

Media Release

25 November 2013

Schools reap rewards from focus on mental health

Nine Australian schools have been recognised for their focus on student wellbeing at an awards ceremony held earlier this month. The ceremony showcased significant benefits across the schools including:

- reductions in bullying
- decreases in absenteeism and
- an increase in students' ability and willingness to seek help if they feel stressed or anxious.

The schools that were acknowledged for their innovative approaches to promoting mental health in the classroom and the schoolyard were:

- Hawker College – ACT
- Kilbreda College – VIC
- Mater Hospital School – QLD
- Ogilvie High School – Tas
- Presbyterian Ladies College – WA
- St Francis de Sales College – SA
- St Stephen's School – WA
- Whyalla High School – SA
- Young High School – NSW

"It is excellent to see the schools working in focused and strategic ways to improve student mental health and learning outcomes," said Jim Davies, CEO of Principals Australia Institute.

"They are doing extraordinary work in the area of mental health and are to be commended."

"We know that when children are mentally healthy and resilient they are better able to learn and flourish at school."

For schools to achieve MindMatters Recognition, they have undertaken and evaluated a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing over an extended period of time fulfilling detailed criteria.

MindMatters is the leading national mental health initiative for secondary schools. It is managed by Principals Australia Institute and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

"MindMatters does some incredibly important work with schools and we now have over 80% of high schools across Australia engaged in our training and using our resources," said Jim.

"Our focus is on supporting secondary schools in promoting and protecting the mental health, resilience and social and emotional wellbeing of their students and staff."

Highlights of the schools' achievements include:

Hawker College – ACT – creation of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Centre for students called "The Hawk's Nest." The centre supports student leadership and those needing additional support. Students also ran a wellbeing week.

Kilbreda College – VIC – Development of a comprehensive health curriculum from Year 7-10 with structured professional development opportunities for teaching staff.

Mater Hospital School – QLD – Transitioning students back into mainstream schooling and improving staff knowledge and understanding in mental health and wellbeing.

Ogilvie High School – Tas – Increasing student safety: 44 less recorded incidents in 2012 than in 2009.

Presbyterian Ladies College – WA - 20% improvement in student levels of sense of control and 14.75% increase in student self-efficacy levels after completing the Personal Goals Project Trial.

St Francis de Sales College – SA – Significant increase in parent engagement with 45% of parents (837 families) in 2013 engaged with an activity in a volunteer capacity within the College. (Compared to 3% In 2008).

St Stephen's School – WA - Fewer incidents of bystander bullying in the school. Student survey on bullying showed 71.1% of students reporting no bullying and 24.6% reporting 'once in a while.'

Whyalla High School – SA - 15% increase in students agreeing that they know how to get help with mental health and wellbeing issues. 21% increase in students agreeing that their school deals fairly and quickly with bullying.

Young High School – NSW - Using the Mind Matters staff survey in 2011, 2012, and 2013 conclusively demonstrated a growing understanding of mental health issues and integration into the classroom.

The awards ceremony was held in Sydney on November 15.

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