



# THE WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS

# Introduction

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) is committed to creating quality learning opportunities for children and young people. This includes strengthening their cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development. Parents entrust their children and young people to principals, teachers and school staff with confidence that schools will deliver on this agenda.

The concept of wellbeing and its close links with learning are not new. A wealth of evidence is available to inform educators of this important relationship in the work they do every day with students, from preschool students beginning their education journey, to senior students preparing for further education, employment and adult life.

In recent years however, there have been changes to how children and young people learn and how teachers teach. The school environment, and the world in which our children and young people will grow and function, continue to change. We need to be responsive to numerous influences as we deliver public education now and into the future.

There is a heightened awareness of, and commitment to, personalised and differentiated learning and support for every student to succeed. There is targeted support at the system and school levels so that where a child or young person lives and goes to school does not shape their learning outcomes.

In this context, our understanding of wellbeing needs to be contemporary and forward-focussed. An individual's wellbeing is constantly changing. How students feel about themselves and their own wellbeing changes over time, in different situations and circumstances, and in response to community and environmental factors. Wellbeing, or the lack of it, can affect a student's engagement and success in learning. Educators need to understand the potential wellbeing has to bring about positive change, what is required to foster wellbeing, and how it can become a powerful force in students' learning and development.

The themes that will drive wellbeing in our public schools into the future are Connect, Succeed and Thrive. Our commitment to our students, parents and members of the community is that public schools will be teaching and learning environments that enable the development of healthy, happy, successful and productive individuals.

In turn, our students will be expected to contribute to their own wellbeing, the wellbeing of their peers and the collective wellbeing of their communities. In this way schools in partnership with parents and carers will equip children and young people to be active and positive contributors to the society in which they live.

Schools will be supported at every level by a system that is cohesive, expert and responsive. Information for school leaders and school staff will be clear and easy to access; policies will be streamlined and meet the modern operating context of our schools; resources will be positioned in schools to drive contextual decision making and planning; educational services will be coordinated at the local level and will be responsive to the needs of schools. Education will work with government and non-government agencies to develop partnerships to enhance the collective wellbeing of schools and their communities.

Student wellbeing is enhanced when schools connect with and draw on the expertise, contribution and support of their communities. Community engagement maximises how students connect, succeed and thrive.

# Rationale

## What is wellbeing?

It has long been acknowledged that wellbeing is more than the absence of physical or psychological illness. In very broad terms, wellbeing can be described as the quality of a person's life.

Two major approaches to defining wellbeing relate it to our subjective experience of feeling good or experiencing pleasure and positive emotion; and functioning well, or our potential to flourish. While there is debate about whether one or both of these approaches to wellbeing offers the best way of understanding it, an approach that considers the whole person, and which combines feeling good and functioning well offers the most utility.

The literature sets out a range of contexts in which wellbeing is experienced. These contexts recognise that wellbeing needs to be considered against a background of how we feel and function across several domains, recognising the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing. These domains include cognitive, emotional, social, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Cognitive wellbeing is associated with achievement and success. It includes how information is processed and judgements are made. It is also informed by motivation and persistence to achieve. Cognitive wellbeing is important for attaining knowledge and experiencing positive learning.

Emotional wellbeing relates to self-awareness and emotional regulation. It includes how well we cope, and is often reflected by the level of a person's resilience. Emotional wellbeing is in part informed by our capacity for self-reflection.

Social wellbeing includes the extent to which we experience positive relationships and connectedness to others. It is important for pro-social behaviour and our empathy towards others.

Physical wellbeing is associated with the extent to which we feel physically safe and healthy. It includes nutrition, preventative health care, physical activity and physical safety and security. Physical wellbeing enables positive health outcomes.

Spiritual wellbeing relates to our sense of meaning and purpose. It can include our connection to culture, religion or community and includes the beliefs, values and ethics we hold.

These domains of wellbeing are helpful in describing the contexts in which wellbeing is experienced. However, to understand wellbeing more deeply we must also consider a range of other influences that contribute to wellbeing.

## How can schools positively influence the wellbeing of students?

Wellbeing can be shaped by a number of broad influences including the degree to which there is an experience of: choice, achievement of meaningful goals, positive relationships, enjoyment, personal growth and development, health, and safety.

Choice is important because it impacts positively on a student's learning and engagement in schooling. It contributes to enhanced motivation, interest and commitment to tasks. The provision of choice supports self-regulation, self-discipline and achievement. When students have choice and opportunities to engage in activities that are of interest and value to them, their wellbeing is enhanced.

Achievement contributes positively to a student's wellbeing, and can contribute to a student's confidence and self-esteem. It can help to foster student self-discipline and effort, encourage students to stretch themselves and take risks in their learning. Achievement fosters positive emotions which can build further engagement and effort.

Positive relationships foster connectedness and feelings of belonging and are essential for wellbeing. These relationships are characterised by constructive interactions that provide enthusiastic and genuine support. They are important because they help us to build social and emotional skills and in turn nurture other positive, caring and respectful relationships.

Enjoyment, or the presence of positive emotion, can increase a student's wellbeing. Learning occurs more effectively in the context of positive emotions. Enjoyment broadens a student's ability to think creatively, be innovative and to problem solve more effectively.

Development and personal growth can lead to a student having greater satisfaction with life, more confidence and self-efficacy and greater feelings of resilience, health and wellbeing. Development contributes to social competence, self-esteem and a student's sense of meaning and purpose.

Feeling physically safe and being in good physical health contributes to wellbeing. Environments that provide for safety, and support good health, optimise learning experiences.

### Why is wellbeing important to the work of schools?

Schools have a pivotal role to play in connecting character development in children and young people to individual and collective wellbeing, which in the longer term will shape the values and attitudes of the society in which they live.

Teachers play an important role in providing learning experiences and opportunities that develop and shape the character and wellbeing of children and young people.

Experiences that develop character by promoting mindfulness (self-regulation and behaviour), curiosity, courage, resilience, ethics and leadership benefit children and young people as they grow and develop.

Schools focus on giving children and young people voice, being active learners and developing strong character qualities that will enable them to succeed, thrive and contribute positively throughout life.

## Our commitment to wellbeing

The Wellbeing Framework for NSW public schools contextualises wellbeing to individual students, school settings and local school communities. The concept that wellbeing is dynamic and is integral to learning is vital to embedding it in the complex multi-dimensional work of schools.

The DEC commitment to wellbeing is for our schools to support students to connect, succeed and thrive at each stage of their development and learning; to provide opportunities that are age rigorous, meaningful and dignified; and to do this in the context of individual and shared responsibility underpinned by productive relationships that support students to learn.

To this end, schools will be enabling environments, informed and guided by legislative and policy requirements. Schools will be supported to focus on the development of quality teaching, learning and engagement. Local decision-making will invigorate school communities. Highly effective leadership will deliver on this commitment for every member of the school community.

At the system level, there will be focus on being responsive to the needs of schools and incorporating wellbeing into planning and processes. There will be strong communication frameworks within and across government and non-government partners relating to how their work contributes to the development of individual and collective wellbeing.

Our shared understanding of wellbeing:

- is that it is dynamic and integral to learning
  - focuses on attributes and strengths that teach and support children and young people to grow and learn from challenges and complexities
  - recognises the importance of developing and shaping the character of the individual
  - is multidimensional and interrelated
  - takes into account the context of children's and young people's lives and uses both objective and subjective measures
- incorporates the views and perspectives of children and young people themselves throughout the different stages of development
  - considers the wellbeing of children and young people in the present as well as focussing on long-term outcomes
  - acknowledges the diversity of contributors to and influences on the wellbeing of children and young people, and recognises our obligations and responsibilities.

## The Wellbeing Framework for schools



CONNECT

Our students will be actively connected to their learning, have positive and respectful relationships and experience a sense of belonging to their school and community.



SUCCEED

Our students will be respected, valued, encouraged, supported and empowered to succeed.



THRIVE

Our students will grow and flourish, do well and prosper.

ENABLE

The school environment is pivotal to the growth and development of our most important assets – our children and young people. Our schools strive for excellence in teaching and learning, connect on many levels and build trusting and respectful relationships for students to succeed.

# Connect, Succeed, Thrive in an enabling school environment

## CONNECT

- Students are actively connected to their learning through meaningful, engaging and rewarding personalised learning experiences.
- Students have positive and respectful relationships with each other, their teachers and the community.
- Students experience a sense of belonging and connectedness that respects diversity and identity.
- Students are self-aware and regulate their own emotions and behaviours. Students have the social and emotional skills to develop and maintain positive relationships and engage in pro-social behaviour.
- Students are connected with their cultural, religious or spiritual backgrounds.
- Staff nurture professional relationships with students which are safe, respectful and supportive, and which help students to reach their full potential.
- The school is focused on building individual and collective wellbeing through a climate of care and positivity.
- Parents and the broader school community actively participate in the school and in helping students to develop positive connections.

## SUCCEED

- Students are succeeding in their learning.
- Students strive toward and achieve meaningful goals.
- Students are confident and resilient learners. They have positive self-esteem, stretch themselves and take risks in their learning. They demonstrate self-discipline and effort toward their learning.
- Students are provided opportunities to succeed and success is celebrated in a way that is meaningful to the student.
- Students develop strong positive character traits that are reflected in their behaviour decision making and relationships.
- Staff enable success by personalising student learning and supporting students to achieve.
- Staff enable success by contributing to a positive, supportive and encouraging learning environment.
- Parents and the broader school community actively participate in supporting and reinforcing student learning.

## THRIVE

- Student learning takes place in an environment which fosters and develops choice, accomplishment, positive relationships, enjoyment, growth, health and safety.
- Students are self-directed, take initiative and grasp opportunity.
- Students contribute to the learning of other students and to the school community more broadly.
- Students have a strong sense of meaning and purpose.
- Students develop the skills to reflect on and positively shape their behaviour in the context of ethical decision making.
- Students are recognised and celebrated.
- Staff contribute to environments which allow students to thrive by delivering high quality learning experiences.
- The school has high expectations for every student.
- Parents and the broader community support and enable the aspirations of every student.

## ENABLING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- Students are recognised, respected and valued.
- Students are provided with opportunities to exercise choice in the context of self-regulation, self-determination, ethical decision making and responsibility.
- Collaborative partnerships are built with students, staff, families, communities and other organisations to support and develop students and school communities.
- Professional practice is valued and there is a commitment to ongoing improvement and student wellbeing.
- Resources are used to best meet individual and collective student need.
- The school environment is a safe and healthy place to be.
- Counselling and wellbeing services provide essential expertise to schools and communities to guide student growth and development.
- Schools provide learning experiences that contribute to the development of individual character traits and positive group dynamics.

# What does the Wellbeing Framework mean for schools?

There are strong links between school excellence and wellbeing. Schools should consider teaching and learning and the development of wellbeing as parallel, integrated, complementary processes.

All schools are required to have a planned approach to wellbeing in place that incorporates the elements of the Wellbeing Framework.

# Elements of the Wellbeing Framework

## Teaching and learning

- Schools will consider aspects of and factors contributing to wellbeing in the delivery of teaching and learning.
- Students should be provided with opportunities to connect, succeed and thrive that are relevant to their stages of learning and development.
- The child or young person's subjective view of their own wellbeing is recognised by schools, peers and parents as an important measure to inform decisions about the child or young person.
- Whole school approaches to physical health and fitness, social skills and friendship, empathy and resilience, peer support and mentoring, student leadership, citizenship and community engagement contribute to the growth of individual and collective wellbeing.

## Behaviour, discipline and character education

- Every school will implement a comprehensive and inclusive strategy to create an environment with clearly defined behavioural expectations.
- All members of the school community should consistently implement the agreed strategy to create a positive teaching and learning environment.
- The school recognises the importance of developing and shaping the character of the individual and maximises opportunities for personal growth.
- Students have responsibility to be active learners who exercise self-regulation appropriate to their age and level of understanding.
- Parents and caregivers play an important role in working with the school to develop their child's understandings, skills and character.
- Teaching and learning is not disrupted by unacceptable behaviour in the classroom, on the playground and in activities for which the school is responsible.

## Learning and support

- Students with identified learning needs benefit from personalised learning and support.
- Aboriginal children and young people will have an individual personalised learning pathway.
- Students with identified healthcare needs have an individualised health care plan.
- Parents are consulted and contribute to the planning to support their child's individual learning.
- Adjustments to the learning environment are made and documented as required.
- Assessment of student achievement informs individual learning.

## Professional practice

- Professional learning is linked to the needs of the students, teachers, schools and the system.
- All staff undertake mandatory training to comply with legislative and policy requirements.

## Effective leadership

- Leadership is evidenced at every level of the school environment. Students, staff and parents contribute to the leadership of the school and to the achievement of its goals and priorities.
- The principal implements systems to meet accountabilities relating to wellbeing policies in the school environment.
- The principal effectively uses school and system resources to support the learning and wellbeing of all students.

## School planning

- Wellbeing is an element of the School Excellence Framework and is addressed through school planning and school self-evaluation.
- A self-evaluation of wellbeing incorporates the stages of learning of the students, environmental factors and the influences and domains of wellbeing.
- Schools use qualitative and quantitative evidence to inform and guide school planning for wellbeing.



# Achieving school excellence in wellbeing

- The school has a comprehensive and integrated strategy in place to support the cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of students in a context of quality teaching and learning.
- Students, teachers and staff, and members of the wider school community have a shared understanding of the behaviours, attitudes and expectations that enhance wellbeing and lead to improved student outcomes.
- Individuals care for self, and contribute to the wellbeing of others and the wider community.
- Effective leadership guides the development of a highly effective school.
- The resources and expertise of the system at every level are targeted to meet the wellbeing needs of all students.
- Quality teaching and effective professional practice are evident in every learning environment.
- Teaching and learning occurs in environments that celebrate difference and diversity and recognise, respect and respond to identity and cultural background.

## Conclusion

Everyone enters the world with potential. Our experiences develop our abilities and shape our expectations, which in turn colour our perceptions of the world in which we live.

When individuals are empowered to have control over lived experiences, they build their own resilience and in turn contribute positively to collective wellbeing and an inclusive community.

NSW Public Schools, in committing to and enabling individual and collective wellbeing of children and young people, importantly provide for the growth and holistic development of students and their success in school and beyond.

Children and young people in public education in NSW will experience a sense of connection, inclusion, respect for individuality and difference, resilience, empowerment, capacity to contribute to their school and wider community, and confidence to positively shape their own futures.

Developing and fostering wellbeing is the ultimate deliverable that comes with the privilege of working with children and young people in NSW public schools.

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