



Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Western Australia

# Supporting student wellbeing in WA schools

Discussion paper

October 2020

## **Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People**

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

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On request, large print or alternative format copies of this report can be obtained from the Commissioner for Children and Young People at:

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA  
Ground Floor, 1 Alvan Street  
Subiaco WA 6008

Telephone: 08 6213 2297  
Facsimile: 08 6213 2220  
Email: [info@ccyp.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@ccyp.wa.gov.au)  
Web: [ccyp.wa.gov.au](http://ccyp.wa.gov.au)

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## Foreword

Schools play a critical role in supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly outlines the right of all children and young people to receive an education, and that this education should support “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.

WA children and young people have regularly identified school as an important factor in their lives, providing a strong foundation for their wellbeing. Schooling has a significant influence on a child’s experience of learning, their relationships with peers and adults, their confidence and development of new skills and whether their needs are identified and supported.

Since 2015, I have made a number of recommendations and findings relating to schools and student wellbeing based on the views of children and young people themselves in my School and Learning consultation and Speaking Out Survey. I have also reported on my ongoing monitoring of progress in improving mental health supports for children and young people in WA.

Schools play a vital role in supporting and responding to student wellbeing, from providing universal approaches to build positive schools and promote wellbeing, through to individualised responses where there are concerns for a particular student or cohort.

Despite the best efforts of school staff to fulfil this role, there is a clear need for a stronger strategic approach, prioritisation and resourcing for student wellbeing at a state, system and school level.

This report highlights the need to strengthen approaches to student wellbeing. A state-wide strategy for supporting student wellbeing is required. The bulk of the research for this paper was undertaken before the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people told me during and after the pandemic the ways in which their wellbeing had been impacted, highlighting an even greater need to ensure we plan for the potential long-term impacts it may have for vulnerable groups of children and young people and their families.

I thank the three education sectors for their participation in this project, and the school staff who shared their individual experiences of supporting student wellbeing. Their insights and experiences highlight the opportunities to better support the wellbeing of all students in WA schools.

Colin Pettit  
Commissioner for Children and Young People

## What is student wellbeing?

The wellbeing of children and young people is a core focus of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, and includes their care, development, education, health and safety.<sup>1</sup>

The Commissioner for Children and Young People has developed a Wellbeing Monitoring Framework, which includes the Indicators of Wellbeing data source that tracks children and young people's wellbeing across three domains:

- Learning and participating: children and young people are engaged in learning and have the skills and supports needed for successful learning.
- Healthy and connected: children and young people have positive physical and mental health, engage in positive health behaviours, and feel connected and respected in their culture and community.
- Safe and supported: children and young people are supported by safe and healthy relationships, experience physical and emotional safety in the home and their community, engage in safe behaviours, and are supported to have their needs met.

There are many definitions of wellbeing,<sup>2</sup> and the term is regularly used within different education sectors without a clear and consistent definition or explanation.<sup>3</sup> Historically, student wellbeing approaches in schools have focused on student welfare and at-risk students, alongside the delivery of specific interventions and curriculum content.<sup>4</sup>

Over time, there has been a shift from this focus on student welfare to a more holistic focus on universal student wellbeing needs and emphasising student wellbeing at a whole school level.<sup>5</sup> This shift has seen student wellbeing now considered as central to a student's learning and engagement at school, rather than separate to their education.

## Why focus on student wellbeing?

The insights and wellbeing experiences of 1,800 students heard through the Commissioner's School and Learning consultation in 2018 and almost 5,000 participants in the 2019 Speaking Out Survey WA form a strong foundation upon which to conduct this project.

Research consistently demonstrates the connection between positive student wellbeing and positive learning outcomes. Students with higher levels of wellbeing are:

- more likely to have higher academic achievement and Year 12 completion rates
- more likely to have better mental health
- more likely to display pro-social attributes (e.g. displaying concerns for others)
- more likely to make responsible decisions
- less likely to engage in at-risk behaviours (e.g. alcohol and drug use or criminal activity).<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, higher levels of student distress and lower levels of student wellbeing are associated with negative impacts on the social, interpersonal and academic functioning of students.<sup>7</sup>

There is growing recognition of the role of schools in supporting the wellbeing of students. This has increased the importance placed on schools to create positive environments that promote wellbeing, explicitly teach social and emotional skills, assess and respond to wellbeing concerns, and provide student wellbeing supports and interventions.

## **Speaking Out Survey 2019 snapshot**

### **Health**

12 per cent of students rated their health as fair or poor.

1 in 2 female Years 7–12 students reported a high score for life satisfaction compared with 2 in 3 male students, while almost 1 in 5 students reported a very low score.

1 in 10 students reported that they cannot achieve their goals or cope with life's challenges.

More than one-quarter (26.5%) of students in Years 7–12 reported having a long-term health problem or condition lasting six months or more, and 11.4 per cent reported having a disability.

School and study problems are the most common source of stress for Year 9–12 students.

### **Knowledge of where to get support at school**

One third of students in Years 7–12 did not know where to get mental health support in their school.

For those students who sought mental health support in the last 12 months, 24.3% found teachers and 18.4% found school psychologists helpful in assisting with their emotional worries.

### **Perceptions of safety at school**

Most students reported feeling safe at school, however almost 1 in every 5 students feel safe only sometimes or less, especially for Year 7–9 students.

One-half of Year 4–12 students say that they have been bullied.

15% of students said they have ever been absent from school because they were afraid they would be bullied.

One half of Year 9–12 students had been deliberately hit or physically harmed by someone else. Among students who reported this, 57.4% of male respondents and 27.7% of female respondents said this happened to them at school.

### **Feeling connected**

1 in 5 Year 10 students said they feel they do not have enough friends.

More than one half of students feel they are very good at making and keeping friends and one-third say they are ok at it.

Two thirds of students said they usually get along with class mates and with teachers, with close to one-third of students saying this was sometimes or less.

### **Engagement in school and learning**

Twice as many students in Years 4–6 as Years 7–12 reporting liking school a lot.

When asked whether they felt teachers care, believe and listen to them, almost one-third of Year 7–12 students feel that this is not, or only a little, true for them.

One half of female students in Years 7–12 say they do not feel like they belong at school and one-quarter do not like school.

## Progress on supporting student wellbeing

One of the Commissioner's core functions is to monitor children and young people's wellbeing and to review policies, practices and services affecting them.

Previous consultations and inquiries by the Commissioner have highlighted the important role that school plays in supporting children and young people's wellbeing.<sup>8</sup> Students need a positive school environment to learn in and school staff are vital to ensuring that students have access to appropriate information, advice and support.<sup>9 10</sup>

The Supporting Student Wellbeing in Schools project links to key findings and recommendations made through the Commissioner's School and Learning consultation in 2018 and the 2015 report *Our Children Can't Wait: Review of the implementation of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*:

*School and Learning Recommendation 13:* Relevant governing authorities and key stakeholders work with the Commissioner for Children and Young People to review and develop a best practice model/s for implementation of social and personal support within schools.

*Our Children Can't Wait Recommendation 7:* Schools be resourced to provide whole-of-school approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective in promoting resilience and supporting social and emotional learning.

The project aimed to further explore:

- issues impacting on student's wellbeing
- frameworks or approaches to supporting student wellbeing across the WA education system and across individual schools
- resourcing provided to support student wellbeing
- opportunities to strengthen responses to ensure that students receive the required support and assistance.

This discussion paper is informed by information from the Department of Education, Catholic Education WA, and the Association of Independent Schools WA, as well as from individual schools and school staff members, and a literature review.

- The Commissioner has also published the following supporting resources: *Student wellbeing approaches in schools: School survey results* detailing responses from WA principals and staff on student wellbeing within their school.
- Case studies of WA schools on supporting student wellbeing, including eight primary and secondary schools across all sectors.
- *How the Education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*, which details financial resourcing and funding distribution across sectors to support student wellbeing.

## WA education system governance

The WA education system has three sectors, Government, Catholic and Independent. All schools must meet legislative requirements and standards required by the *School Education Act 1999*.

The Department of Education operates 812 schools located within eight education regions. It provides strategic focus and direction for its schools; regulates and funds non-government schools, including monitoring compliance to the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools; and provides support to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and Teacher Registration Board of WA.

The Department of Education plays a role in identifying the issues impacting on schools and determining any responses required, including different levels of services and resourcing. Regional offices support schools to implement system-wide policies, monitor and support school performance, deliver services to assist staff, and provide advice and support. The government school system also includes independent government schools, which are schools that have greater decision-making autonomy and flexibility to make local decisions across their school's operation.

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) has overall responsibility for the strategic direction and management of Catholic education in WA, providing the policy work and associated decision making for the four WA dioceses – Perth, Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome. Catholic Education WA (CEWA) has the delegated authority from CECWA to oversee the delivery of Catholic education across 162 schools in WA, providing direct guidance, support and the delivery of different initiatives to support the delivery of CECWA's strategic directions. All schools must adhere to the policies set out by CECWA, and various guidelines have been developed to inform school operation and accountability. CEWA is responsible for ensuring compliance to all legislative and regulatory requirements.

Independent non-government schools operate as private, self-administered organisations, with their own constitutions and governing bodies, and are separately registered by the Minister for Education. Their individual governing bodies determine the school strategic directions, ensure the school is complying and meeting the required standards, and ultimately hold responsibility for the welfare of students and the school. The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) supports, represents and advocates on the interests of Independent schools and provides guidance and support (including providing guidelines and draft policies and procedures). AISWA does not enforce or monitor school compliance across Independent schools.

All schools and teachers are required to adhere to a number of standards and the *School Education Act 1999* in the provision of education, as well as meet registration standards and participate in review processes.

There are different models of school funding across each of the sectors in WA, and schools receive varying proportions of funding from both Commonwealth and State Government sources.

Further information on the governance structures for the different education sectors and a breakdown of funding provided to schools to support student wellbeing are outlined in the



supporting report, *How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*.

## Child safe principles

*"It may help kids come to school if they know they're safe and are in good hands. And know that no one will harm them."* Student<sup>11</sup>

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (final Report 2017) recommended that organisations providing a service for children and young people must take responsibility to protect children and young people from harm and abuse, by identifying and implementing strategies to mitigate the risks that may impact on their safety.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (2019) were agreed by the Coalition of Australian Governments in February 2019, including the WA Premier. The National Principles underpin an organisation's approaches to creating child safety, including minimising the risk of harm occurring, increasing the likelihood of the harm being uncovered, and responding appropriately to disclosures or allegations of harm.

## What do school staff say about the wellbeing of students?

In September 2019, the Commissioner sought feedback from school principals and education staff about the wellbeing issues facing their students. Over 170 schools participated in the survey, including primary and high schools from across metropolitan and regional locations and all three education sectors.

Clear themes emerged and staff identified a range of issues experienced by students, including:

### *Mental health, emotional and behavioral disorders*

- Mental health conditions (e.g. anxiety, depression and trauma).
- High-risk behaviours (e.g. non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation and addictive behaviours such as alcohol, drug and technology addiction).
- Behavioural disorders (e.g. ADHD, ODD and emotional dysregulation).
- Behavioural concerns (e.g. violence and aggression, bullying, conflict).
- Lack of resilience and coping skills.
- Experiences of trauma.

### *Family and parenting concerns*

- Family structure challenges (e.g. long work hours, split families, grandparent carers).
- Inconsistent parenting styles and parental engagement.
- Families access to material needs – including families living in poverty, unemployment, homelessness or financial stress.
- Limited capacity for families to address students' wellbeing concerns (e.g. accessing specialist health, educational or psychological services).
- Unsafe family and living conditions.
- Children living in out-of-home care.

### *Disability and special educational needs*

- Presence of multiple complex needs (including comorbid disabilities).
- Undiagnosed or unrecognised disabilities where students do not meet the threshold for support.

### *Physical health*

- Long-term disease or physical health conditions.
- Physical health impacts of poverty – including poor nutrition, poor hygiene, and inadequate housing.
- Poor health habits, including lack of nutrition, limited physical exercise, lack of sleep, excessive use of screen time.

### *Attendance issues*

- Low school attendance rates.
- School transiency.

### *Social isolation*

- Sense of not belonging at school.
- Experiences of racism.
- Limited understanding and appreciation of cultural differences.
- Lack of acceptance for LGBTI+ students, particularly those with diverse gender identity.

### *Impact of COVID-19*

The survey was undertaken with school principals prior to the onset of the COVID-pandemic, and therefore does not capture any wellbeing issues that may have emerged as a result. From March to June 2020, the Commissioner heard from over 800 children and young people about the positive and negative impacts that the pandemic had for them, including mental health concerns, education, concerns for their future, having additional time with parents and at home to pursue hobbies and interests, and, for some children and young people, a preference for some aspects of home-based learning. These responses were collated into the Commissioner's report, *COVID-19: As told by WA children and young people*.

There has also been emerging research about the long-term impacts of the pandemic, including significant increases in the number of children living in families where there is employment stress as a result of COVID-19 job losses,<sup>12</sup> and the pandemic's impact on particularly vulnerable groups of children and young people. The Commissioner will continue to monitor the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of children and young people through consultations and the 2021 Speaking Out Survey.

## **What is already being done to support student wellbeing?**

There are several system-wide and school-based approaches to supporting student wellbeing in WA. These approaches tend to fall along a continuum including universal

approaches delivered to promote or enhance wellbeing for all students and staff at a school, targeted interventions to provide additional support for groups of students who have specific needs, and individual or specialised interventions for students identified as requiring intensive or tailored support.

## Australian Student Wellbeing Framework

Education Services Australia developed a national framework for the Commonwealth Department of Education to support all Australian schools to promote positive relationships and wellbeing of students and educators within safe, inclusive and connected learning communities. The framework identifies the following five elements, which constitute a systemic whole-of-school approach:



*Five elements of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework*

Australia's Ministers of Education endorsed the framework, however it is not supported by any specific national policy or standards for implementation. It is unclear how the framework is being used across Australian schools.

## Universal approaches

Universal approaches vary across the education sector and WA schools and include whole-of-school frameworks, sector-wide standards, policies and guidelines, models of support, engagement with external stakeholders and funding to support student wellbeing.

### Whole-of-school frameworks, approaches, initiatives and programs

A whole-of-school framework, such as the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, is a systemic approach to student wellbeing that embeds a number of elements across the school to address and create the conditions for positive wellbeing outcomes for students and staff. It may incorporate a range of different approaches or initiatives (e.g. a whole-of-

school approach to bullying) to form part of the broader strategic approach to addressing wellbeing.

Internationally, there are several models used for whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing, including the European Network of Health Promoting Schools, the Positive Psychology Framework and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model.

The literature review undertaken for this project highlighted the common elements that should be included in whole-of-school wellbeing frameworks or strategies, including:

- Leadership, strategy and planning, including policies, processes, frameworks, official planning documents.
- Support for students, including available services and supports.
- Social and emotional learning for students through curriculum and skills building.
- Student participation, including having a voice in decisions made within the school and opportunities to contribute.
- Safety for students, including physical and emotional safety, cultural safety and support for diversity and inclusion.
- Partnerships with providers, parents, students, communities.
- Learning and development for educators through professional learning and development and skills sharing.

The literature review also identified the challenges that schools may face in being able to effectively implement whole-of-school student wellbeing frameworks. These included inconsistent understanding and application of wellbeing approaches, lack of support and clarity around implementation, resource and funding challenges, and difficulty in tracking the impact.

*"The whole school approach not only to learning but also developing social skills, resilience and emotional regulation has improved the chances of success for our students."* Comment from regional government primary school <sup>13</sup>

There are no formal requirements across WA schools to develop or implement a whole-of-school framework or systemic approach to wellbeing for students and staff. There is also limited evidence about the use of specific whole-of-school frameworks in WA.

While all three education sectors recognise the importance of supporting student wellbeing, there does not appear to be a clear or consistent definition of student wellbeing overarching their approaches. At a system level, none of the three education sectors had a comprehensive wellbeing framework or systemic whole-of-school approach to wellbeing. At an individual school level, however, some schools across the different sectors had developed or implemented a whole-of-school wellbeing framework or approach and embedded this within their strategic plan or priority documents.

AISWA advised they promote the use of whole-of-school frameworks, such as the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework and Be You (the mental health in schools program) to Independent schools. It is up to the individual schools whether these are implemented.

CEWA's website states that school psychology teams can support schools in the development of whole-of-school frameworks, though it is not clear what framework or approach will be used. This is also the case for government schools.

While a number of different elements comprise a whole-of-school framework, as detailed on page 12, some appear to be better understood and implemented more frequently than others. For example, schools and sectors regularly raised specific student supports and staff training as a key strategy for addressing student wellbeing, however it was less common for schools to raise student or family participation as part of their wellbeing approach.

Many schools recognised that creating a safe, inclusive and caring school environment was fundamental to addressing student wellbeing. This was often articulated through school strategies and values. Many schools across the sectors had developed dedicated leadership structures and staff committees to prioritise and focus on student wellbeing and deliver wellbeing initiatives.

*"A whole school approach to Social /Emotional wellbeing, supported by School Social worker, School Psychologist, and implementation of the Child Safe framework have provided a sound basis on which to manage all related issues."* Comment from metropolitan Catholic school <sup>14</sup>

## **Education policies and guidelines**

Each sector reported a range of policies and initiatives that had some link to student wellbeing, however these were not coordinated under any overarching framework of student wellbeing. Policies ranged from students at educational risk and student health care through to healthy food and drink.

Other Department of Education frameworks used across government schools include the Reduce Bullying in Schools guidelines and associated resources, the Let's take a stand together framework on school violence, the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework and the Positive Behaviour Support Framework.

CEWA's response also referenced their Code of Ethical Conduct and Child Safe Framework.

While schools are required to implement some of the frameworks and guidelines detailed above, some remain optional.

### *Child safe and child protection frameworks*

The Department of Education's policy and procedure guidelines, Child Protection in Department of Education Sites (2019), includes details on the mandatory reporting requirements for sexual abuse and support for students affected by child abuse. The Department is working towards a comprehensive child safe framework across all government schools.

All non-government schools must implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations under Standard 10 of the Registration Standards for Non-Government Schools, and are assessed on this as part of their registration process. The Catholic sector has a specific Child Safe Framework that all Catholic schools are required to implement to address the National Principles.

While a child safe framework may complement a systemic whole-of-school approach to student wellbeing, it has a specific focus on protecting children and young people from harm. A child safe framework does not have a broader wellbeing focus or form a comprehensive wellbeing framework on its own.

### **System-wide models of support**

System-wide models of support exist across the education sectors, including through school psychology services and centralised and/or regional support.

#### *School psychology services*

Schools across all sectors are allocated some level of school psychology services. School psychology services provide a specialist psychological assessment, intervention and consultation service for schools that focus on:

- Assistance for individual student and whole-of-school learning; attendance, behaviour and engagement; wellbeing and mental health; and emergency and critical incident management.
- Assessment of students with learning difficulties and supporting schools to implement adjustments.
- Building school capacity and skills of school staff.
- Assistance for families to address children's psycho-educational needs.

The funding and provision of school psychology services is further explored in the supporting report, *How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*.

In submissions to the Commissioner, each of the education sectors provided details on the allocation of school psychology services to schools within their sector. The government education sector provides an allocation of one school psychologist to a maximum of 2,000 students. One school psychologist is allocated to every 5,189 students within the Catholic sector. There are nine state-funded school psychologists within the Independent sector, with the approximate figures for students in this sector being 66,387 (approximately one psychologist per 7,376 students).

Feedback from the education sectors and school surveys indicates that the current provision of school psychology services is not sufficient to meet demand or to undertake the initiatives and programs that are required. Within each sector, where it is practical, schools may opt to utilise school funding to purchase additional psychology services beyond what is allocated to them.

*"Our school has purchased additional psych time to try to manage the case load (35 at risk students from a school population of 142). Our allocated time is 0.08 FTE which the school has struggled to increase to 0.2 FTE."* Comment from a regional government primary school<sup>15</sup>

*"Access to school psychological services is limited, reducing the number of students that can be assessed and is more focused on the academic side rather than social / emotional wellbeing of the child."* Comment from a metropolitan government primary school<sup>16</sup>

### *Other supports*

Each education sector provides schools with access to consultancy and support on issues including curriculum, behaviour and wellbeing, child protection, disability, school psychology services, and specific supports for primary and secondary schools.

School chaplaincy programs are voluntary and can be accessed by schools to form part of their pastoral care approach to promote positive school environments and support student development. However, they are dependent on funding allocations. Participation in school chaplaincy programs is voluntary for students and families.

Staff across a number of schools described having dedicated student support or services teams and coordinated pastoral care approaches as a way to improve and support student wellbeing. The approaches varied between schools.

*"Investment in our services team of a social worker, school psychologist and a chaplain, all communication with my Deputy Principal to plan and cross reference the students who are engaging in the services has resulted in better coverage, a more consistent approach and a more thorough coverage for students."* Comment from a metropolitan government primary school <sup>17</sup>

There are also several targeted approaches to support specific cohorts or groups of students with distinct educational or wellbeing needs, referenced in the section from page 18.

### **Funding approaches to support student wellbeing**

All schools receive a base amount of funding from either the State or Commonwealth governments. Schools may receive additional loadings depending on the characteristics of their student population (e.g. Aboriginal students and students with a disability), the socio-economic profile (or disadvantage) for the school, as well as school location, and school size.

Further information on models of funding supporting and key issues related to funding are detailed in the supplementary report, *How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*.

Schools participating in the school survey reported a range of issues relating to funding and resourcing that they felt impacted on their capacity to support student wellbeing within their school. This included the level of staffing available to schools to support student wellbeing, and competing priorities and demands on schools with limited resources.

*"School is grossly under resourced to deal with the local issues."* Comment from a regional Catholic school<sup>18</sup>

*"Once we direct funding to student services it is coming from somewhere else. What curriculum areas need to be cut so that we can support the students we have in our school."* Comment from a regional Catholic school<sup>19</sup>

### **Systemic engagement with external organisations and departments to support student wellbeing**

*"Engaging with community support agencies, bringing them into school to help our families to build relationships and feel comfortable about engaging with these*

*services has been productive.* "Comment from a metropolitan government primary school <sup>20</sup>

While schools are well placed to support student wellbeing, it is unrealistic to expect that schools have the specialist knowledge, expertise, resources or remit to address all student needs. Schools require access to external organisations to provide the necessary services required by students or their families.

The three education sectors provided examples of dedicated guidelines in place to engage external support for a child or young person. These include the agreements for School Health Services and Community Health Nurses in government school systems; Mandatory Reporting requirements for schools to report suspected child sexual abuse and training for staff; and the School Suicide Response Program workgroup, an interagency protocol around coordination of support services in the event of a suspected youth suicide. Both CEWA and AISWA can support schools to access and engage with other services as required.

The Department of Education has Memorandums of Understanding in place with the Department of Justice and the Department of Communities to support vulnerable cohorts of students, as well as with the Department of Health to support schools more broadly. The Department also has an Engaging and Working with Our Community Framework, which provides broad details for schools on how to engage with community and external stakeholders.

School engagement with service providers is dependent on relationships with individual providers, and the availability and capacity of services within the local area. School survey participants identified organisations they connect with to support students including:

- Mental health issues – referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or community mental health organisations, onsite school nurse or psychologist, and consultation with the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health (for government schools).
- Physical health issues – referrals to general practitioners, allied health services, onsite school nurses, and Aboriginal health providers.
- Disability and learning difficulties – consultation with School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory and School of Special Educational Needs: Disability (for government schools) and referrals to external providers such as psychiatrists, occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers.
- Child protection concerns – referrals to the Department of Communities or other community service or family support providers.
- Family poverty and lack of material basics – support and referrals to Foodbank and Smith Family scholarships, and partnership with Centrelink (e.g. delivery of Centrelink services within schools).
- Challenging behaviour – referrals to School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement (for government schools).
- Legal issues – engagement with local police and youth justice services.
- Other - dedicated programs for Aboriginal children and young people, culturally and linguistically diverse children, children in the early years and recreation initiatives.



## Whole-of-school initiatives or programs

A range of initiatives were identified by education sectors and schools which may be delivered to support and address student wellbeing.

### *Student programs*

Whole-of-school student wellbeing programs will typically focus on developing students' social and emotional skills or broad wellbeing areas. Examples include supporting students to develop alternative thinking styles, understand their emotions and feelings, or develop their knowledge through wellbeing related curriculum content. Whilst these programs form an important part of a whole-of-school wellbeing approach, they are not in themselves a complete wellbeing approach or strategy.

Each education sector recommends specific programs to their schools however implementation is optional, with uptake determined and resourced at an individual school level. There are some exceptions where programs are mandatory (e.g. child protection or specific health curriculum).

Programs identified in WA schools included, but are not limited to:

- Classroom social and emotional learning programs, such as the Promoting Alternate Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program, Friendly Schools, Aussie Optimism, School Drug Education and Road Aware, Zones of Regulation, Teen Mental Health First Aid, anti-bullying programs, the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement (PERMA) approach, and mindfulness programs.
- Whole-of school health checks, providing an assessment point for all students within the school, for example relating to hearing and speech.
- Child protection curriculum being taught to students through mandated protective behaviours and sexual abuse prevention education and training.
- Health curriculum being taught to students, covering physical and mental health education, as well as other health topics such as hygiene or nutrition.
- Student transition programs which support transitions between different year groups, schools, or from primary into high school.
- Student engagement programs such as recreational, behavioural or cultural programs.
- Support programs, including breakfast clubs, transport assistance and other practical supports.

### *Family and community programs and initiatives*

Partnership and engagement with parents was highlighted by schools as an important in supporting student wellbeing. Dedicated activities were in place across a number of schools to help build parental and community capacity, to promote positive child wellbeing outcomes, and to recognise and respond to wellbeing concerns. Examples of these initiatives included:

- Triple P Positive Parenting Program for parents.
- Enhanced Transition to Schools project, which provides community-based playgroups on or near a school site.

- Child and Parent Centres, which facilitate a range of programs for parents and community members.
- Parent education sessions on topics such as child behaviour, mental health or other relevant topics.
- Other activities including community gardens on site, student and family activities, and specific parent groups.

## Student participation

Hearing the views and opinions of school students, and involving them in decision making, is a key element of a whole-of-school framework for student wellbeing.

*"To have a say about what needs improvement in the school. So basically our ideas and thoughts should be heard and utilised."* High school student<sup>21</sup>

There are no system-wide approaches to student participation evident across the education sectors, although this is encouraged. Individual schools determine whether they utilise student participation methods and the methods they use. Some schools indicated that their approaches to student participation included:

- Student leadership teams (e.g. student council)
- Student wellbeing and opinion surveys
- Feedback boxes for students
- Involvement of a student voice in the development and promotion of school strategies, including Codes of Conduct or school values
- Student participation initiatives (e.g. in community service activities).

## Targeted approaches to support student wellbeing

Targeted approaches within the education system that provide dedicated support for particular students include processes to determine students at risk, interventions for distinct cohorts of students and training to build capacity of school staff.

All sectors recognised that there are distinct groups of students with specific wellbeing considerations. Broadly, the WA teacher's professional standards and registration require that teachers have demonstrated knowledge and regard for students with diverse backgrounds and will implement strategies to address the needs of these groups in their learning environments. This includes students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds, and students who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, have disability or diverse abilities.<sup>22</sup>

## Students at educational risk

*"Me, school no, when I got homeless with mum, that was really hard for me to go to school and start having an education again. I never fit in with the kids at school to be honest."* Young person<sup>23</sup>

The Department of Education's Students at Educational Risk in Public Schools Policy and Procedures clearly outlines the requirements for schools "to identify, provide for, monitor and report on students who may be at educational risk".<sup>24</sup> This policy states schools should implement approaches to:

- enhance protective factors and reduce individual factors that may place a student at educational risk
- engage resources and agencies to support students
- ensure that teachers are making adjustments and allocating support to address the diverse needs of students at risk
- build capacity of staff through professional learning to identify and respond to student needs, and to engage in planning for students at risk.

The policy outlines that schools will develop and use clearly identified strategic plans and evidence-based processes to enable early identification of students at education risk, determined at an individual school level and in response to local issues and needs.

The Students with Exceptional Needs program within the government education system addresses learning needs and/or risk management of some students with extremely high needs. This may include children in out-of-home care, or students with a disability, including those who do not meet criteria to receive support, but require additional assistance.

Curriculum and Re-engagement in Education (*CaRE*) schools provide education to secondary students who are unable or have difficulties engaging in mainstream education, with modified curriculum and additional supports to address the factors impacting on a student's engagement in learning. These operate within the Catholic sector as independent schools.

Survey responses from CEWA and a number of schools indicated that there was a need to expand the number of CaRE schools to address the demand for this model. Further details on CaRE schools, their funding models and allocations are detailed in the report, *How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*.

*"I'm at school and I haven't been to school in years... I like it 'cos mainstream schooling was just not for me. I'd always get in fights and people always bully me and being here no-one bullies you... and its good having that where you can just be yourself and not be judged."* CaRE school student <sup>25</sup>

A small number of schools across the different sectors indicated that they have developed their own processes to determine and assess students who are at risk. This includes allocating specific staff members to track and assess student attendance, academic attainment and behaviour, and assessment frameworks to identify individual student outcomes.

### **Students with disabilities**

*"Being made to 'fit in' to mainstream school and learning, but not always getting the correct support or enough modifications at school."* 10 year-old<sup>26</sup>

The national Disability Standards for Education outlines the obligations for education and training providers, and the rights of people with disability, under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)*. The standards seek to ensure students with disability have opportunities and choices comparable with those offered to students without disability. Education providers are obliged to consult regarding a person's disability and determine what assistance is required, make reasonable adjustments to assist a person to participate, and to eliminate discrimination and harassment towards people with disability.

There are clear system-wide strategies in place across all education sectors to support the learning and engagement of students with disability, including:

- The provision of expert advice and direction to schools on supporting students with disability, including the use of consultants, classroom observation and supports to apply for resourcing or assistance.
- Professional learning to build the capacity of schools and educators in their support of students with disability.
- Access and use of student teachers, specialised equipment, and other services to support students.
- The availability of Education Support Centres and Schools for Special Educational Needs.

Given the clear requirements on schools to support students with disability, sector approaches tend to be more purposeful and direct than initiatives for other cohorts of students. However, feedback from schools indicates that this does not always equate to children and young people with disability receiving the support they require, or the required adjustments made to meet their needs.

The Department of Education's Schools of Special Educational Needs provide supports to government school students with disability, sensory needs, medical and mental health needs, as well as students with extreme, complex and challenging behaviours. Further information about these services and its funding is provided in the supplementary report, *How the education sectors resource and react to student health and wellbeing issues in Western Australia*.<sup>27</sup>

Education support centres and schools operate across all education sectors, providing specialist programs or early intervention programs for students with diagnosed disability.

School staff indicated a range of targeted programs they use to support students with disability. These include, but are not limited to:

- Autism Early Intensive Intervention Program, which supports transition for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in kindergarten and pre-primary.
- Specialist Learning Programs for Autism Spectrum Disorder, which is an endorsed educational program for students with High Functioning Autism from Year 7 to 10, resourced by the School of Special Educational Needs.
- Talkabout program, a specialised language service for children and young people experiencing speech, language delays or disability.
- Zones of Regulation, an approach that supports students with the development of self-regulation skills.

In responding to the Commissioner's survey, many staff outlined challenges they face in providing support for students with disability, including difficulties in obtaining a diagnosis, gaps in support for those who are unable to access a diagnosis and limited access to specialised staff within the school.

*"...the more severe [the disability] the more difficult to get the resources required to assist. Often the School Psych is here for limited timing and with more and more students presenting with either a disability (undiagnosed) or mental health problems*

- *it is difficult to manage.* "Comment from a regional government primary and secondary school<sup>28</sup>

*"Approx. 27% of our students are on the NCDD (Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability) register. Many have social/emotional needs and learning needs.*" Comment from a regional Independent primary school<sup>29</sup>

## Aboriginal students

*"One of the reasons why I left school was 'cause I was getting bullied... I was getting bullied for my dark skin... it was also through my primary school to my high school and I dropped out in Year 9. I'm supposed to be in Year 12 today and I still haven't gone back to school."* 17 year-old<sup>30</sup>

*"Make schools for black kids 'cause we learn different to Wadjellas [non-Aboriginal people]. We think different, a school where Wadjella kids could come too, so we can share our ways and teach them... I would bring language and culture back first."* 13 year-old<sup>31</sup>

All government schools are encouraged to use the Department of Education's Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework, which outlines how to create whole-school environments that support Aboriginal students and Aboriginal perspectives, as well as strengthen relationships and connection between the education sector and Aboriginal families and students. Government schools can also utilise their school budget to access specific or dedicated programs or supports for Aboriginal students, including the Follow the Dream program, Clontarf Academy, or to employ an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer to help schools to understand and work with Aboriginal students and the local community.

The Catholic sector has an Aboriginal Education Policy, specific programs and supports available for Aboriginal students and families, and consultants to provide support to schools and cultural competency training for staff.

Schools may also develop and implement other strategies to support Aboriginal students and support Aboriginal cultural safety at school.

The Commissioner's 2018 School and Learning consultation found that many Aboriginal students experience greater challenges at school than their non-Aboriginal peers in areas such as relationships at school, and the support they received for their learning and health, including personal mental health. The Commissioner recommended that governing authorities *"review and evaluate the implementation of cultural frameworks for supporting Aboriginal students across schools in WA and report publically on the findings."*

## Culturally and linguistically diverse students

*"...even though I was very young, I went through enough misery to last a lifetime. First we didn't have anywhere to live, after when I started school everybody teased me, I didn't have any friends, my accent was different, I was an outsider. I didn't belong."* 16 year-old<sup>32</sup>

All education sectors provide support for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse and who have English as an additional language through targeted funding for language classes and literary support.

The Department of Education provides Intensive English Centres in selected primary and secondary schools, delivering specialised programs for students who are learning English as an additional language.

Within the Catholic sector, students from refugee and migrant backgrounds were identified as a group that require additional support. This is provided through school psychology and capacity-building projects which focus on strengthening trauma-informed approaches.

## Mental health

*"Many kids our age struggle with depression and anxiety, I think there should be effort to support them."* High school student<sup>33</sup>

Principals and education staff identified mental health, emotional and behavioural disorders as being the dominating issue impacting on student wellbeing.

*"Mental health concerns impact on an increasing number of our young people. Anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicide ideation and in some cases psychosis are observed in many of our students."* Comment from a metropolitan Independent primary and secondary school<sup>34</sup>

There is some system-wide support and direction for schools in terms of responding to students with mental health concerns, mostly related to suicidal behaviour or self-injury.

The Department of Education has developed the *School response and planning guidelines for students with suicidal behaviour and non-suicidal self-injury*, and education sectors have access to postvention support when there has been a student suicide within the school.

While school psychologists or nurses play a role in supporting schools to identify and respond to students with mental health or welfare concerns, schools indicate the level of school psychology time they receive does not allow them to adequately assess or respond to concerns about all students, or provide the level of support required for students with specific mental health needs within their school.

*"I have made comment at times that we are not a mental health facility. Schools do the best they can with the resources at their disposal and skills of staff."* Comment from a metropolitan Catholic secondary school<sup>35</sup>

The Department of Education has funded the Mental Health in Schools Project over 2019–2024. The pilot project is providing 300 schools with an additional 0.1 FTE Level 3 classroom teacher to plan and implement an evidence-based mental health program to develop mental health knowledge, skills and competencies amongst WA students.<sup>36</sup> This project has a specific focus on mental health, rather than a holistic focus on wellbeing.

Schools with mental health concerns for a particular student or group reported they often relied on local mental health services to provide support and targeted interventions. However, they also identified significant challenges in accessing support for students, including a lack of services and long waitlists. In regional areas, this was compounded by the high turnover of mental health workers within the community and gaps in the availability of suitably qualified workers. A lack of programs for younger children and young people under the age of 12 was also reported.

*"Limited access to psychological services in regional areas, limited access to GPs with specialisation in adolescent mental health."* Comment from a regional Independent school<sup>37</sup>

*"Lack of resources/agencies that can support students in the age group of 6-11 years old with mental health issues."* Comment from a metropolitan government primary school<sup>38</sup>

## **Students with challenging behaviour**

The Department of Education's Positive Behaviour Support Framework outlines a whole-of-school operational framework to making evidence-based decisions to improve student academic and behavioural outcomes. The framework provides guidance on how schools can implement the WA Positive Behaviour Support model and is specific to addressing student behaviour, rather than student wellbeing.

The School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement provides educational support and services for students with extreme, complex and challenging behaviours, as well as providing consultancy to government schools. There is a rigorous referral process for students to be accepted into the engagement centres, with limited spaces within each region.

The Alternative Learning Settings Pilot Program provides education for government school students who have been excluded for physical assault.

School staff expressed challenges in being able to meet the needs of students with emotional regulation or behavioural issues, both in the type of resourcing available, and the available options or strategies to support student's individual needs.

*"Lack of intermediary funding for children at risk and displaying serious behaviours. Not able to fund EAs for short term contracts, without having to make them permanent. This is an issue if the child does not go on to receive any disability funding, yet Principal decides to put in school funds for immediate support."* Comment from a metropolitan government primary school<sup>39</sup>

*"Nothing seems to work for students with severe behavioural issues."* Comment from a metropolitan secondary government school<sup>40</sup>

## **Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex students**

The Department of Education indicated individual schools have the responsibility to determine the resources and support that they use to fulfil their anti-discrimination policy and legislative obligations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) students.

The Department of Education provides funding to Inclusive Education WA to provide professional learning and support to secondary schools on the needs of LGBTI students, if requested by schools. The department has also developed a *Supporting transgender and intersex students – Frequently Asked Questions* resource for schools.

Within Catholic and Independent schools there are no formal support avenues for schools or students, however schools can request assistance from CEWA and AISWA to inform their decisions or supports for students.

## Students involved in child protection and care

*"When I went to school it was mainly to get away from [home]..... When I did go to class I found the teachers weren't supportive. I never had clean clothes or lunch. I couldn't concentrate and was always crying a lot. They were just angry that I wouldn't turn up at class.... Looking back, it was presented as "you're a naughty child" when really I think I just needed some help, some support."* 20 year-old<sup>41</sup>

Processes in place to guide schools in their response to child protection concerns include mandatory reporting requirements for all schools to report suspected child sexual abuse, and child protection policies and procedures within the Department of Education and Catholic Education WA. Many schools indicated frustration that there was often little action or follow up when they reported other child welfare concerns to their local Department of Communities office, or where children in care needed additional support.

*"When we have had disclosures and reported them through the appropriate channels, staff are disillusioned because they are told by CPFS that the students are 16 so they will do nothing or they are not CPFS children and they do not follow up."* Comment from a regional Catholic secondary school<sup>42</sup>

*"There are some agencies that take excessive periods of time to respond or responses are viewed as superficial...this tends to be more from CPFS and we understand that they may well be under resourced."* Comment from a metropolitan government secondary school<sup>43</sup>

*"Department of Communities are under-resourced and struggle to provide for the high level of needs of our community."* Comment from a regional government primary school<sup>44</sup>

Memorandums of Understanding are in place between the Department of Communities and all three education sectors. These outline the requirement for schools to have an education plan for children and young people in care, affirming a joint approach between the parties, and delegating authority to schools to meet and plan for individual student needs.

## Targeted training to build capacity of school staff

Schools may access training to build the capacity, confidence and skills of teachers and staff to improve responses to specific student wellbeing needs. Programs identified by schools include Team Teach positive behaviour management training, the Trauma Informed Learning Initiative, Youth Mental Health First Aid, Gatekeeper training and mandatory child protection professional learning.

Schools identified some barriers that impact staff from accessing specific training on student wellbeing. These include limited number of places available for staff, a requirement for staff to have time away from the classroom in order to attend, and having to balance training on student wellbeing with other conflicting training requirements (e.g. curriculum or assessment processes).

Schools provide whole-of-school learning opportunities and development days, with the content focus of these days determined at an individual school level.



## Specialised and individual interventions

*"School was aware of circumstances, got involved with school chaplain. He arranged for mental health assessment, took me to Centrelink and saw social worker, took me to [Agency] who provided accommodation for 12 months. Young person<sup>45</sup>*

Schools often deliver specialised and individualised interventions for students requiring intensive or tailored support. Many school staff identified they were able to respond to individual student wellbeing needs through year coordinators or pastoral care roles, such as school psychologists, chaplains, school nurses, youth workers or social workers. However, school staff often felt their ability to provide support, particularly for students with complex needs, was impacted by limited resources.

Specialised or individual strategies provided in schools included:

- Supports for students with a disability, such as assessment, making individual adjustments, and applying for and accessing supports and funding for students with disability.
- Developing and implementing individual attendance strategies.
- Developing individualised learning plans to address the specific student wellbeing needs.
- School based social workers, chaplains or psychologists directly supporting students and/or families, home visits to parents.
- Critical care, case management or mentoring.
- Direct financial support and relief for families experiencing hardship.
- Behaviour management plans.
- Referrals to external organisations and supports.
- Joint case management with other organisations for students with complex trauma.
- Tailored support to support the wellbeing of an individual student.

*"Lack of support for students with learning difficulties that are difficult to identify / diagnose and do not fit into the prescribed categories which attract support."*

Comment from a metropolitan government primary school<sup>46</sup>

## Enablers and barriers to addressing student wellbeing needs

Participants in the school survey highlighted a range of enablers and barriers to addressing student wellbeing needs or embedding wellbeing frameworks or systemic approaches, which are described in further detail in the survey report. These factors largely consistent with those identified in the literature review.

### Enablers

#### *Leadership, strategy and planning*

- Strong leadership support and having a dedicated person to lead whole-of-school wellbeing work.
- Clear recognition and priority given to supporting student wellbeing.

- Involvement of whole school staff and wellbeing teams in implementing systemic wellbeing approaches, developing a sense of ownership, shared understanding, and strong morale.
- Policies, processes, frameworks, and official planning documents, which clearly articulate the school's approaches to student wellbeing.
- Development of initiatives, which embed and reinforce the importance of wellbeing through all aspects of the school.
- Clear school direction in creating a strong and nurturing school culture.
- Resourcing for systemic wellbeing approaches.

#### *Support for students*

- Developing strong and coordinated support processes for students (e.g. year coordinators, pastoral care or student service teams).

#### *Student participation*

- Students having a voice in decision making in the school and opportunities to contribute.
- Involving students in implementing wellbeing approaches.
- A focus on developing and promoting relationships between students and their teachers/school.

#### *Partnerships with service providers, parents, students, communities*

- Working closely with families and developing positive working relationships.
- Constructive interactions with external service providers and supports.
- Mechanisms to involve parents and community about decisions and the wellbeing approaches taken.

#### *Learning and development for educators*

- Professional learning, development and skills sharing.
- Focus on promoting teacher wellbeing.
- Ongoing development opportunities for staff to build their capacity to address student wellbeing issues.

## **Barriers**

#### *Limited school funding and resourcing impacts*

- Ability to implement programs or initiatives (both in terms of cost and staff time available)
- Ability to employ dedicated wellbeing staff
- Capacity to meet the high demand of students requiring support, particularly for school psychology services.

#### *Challenges in engaging appropriate services for students*

- Limited skills and capacity of teachers to respond to complex wellbeing needs, including a lack of professional learning
- Lack of options for students who struggle in mainstream learning environments

- Students who have complex needs and/or challenging behaviours but are ineligible or unable to receive support for this
- Limited engagement and partnership from some external agencies to address wellbeing concerns (particularly child protection)
- Lack of services or limited service capacity within the local area to provide support to schools or individual students
- Gaps in services and resources to support the mental health of primary school aged children
- Difficulties engaging parents or caregivers to address student wellbeing concerns
- Mental health issues amongst secondary students becoming more multi-faceted and complex, and more difficult to address.

*Conflicting priorities for schools in terms of pressure to address student wellbeing as well as meet academic requirements.*

*Difficulty tracking and evaluating the impact of wellbeing initiatives.*

*Limited capacity of schools to address factors outside of the school environment (e.g. within the home environment or in communities).*

## **Monitoring and compliance**

There are no requirements for schools to have whole-of-school wellbeing frameworks in place and therefore no monitoring or measurement of such at a system level.

Schools are required to demonstrate compliance with certain policies such as reporting on the delivery of protective behaviours education, or the development of health care plans for students with health needs.

The core government school accountability mechanisms used by the Department of Education include the School Improvement and Accountability Framework, school reports and a range of reviews. These processes do not appear to have an explicit focus on student wellbeing.

CEWA reported monitoring through school registration audits and standards compliance reporting (every three to five years), reporting on professional development delivered for staff, specific evaluations on school psychology services and mental health and wellbeing audits.

AISWA do not monitor compliance, relying on external school registration and monitoring of non-government schools by the Department of Education.

## **Data collection**

The systematic collection of student data is largely focused on student academic achievement and attendance, with additional information being captured regarding suspensions, critical incidents, and student adjustments on basis of disability.

The Department of Education reported a range of platforms it uses to collect data on students and report on outcomes:

- Student Information System (SIS), which links, organises and can transfer individual student data
- Reporting to parents system on student achievement and individual education planning
- Individual systems used by Statewide Services that feed into SIS, including systems through Schools of Special Educational Need, Student Tracking System, School Psychology Services and Disability Resourcing System
- Systems used by schools to collect student data exclusive to that school.

All schools collect and report data on their students who are receiving adjustments at school for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability. This data helps to understand individual student needs as well as informing policy development and planning at a systemic level.

All WA schools are required to use the National School Opinion Survey (NSOS) to hear from students, parents and school staff about their experience in their school. The survey has a general focus on the opinions and satisfaction of students at the school, rather than a specific focus on wellbeing.

Recommendation 1 in the Commissioner's 2018 School and Learning consultation report focused on the use of the NSOS:

*a) The Minister for Education review the way NSOS data is used and reported on to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of policy and practice at a school level across WA.*

*b) Governing authorities report on aggregated NSOS data relevant to the school sector in the annual reporting framework to monitor trends over time.*

*c) Schools demonstrate via their annual reports the actions they will take as a result of the NSOS survey of student's responses.*

There does not appear to be any comprehensive system self-report measures to hear from students about their wellbeing or needs across government schools. Other data collection mechanisms are available for schools to use to understand, report on and monitor the wellbeing of their students, including the Wellbeing Engagement Collection in schools survey or the What's Happening in This School survey. While some schools use these surveys or similar, they are voluntary and there is inconsistent uptake.

It should be noted that the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Speaking Out Survey also aims to monitor student wellbeing, with the Speaking Out Survey 2019 involving approximately 125 schools across the government and Independent school sectors. The Speaking Out Survey 2021 is currently being planned for delivery across all three sectors, with the view that participating schools will be able to access their survey results to understand the wellbeing of their students. Participation in this survey is voluntary for schools and includes a random sample of schools from across the State.

CEWA reported a range of mechanisms it uses to monitor wellbeing and trends, including tracking and reviewing the number and nature of referrals made to school psychology services. This assists CEWA to monitor and track changes over time. CEWA is also implementing a new online school administration platform system, LEADing Lights, which

provides a central point to information relating to student management, including reviewing wellbeing and associated plans, and integrating other school management functions.

All Australian schools participate every three years in the collection of Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data from pre-primary students, providing a snapshot of children's progress at national, state/territory and community levels. Progress is measured in five key domains of development - physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge.

AEDC data is provided to individual schools as a school profile, with the schools determining how they use this information to guide their decision making. The state and federal governments use the community level data to assist with determining the needs of schools across different geographical locations, and the specific resourcing that a school receives.

Individual schools reported different ways that they attempt to capture data and measure outcomes for their students, including tracking academic and attendance data alongside any wellbeing concerns, as well as using the AEDC data to inform the specific initiatives that are required within their school.

Schools reported that it was a challenge to know whether wellbeing initiatives or approaches were making a difference, given the lack of systemic measures to capture student wellbeing.

## **What needs to be done to improve responses to supporting student wellbeing?**

Student wellbeing must be recognised as a priority for schools and all education sectors. It should guide the implementation of evidence-based whole-of-school approaches to student wellbeing in support of a positive learning environment.

### **Strategic approaches and planning**

- A comprehensive student wellbeing strategy or framework, and a consistent definition of student wellbeing, is required across the education sectors.
- Schools need clear guidance and support to implement and embed a whole-of-school wellbeing framework, with consideration of the needs of the local community. This whole-of-school approach should at a minimum, include the five pillars of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework:
  - student voice
  - leadership
  - inclusion
  - support
  - partnerships.
- Protocols and partnerships need to be strengthened between education sectors, government agencies and services to improve support and responses to individual students.
- Pre-service and professional learning for teachers needs to include sufficient focus on student wellbeing as a key driver of better learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

## **Resourcing**

- Targeted funding for all schools to establish wellbeing frameworks and strategic approaches at a whole-of-school level.
- The models and criteria for the provision of funding and support for individual students requires review.
- Appropriate and equitable funding across WA schools and sectors is required to build capacity of schools to provide student wellbeing supports, including school psychology services.

## **Student engagement and participation**

- Ensure students have their voices heard and these inform decision making at a school and system-level.
- Explicit support for distinct cohorts of students, including Aboriginal children and young people, children in care or involved in child protection, LGBTI students, students from CaLD backgrounds, young carers, children with disability, and children with physical or mental health challenges.

## **Monitoring outcomes**

- Introduction of consistent mechanisms to gather and report on data related to student wellbeing. The data should include children and young people's perspectives, such as in the National School Opinion Survey and the Commissioner's Speaking Out Survey.
- Monitoring at both an individual school and sector level of the impacts of wellbeing approaches on student outcomes.

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