

Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment: a case study

NSW Education and Communities

Students with complex needs

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) is undergoing an ambitious system-wide shift. It is moving away from a decades old “student welfare” model of care to a far more holistic and contemporary “wellbeing” approach.

“Wellbeing is as important to us as the basics of literacy and numeracy,” says Brian Smyth King, DEC’s Executive Director of Learning and Engagement.

The Department’s evolution is well underway. It is investing \$167 million over 5 years to implement a universal Wellbeing Framework supporting all students and their school communities. It will also provide public schools with enhanced capacity to address the diverse wellbeing issues of those

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students who are vulnerable in their schooling journey. It will enable them to access wrap-around multi-agency support within and beyond the school when they need it.

“We know that about one in four students will require additional support and services,” says Brian. “Ultimately, our goal is to keep students engaged with their education, even when they’re facing significant challenges in their lives. We know that people who finish year 12 or its equivalent are more likely to be employed, to be part of the community, to be financially independent and to be more resilient in adult life.”

The Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) tool is proving very useful as a catalyst for this challenging organisational change.

“In NSW we have a system of 2,230 public schools. We have 60,000 teaching staff and on any one day more than 50,000 classrooms operate in our schools. How do you influence a system like that? You need an approach that can be used throughout the system and one that has long-term sustainability,” says Brian.



Brian Smyth King, executive director of Learning and Engagement

“We had to think hard about how we could adapt the MWIA tool. What has been most valuable for us is not so much its capacity to investigate one-off projects or problems, but rather the skilling of people to think differently about wellbeing, to think about the impacts their decisions might have on students, on families and on school communities, and in helping people to generalise these skills to other situations in their day-to-day work.”

Brian was one of the first people within the DEC to be introduced to the MWIA tool. “I sat with Tony Coggins [who is one of the original authors of

the toolkit and works with the South London and Maudsley National Health Service Foundation Trust in the United Kingdom] during one of his early presentations in Australia and was in awe of its potential.

“It really challenged me as an individual about having the answers and solutions when in fact those come from the collective – kids, their families, teachers, schools, school communities – and that’s why it is really powerful.

“I was very excited to be able to then share it with my colleagues... who have been equally impressed.”

The DEC is taking a tiered approach to MWIA training. We want to ensure that our system of public schools becomes familiar with mental wellbeing impact thinking, but we also want, particularly our 100 plus senior psychologists, to develop a greater level of expertise in use of the tool and use it through their work in schools.

“It will encourage us to consider all of the stakeholders when there is an issue at hand and we are making decisions. This is particularly important if we are serious about capturing and responding to the voices of children and young people and their families,” says Brian.

This fact sheet has been produced by the Wellbeing Collaborative. Find out more about wellbeing and how it can be applied to your work.

