be representative of and involve the diverse cultural and community groups within the school. The core team will take a strategic approach to accommodate the range of perspectives on mental health and wellbeing within the school community.