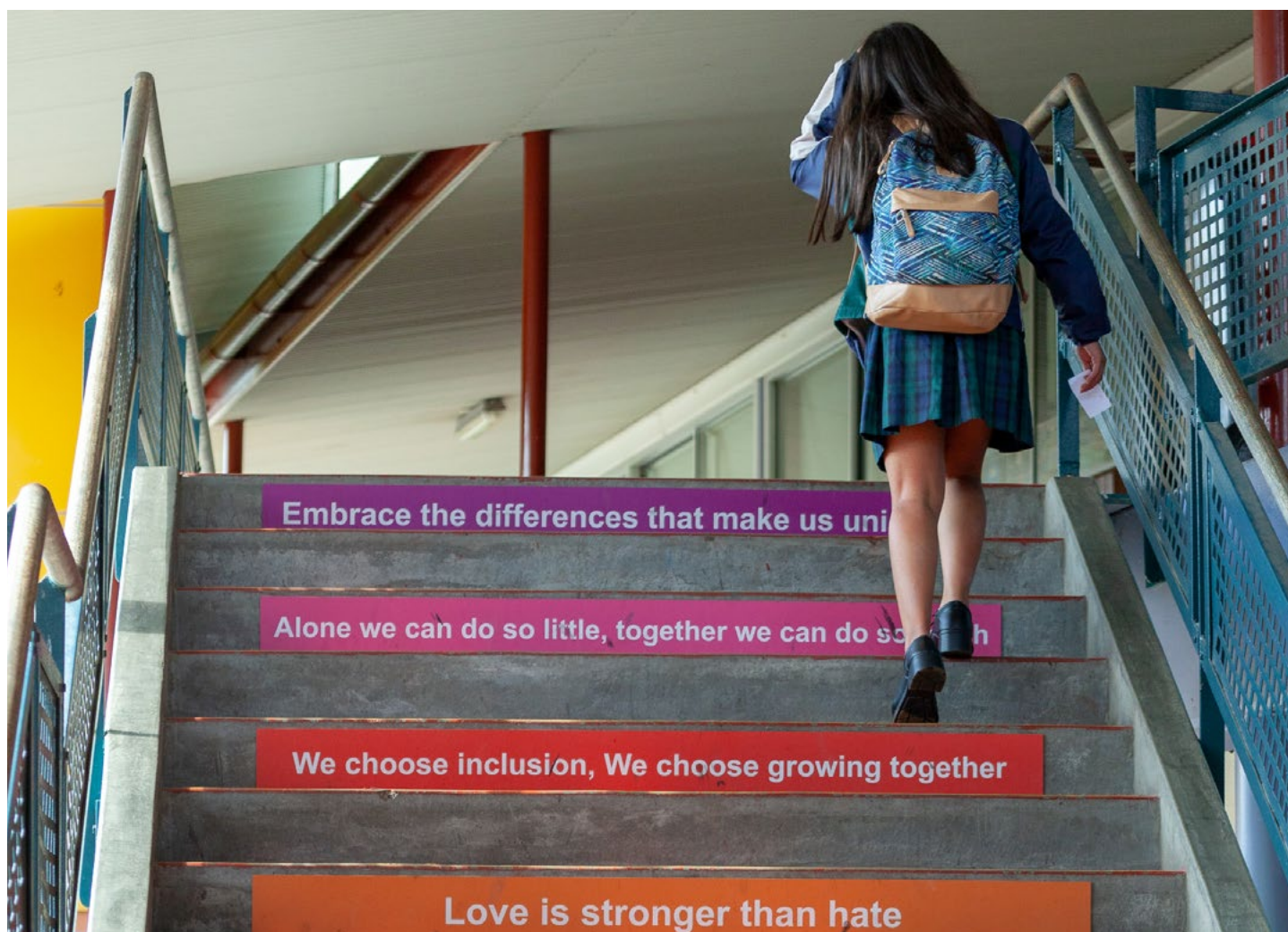**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools – an environmental scan

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Introduction

The NSW Department of Education's Strategic Plan for 2018-2020 includes the goal that 'every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools'. This can be understood to mean that NSW public schools – collectively and through their individual teachers seek to:

- know who each of their students are, including what they bring with them to school that influences their learning; who they are, as people and as learners; where they are at in their learning trajectory; what their aspirations are; and where they need to go to next

- value each of their students, including respecting their personal stories; recognise the contribution they make to their learning community; and hold high expectations for their learning success

- care for each of their students, including providing the support necessary to succeed as learners and experience wellbeing in the school context.

This paper outlines the framework for this strategic goal and provides some preliminary data to describe how NSW public schools are performing against wellbeing indicators. It then reviews briefly some key findings from the literature on student wellbeing, noting that there is not an extant evidence base that can identify best-practice models for ensuring that individual student needs are understood and met at the school level[1]. In the absence of an established evidence base, the paper concludes by outlining a selection of wellbeing approaches that are being used by schools across the public, Catholic and independent sectors in NSW.

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1   This has been known historically as 'pastoral care' in some parts of the education sector in Australia.

Wellbeing for learning and learning for wellbeing

It has been ten years since the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians explicitly broadened the remit of schools and situated the achievement of learning outcomes in a broader responsibility to the whole child. All Australian Education Ministers collectively declared that:

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion (MCEETYA 2008, p. 4).

This was the first formal recognition in Australia that schooling has a broader role to play in the development of students, above and beyond academic outcomes. As a result of this declaration, student wellbeing has received increasing interest across multiple disciplines and policy domains. While definitions of wellbeing differ, they commonly consist of positive affect, resilience, satisfaction with relationships and other dimensions of life, effective functioning, and the maximising of personal potential (Noble, McGrath, Roffey & Rowling 2008). Increasing interest in student wellbeing also reflects the research evidence that shows higher levels of wellbeing are associated with other positive outcomes. These include: better academic outcomes (Graziano et al. 2007; Gumora & Arsenio 2002); better mental health (Hayes et al. 2006; Kashdan et al. 2006); and a more pro-social, responsible lifestyle (Noble, McGrath, Roffey & Rowling 2008; Sancassiani et al. 2015).

The department's strategic goal that 'every student is known, valued and cared for' recognises the inextricable link between wellbeing and learning in the context of schooling. Social and emotional factors influence academic achievement (Murphy & Holste 2016; Wang, Haertel & Walberg 1997), largely via the contributions that they make to motivation and attention. For example, positive mood and improved self-regulation increase students' capacity to pay attention, follow instructions and obey rules (Shapiro et al. 2015), while optimism and a sense of belonging at school are associated with an enhanced future orientation and higher educational aspirations. This leads to a greater appetite for learning and more investment in academic achievement (Murphy & Holste 2016). Conversely, symptoms of anxiety, depression, or an inability for emotional regulation can impact on perceptions of academic competence and are associated with lower educational outcomes (Kranzler et al. 2014).

A certain level of educational proficiency can itself be considered a critical component of student wellbeing. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY 2018, p. 3) specifies learning as one of six outcome areas which must be present for children and young people to be considered to have 'good/high wellbeing'[2]. ARACY notes that 'effective learning and educational attainment is fundamental to future opportunities, both financially and socially' (ARACY 2018, p. 34).

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2   The other areas are: loved and safe; material basics; healthy; participating; positive sense of identity; and culture.

The School Excellence Framework

The relationship between learning and wellbeing is well recognised and articulated in the NSW public school sector. The NSW Department of Education's School Excellence Framework is a clear description of the key elements of high-quality practice across the three domains of learning, teaching and leading. Within these domains, the Framework describes 14 elements that define the core business of schools. One of the Framework elements is Wellbeing, which comprises four themes – caring for students, a planned approach to wellbeing, individual learning needs, and behaviour (Figure 1).

The descriptors of practice in the Wellbeing element explicitly highlight the interrelationship between wellbeing and learning, but this is also implicit in other Framework elements. For example, the Learning culture element calls out a commitment to high expectations of learning progress and achievement for all students. This is realised through effective partnerships with parents and students, and proactive management of attendance and transition points to ensure continuity of learning. The curriculum, assessment, and reporting elements all point to the importance of planning, evaluating and communicating learning in ways that buttress ongoing challenge and progress for every student.

Figure 1: School Excellence Framework – Wellbeing element (NSW Department of Education 2017)

LEARNING DOMAIN:

In schools that excel, there is a strategic and planned approach to develop whole school wellbeing processes that support the wellbeing of all students so they can connect, succeed, thrive and learn.

LEARNING CULTURE

WELLBEING

CURRICULUM

ASSESSMENT

REPORTING

STUDENT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

THEMES	DELIVERING	SUSTAINING AND GROWING	EXCELLING
Caring for students	The wellbeing of students is explicitly supported by identified staff.	Every student can identify a staff member to whom they can confidently turn for advice and assistance at school.	The school is organised so that all students have regular opportunities to meet with an identified staff member who can provide advice, support and assistance to help students fulfil their potential.
A planned approach to wellbeing	Students, staff and the community recognise that student wellbeing and engagement are important conditions for learning. The school plans for and monitors a whole school approach to student wellbeing and engagement.	The school collects, analyses and uses data including valid and reliable student, parent and staff surveys/feedback to monitor and refine a whole school approach to wellbeing and engagement, to improve learning.	The school has implemented evidence-based change to whole school practices, resulting in measurable improvements in wellbeing and engagement to support learning.
Individual learning needs	The needs of all students are explicitly addressed in teaching and learning programs.	Well-developed and evidence-based approaches, programs and assessment processes identify, regularly monitor and review individual student learning needs.	There is school-wide, collective responsibility for student learning and success, which is shared by parents and students. Planning for learning is informed by sound holistic information about each student's wellbeing and learning needs in consultation with parents/carers.
Behaviour	The school's wellbeing approach focuses on creating an effective environment for learning. Teachers and other school staff explicitly communicate expectations of behaviour across school settings.	Expectations of behaviour are co-developed with students, staff and the community and are designed to ensure effective conditions for learning. They are explicitly, consistently and supportively applied across the school.	Positive, respectful relationships are evident and widespread among students and staff and promote student wellbeing to ensure optimum conditions for student learning across the whole school.

The Wellbeing Framework for Schools

Similarly, the Wellbeing Framework for Schools is prefaced by the commitment 'to creating quality learning opportunities for children and young people … [which] includes strengthening their cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development' (NSW Department of Education and Communities 2015, p. 2). The department's 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' (p. 2). The Wellbeing Framework for Schools explicitly acknowledges that wellbeing is associated with achievement and success, as well as the corollary: that achievement contributes to wellbeing, with its contribution to confidence, self-esteem, and effort. The Wellbeing Framework for Schools is broken down into the three themes of connect, succeed, thrive (Figure 2), and six elements of wellbeing: teaching and learning; behaviour discipline and character education; learning and support; professional practice; effective leadership; and school planning.

Figure 2: Wellbeing Framework for Schools - Themes (NSW Department of Education and Communities 2015)

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

# Understanding and tracking wellbeing using student voice

Assessing student learning is a well-established practice in schools, but measuring student wellbeing is a much more elusive task. This is because feeling known, valued and cared for is a subjective response. 'Student voice' refers to the views of students on their experiences of school and learning, and is considered to be one of the best ways of measuring student engagement and wellbeing (Willms 2014). While it is possible to measure elements of student wellbeing through behavioural indicators such as attendance data, listening to student voice can provide a better understanding of student experiences (Appleton et al. 2006). Student voice can be particularly useful for measuring emotional and social engagement which may not be directly observable by teachers or through other methods (Fredericks & McColskey 2012). It can be captured through various methods, including student surveys, interviews, students writing about their class experiences in a learning log, classroom observations, and 360-degree feedback (Hoban & Hastings 2006; Richardson 2010; Wilkerson et al. 2000). Student surveys are one of the most widely used tools for capturing student voice, both in Australia and internationally (Jensen & Reichl 2011).

Tell Them From Me surveys in NSW

The NSW Department of Education has an extensive program for capturing and analysing student voice, using the *Tell Them From Me* (TTFM) surveys. The TTFM student survey was piloted in NSW in 2013 and 2014, and made available to all interested schools from 2015. Schools may also complete complementary teacher and parent surveys. While not all public schools complete every survey every year, uptake of the surveys has been consistently high and has grown over time. Approximately 1,400 NSW public schools took part in at least one student survey in 2018, and more than 285,000 students completed a student survey. As well as providing each participating school with immediate and actionable data on how their students are travelling on a range of engagement and wellbeing measures, the survey also provides valuable systemic insights into the NSW public school student population.

The NSW Department of Education's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 identifies three TTFM measures – sense of belonging, expectations for success, and advocacy at school – that can be used to measure the 'known, valued and cared for' goal over time. System-level data shows that public school students in NSW report high levels across all three measures in primary school, but they dip as students enter high school. While there is improvement in expectations for success and advocacy at school from Year 10, there is only marginal improvement in sense of belonging (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of students who reported having a positive sense of belonging, high expectations and advocacy at school
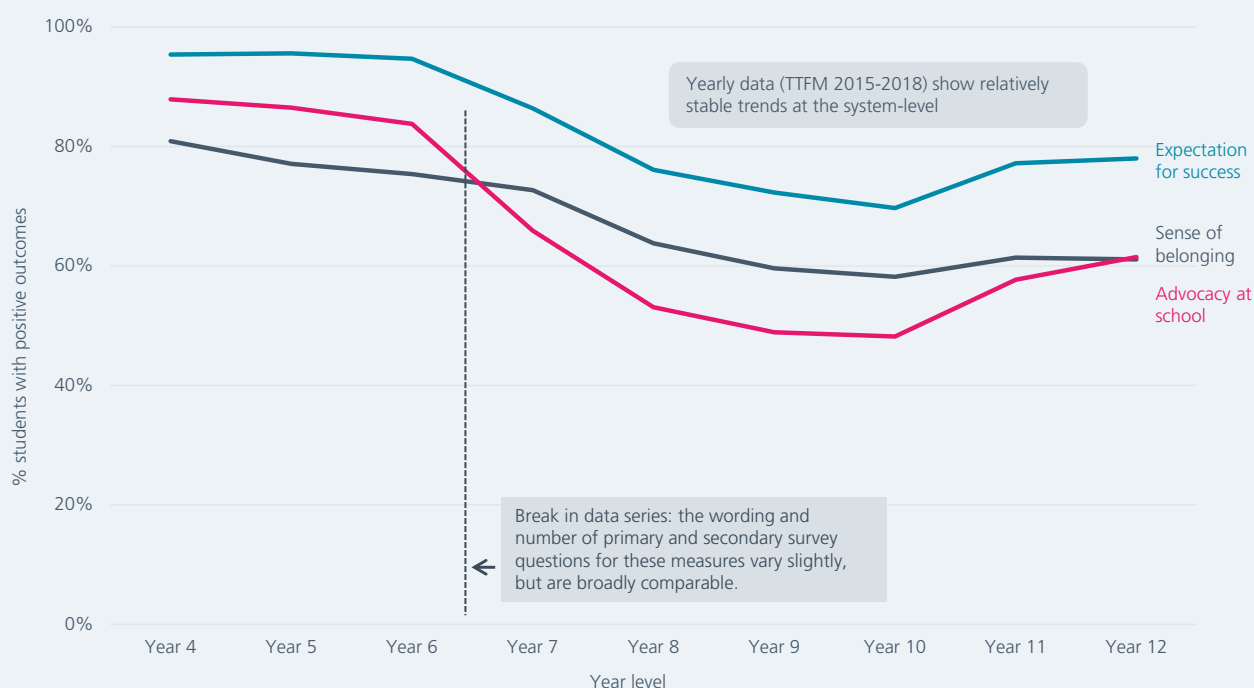
Notes: Students who score more than six (on a scale 0-10) on the TTFM measures are categorised as having positive outcomes. This represents a majority of responses of agree/strongly agree across the items that form each measure.

Percentages for positive 'sense of belonging', 'expectations for success' and 'advocacy at school' cannot be compared with each other as they are based on separate scales (e.g. 80% in 'sense of belonging' cannot be directly compared to 70% in 'advocacy at school').

There are slight differences in the item wording between primary and secondary which should be considered when looking across Y4-12.

Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students.

Students' background is also a significant factor in their experiences of support at school. TTFM data shows that students from high-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds feel more supported at school across all year levels than students from low-SES backgrounds. This gap in support widens during high school. According to TTFM data, on average, low-SES students in high school are 17 percentage points less likely to report that 'my teacher(s) care about me' than high-SES students. In Year 12, the gap is 18 percentage points. In primary school, there is a 10 percentage points difference between low-SES and high-SES students. At Schools for Specific Purposes (SSP), high-SES students are also more likely to report 'my teacher(s) cares about me' than low-SES students[3] (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of students agreeing with the statement: 'My teacher(s) cares about me'
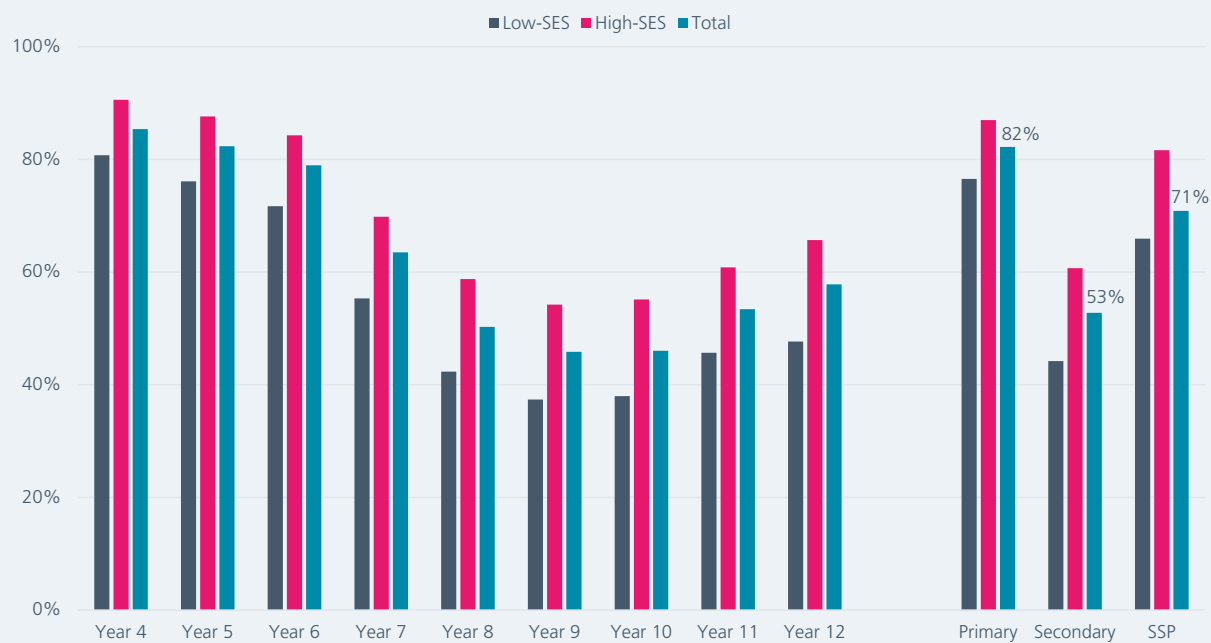
Note: 'Low-SES' and 'High-SES' refers to the bottom and top quartile, respectively, of students by self-reported socioeconomic status. SSP schools have combined primary and secondary survey responses.
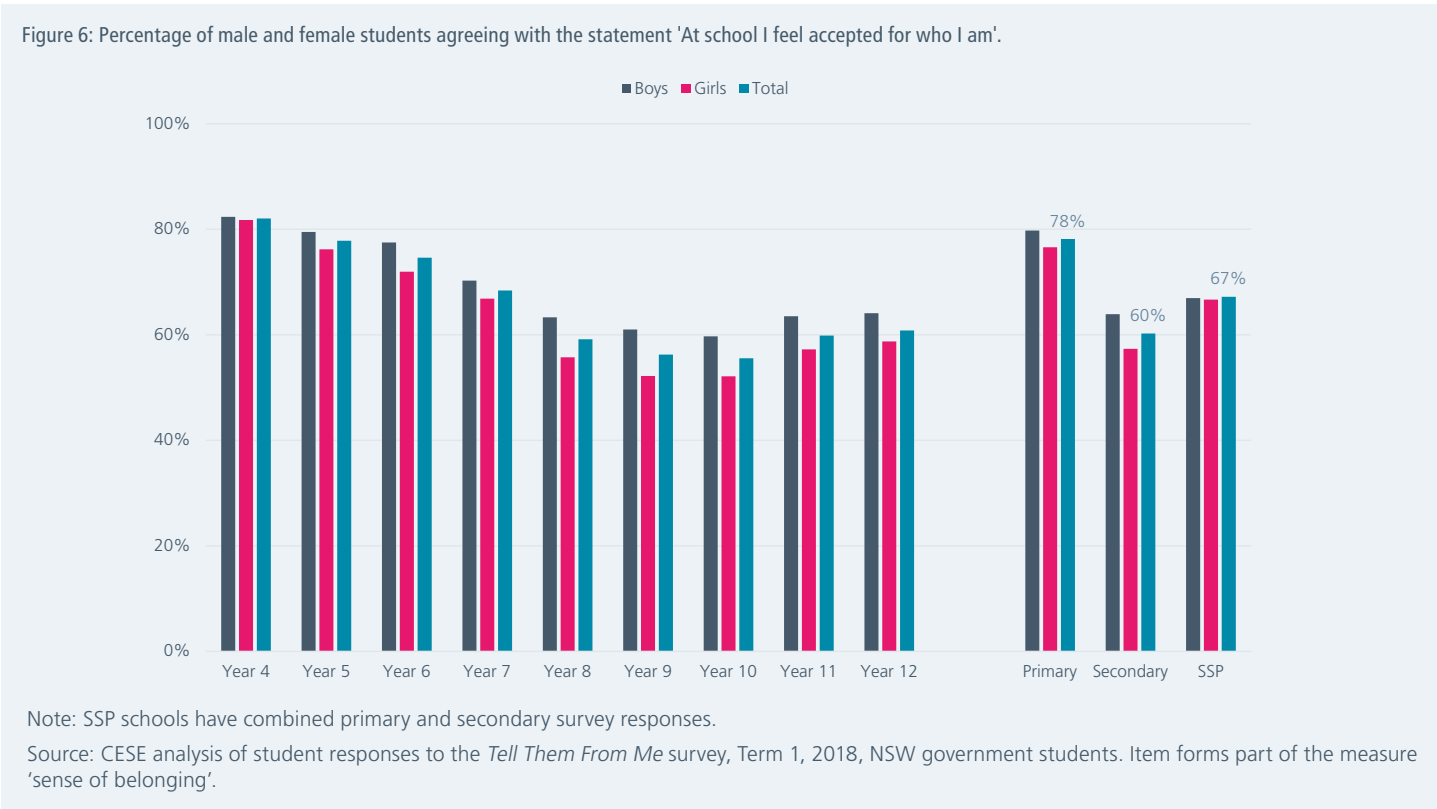
Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students. Item forms part of the measure 'advocacy at school'.

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3   Note that this finding may not be representative of all SSPs, as fewer than 20% of all SSPs participated in the student survey in 2018. This is because TTFM is not suitable for all students in all settings.

Significant differences also exist between the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students across the three wellbeing measures. Aboriginal students report a notably lower sense of belonging, positive advocacy at school and expectations for success than non-Aboriginal students across both primary school and high school (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students reporting positive outcomes on key TTFM measures

Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students.
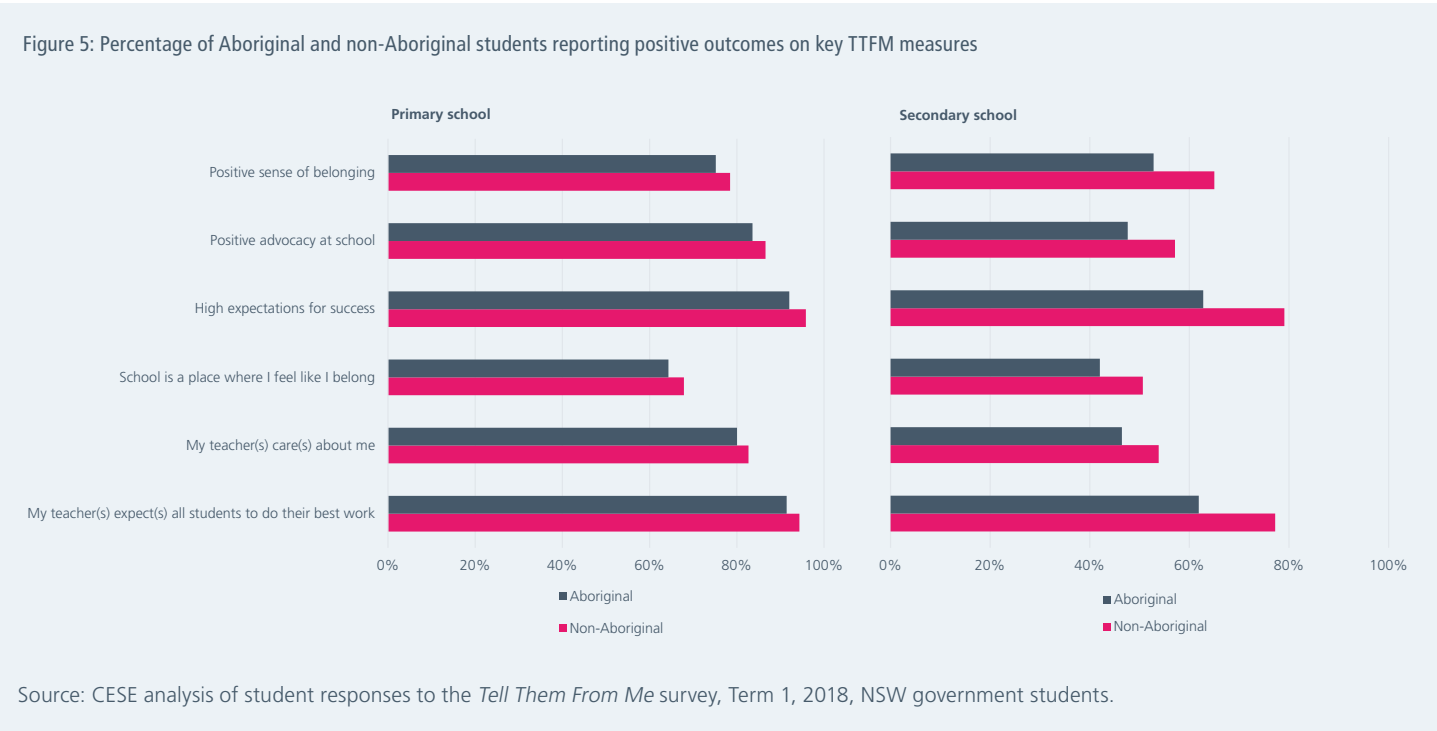
While less dramatic than the impact of being a student from a low-SES background or an Aboriginal student, the survey data also reveals that boys have a stronger sense of belonging at school than girls. For example, from as early as Year 5, boys report that 'I feel accepted for who I am' at higher levels than girls. The finding that boys have a higher sense of belonging at school than girls appears to be the reverse of the findings of most of the literature to date (see, for example, Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni 2013; Goodenow 1993; Smerdon 2002, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2017) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage of male and female students agreeing with the statement 'At school I feel accepted for who I am'.

Note: SSP schools have combined primary and secondary survey responses.

Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students. Item forms part of the measure 'sense of belonging'.

There are also differences between the experiences of students based on their location. While levels of teacher support in primary school are similar across locations, in high school, rural and remote students report lower levels of encouragement from their teachers than their metropolitan peers. This finding is reversed in SSPs, with students in rural and remote locations reporting higher levels of encouragement from their teachers than students in major cities[4] (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of students agreeing with the statement ' Our teacher(s) encourage students to do better'.
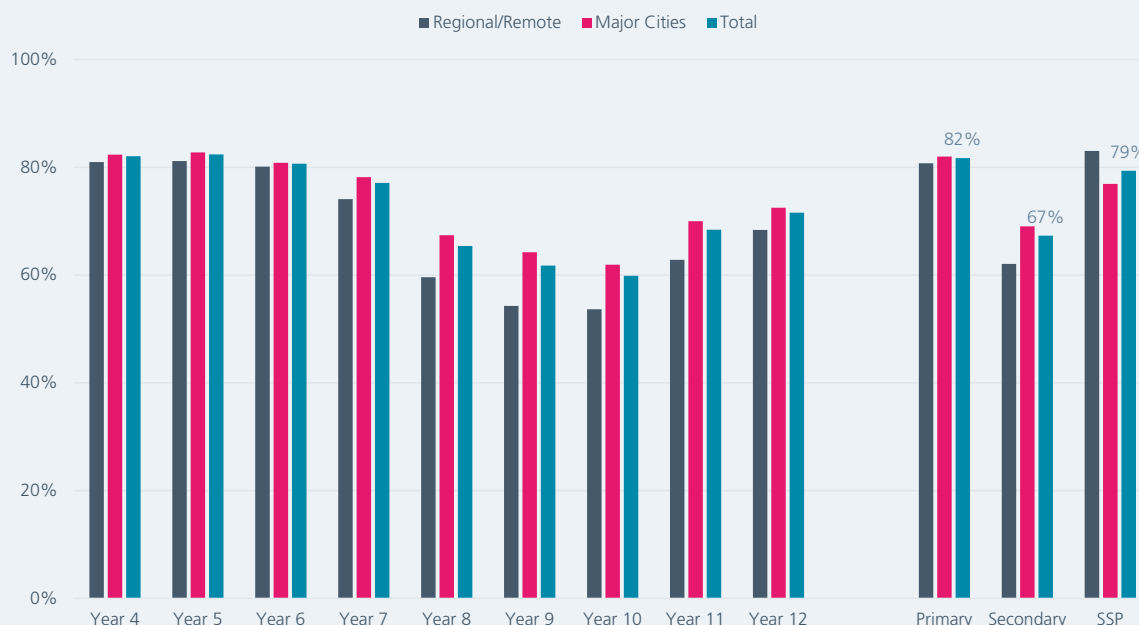
Note:'Major Cities' refers to school geolocation based on ASGS classification: Major Cities of Australia. 'Regional/Remote' refers to school's ASGS grouping: Inner Regional; Outer Regional; Remote; Very remote. SSP schools have combined primary and secondary survey responses.

Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students. Item forms part of the measure 'expectations for success'.

TTFM data also shows that differences exist between the experiences of students born in Australia and overseas. Students born overseas report a marginally greater sense of belonging than students born in Australia in both primary and high school. In high school, overseas-born students also report higher advocacy at school and expectations for success than Australian-born students, but Australian-born students report slightly higher levels in both measures in primary school (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of Australian-born and overseas-born students reporting positive outcomes on key TTFM measures
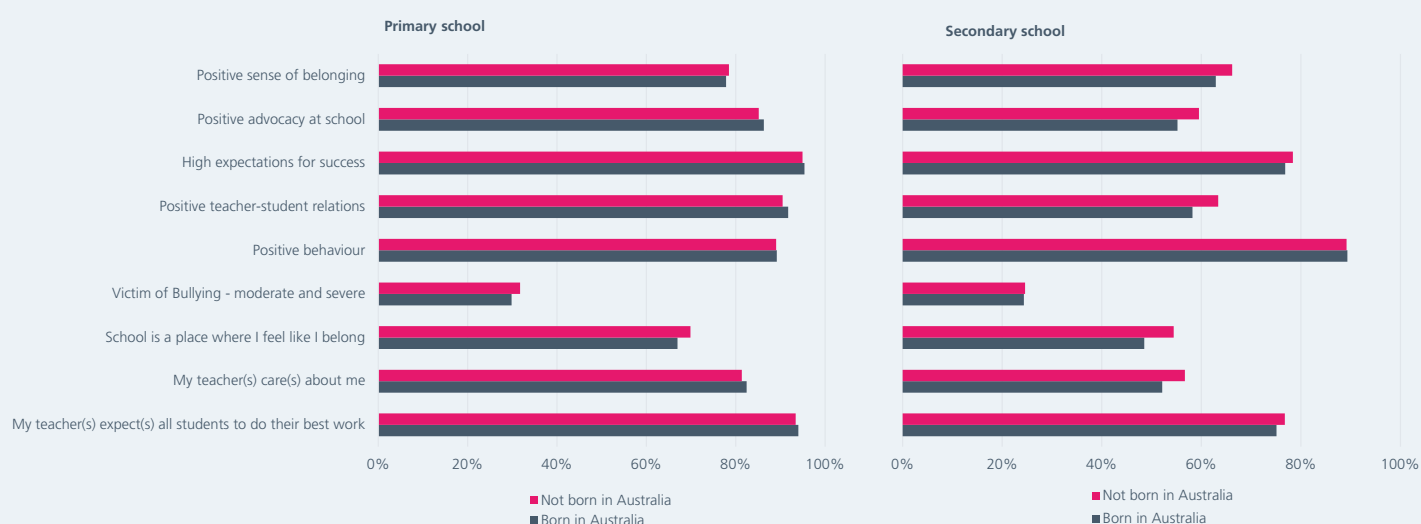
Source: CESE analysis of student responses to the *Tell Them From Me* survey, Term 1, 2018, NSW government students. Item forms part of the measure 'expectations for success'.

Further detail about how the department understands and tracks student voice using TTFM surveys can be found here: http://surveys.cese.nsw.gov.au/

4   Note that this finding may not be representative of all SSPs, as fewer than 20% of all SSPs participated in the student survey in 2018. This is because TTFM is not suitable for all students in all settings.

The Australian Child Wellbeing Project

The findings from *Tell Them From Me* are broadly consistent with results from other significant student voice data sets. The Australian Child Wellbeing Project (ACWP) aimed to benchmark child wellbeing in Australia and provide information to contribute to the development of effective services for young people's healthy development (Redmond et al. 2016). The ACWP was rolled out to a national sample of students in Year 4, Year 6 and Year 8 in 2014, involving more than 5,400 students in 180 schools. This was Australia's first major nationally representative and internationally comparable survey of wellbeing among children aged 8-14 years. The project found that although most young Australians report high levels of wellbeing, a significant proportion report low wellbeing, and this causes them to miss opportunities for healthy development and to strengthen their human capital. In findings that reflect the TTFM student surveys, low wellbeing was found to be concentrated in marginalised groups, such as young people from low-SES backgrounds, and young Aboriginal Australians. The ACWP also found that young people with a disability report low levels of wellbeing.

The Programme for International Student Assessment

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) also collects student voice data related to wellbeing. Specifically, it provides internationally comparable data on students' sense of belonging at school for Australian states and territories and participating countries. The PISA student surveys asks students to respond to six Likert scale statements that are aggregated into a measure of their sense of belonging[5]. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) recently released a report that explored the findings (De Bortoli 2018). It showed that Australian students' sense of belonging has declined significantly between 2003 and 2015, in keeping with an overall Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) trend[6]. Australian students across all jurisdictions also report a significantly lower sense of belonging than the OECD average. In findings that are consistent with the TTFM student surveys, low sense of belonging is most marked for Australian students from low-SES backgrounds, Aboriginal students and girls. Internationally, low-SES students and first-generation immigrant students are more likely to feel a lower sense of belonging than other students. In Australia, PISA data shows that students from NSW report feeling a similar sense of belonging to students in all states and territories except the ACT and the Northern Territory, where students report a lower sense of belonging than in NSW.

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5   The statements were: I feel like an outsider (or left out of things) at school; I make friends easily at school; I feel like I belong at school; I feel awkward and out of place in my school; Other students seem to like me; I feel lonely at school.
6   Different timeframes and measurements make it difficult to make detailed, precise and meaningful comparisons between TTFM and PISA sense of belonging data.

Key components of support for student wellbeing in the school environment

The Melbourne Declaration's articulation of a focus on the whole child aligns with a broader conceptual and linguistic shift. Specifically, it aligns with a shift from a focus on student 'welfare' to the more holistic concept of student 'wellbeing' and the development of a child's capacity to socially and emotionally adjust to the world around them (Hearn et al. 2006). This focus is articulated in the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's (CESE) student wellbeing literature review (2015). This literature review examines the evidence base to identify a number of core elements[7] that affect student wellbeing in schools. These can be grouped broadly into the following themes:

Safe environment

A safe school is one where the physical environment is safe and does not lead to harm or injury for students; the emotional environment is one of positivity and free from negative behaviours such as bullying which can affect mental health; and where a healthy lifestyle is promoted through initiatives such as increased participation in sport and/or healthy food at the canteen. The concept of 'safe schools' can also be extended to refer to schools' attention to the individual health requirements of students.

Connectedness

School connectedness can be described in different ways, including school belonging, school attachment, school bonding, school climate, school connection, school engagement, and teacher support. Within the school environment, connectedness is realised and promoted in the quality of the relationships between students and their teachers, between students and the school, between students and other students, and between schools and the local community, including parents. Particular groups of students may be more vulnerable to experiencing low levels of connectedness, including those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, students with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Students with low connectedness are two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared to more connected peers (Glover et al 1998).

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7   While these core elements that affect student wellbeing have been distinguished for the purposes of outlining the evidence base related to student wellbeing, it is the nature of wellbeing that the categories are intrinsically interconnected and that they should not necessarily be viewed as separate entities in and of themselves.

Learning engagement

There is a mutually reinforcing relationship between engagement, wellbeing and outcomes. Engaged students do better and doing better increases engagement. Students can engage with school socially, institutionally and intellectually. Students become disengaged from education for many reasons, including the learning environment not meeting their needs, homelessness, family breakdown, poverty, mental health problems, low self-esteem, previous poor educational experiences, low educational achievement and challenging behaviours. Ways of ensuring students stay engaged and/or become re-engaged with learning are varied but may include differentiated learning, quality instruction and 'positive education'.

Social and emotional learning

Well-developed social and emotional skills allow students to work cooperatively with others, manage emotions, cope with setbacks and solve problems effectively. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is also the process through which children and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL programs are based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging and meaningful. Examples of SEL programs used in Australian schools include KidsMatter and MindMatters.

Whole-school approach

Wellbeing itself is a holistic concept and efforts to promote student wellbeing demand a whole-school rather than a siloed approach. To be successful, wellbeing must be integrated into the school learning environment, the curriculum and pedagogy, the policies and procedures at schools, and the partnerships inherent within and outside schools including teachers, students, parents, support staff and community groups.

Applying the concepts of wellbeing – interventionist and preventative approaches

NSW public schools are supported in their implementation of wellbeing approaches, by the NSW Department of Education School Excellence Framework and the Wellbeing Framework for Schools. There are also a range of evidence-based publications produced by the NSW Department of Education to support schools, including CESE's wellbeing literature review, and publications on student engagement, which help educators to engage with data and evidence. Planning and delivering specific wellbeing initiatives, however, remains the responsibility of individual schools. This means that schools themselves are tasked with moving from the conceptual level outlined in the department's frameworks and publications, to the practical, on-the-ground level. As a result, there are a wide variety of practices and models found in NSW public schools that aim to support the wellbeing of students. These practices and models can be categorised as either 'interventionist' or 'preventative' approaches to student wellbeing.

Interventionist approaches

Interventionist approaches to student wellbeing are designed to address student wellbeing issues that have already been identified – for example bullying, or depression. These issues could be among all students, or among select groups of students ('targeted interventions'). Significant evidence exists for interventionist approaches that are designed to address, in particular, aggression and violence, bullying, and substance abuse (Clarke et al. 2015); and interventions that target students displaying symptoms of depression (Stein et al. 2003) and anxiety (Bernstein et al. 2005). Interventionist approaches may involve individual counselling, raising awareness through workshops and discussions, skills training and/or the engagement of family and community support services (Clarke et al. 2015). Interventionist approaches play an important role in the treatment and management of student wellbeing concerns.

Preventative approaches

Preventative approaches, on the other hand, are designed to address issues before they become an identified problem. A substantial body of research supports the use of preventative approaches to promote student wellbeing and help students develop the skills they need to be successful at school and in life. The benefits of preventative approaches are apparent across all stages of schooling (Sancassiani et al. 2015) and have been found to be significant and long-lasting (Clarke et al. 2015). School-based preventative programs that enhance students' social and emotional skills have been found to be particularly effective in reducing behavioural issues across the school, promoting social cohesion, and reducing students' levels of emotional distress (Department of Education and Skills 2003), as well as improving attitudes about oneself, others and the school (Clarke et al. 2015), and promoting academic achievement (Bernard & Walton 2011; Public Policy Institute for Wales 2016).

What does wellbeing practice look like in schools?

While the evidence base consistently identifies the broad elements of successful wellbeing support in schools and the different types of approaches that can be used by schools, little research has been conducted into which specific models and practices work best for applying these principles. A recent, large-scale review of programs in the UK concluded that although there is support for the use of universal social and emotional school-based programs, as well as targeted interventions for addressing emergent issues, more research is needed to examine how these programs should be implemented (Clarke et al. 2015).

In the absence of an established evidence base, the remainder of this paper outlines a range of wellbeing practices and models from schools across the public, independent and Catholic sectors in NSW. These examples draw on work undertaken by CESE and the 'Principals in Residence'[8] as part of the NSW Department of Education's priority project – 'Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools'.

8   Three NSW public school principals have been seconded to the NSW Department of Education head office, as 'Principals in Residence' to work on the department's priority project: 'Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools'.

Wellbeing in NSW schools – structural mechanisms for knowing, valuing and caring for every student

Ensuring that every student is known, valued and cared for means that no student falls through the cracks of a large system or flies under the radar in a busy school yard. Practically, this is realised through a range of structures and actions, which mean:

- Each individual student has high visibility to at least one staff member.

- Each individual student has at least one staff member to whom they can confidently turn for support.

- Students are known as individuals across years and subject areas.

- Students have a voice that is heard.

- Families have clear points of contact within the school to discuss any issues that arise.

- Support is both preventative and reactive; cohort-based and customised, as necessary.

Insights from a series of conversations with school leaders in NSW public schools and representatives of schools in the independent sector allowed a number of wellbeing practices and models that focus on knowing, valuing and caring for students to be identified. The final section of this paper is not an endorsement of particular practices and models, or a suggestion that the examples represent best practice in schools. It simply highlights a sample of wellbeing practices and models in use across the sectors in NSW. These practices and models include:

Positive education

Positive education refers to activities that aim to increase wellbeing through the cultivation of positive feelings, thoughts and behaviours. This is similar to a strengths-based approach which identifies and builds on an individual strength, and is consistent with differentiated learning and personalised pathways. When people work with their strengths, they tend to learn more readily, perform at a higher level, are more motivated and confident and have a stronger sense of satisfaction, mastery and competence.

Much of the interest in positive psychology in schools has stemmed from the work of Professor Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania who, among other things, developed a whole-school positive education program for Geelong Grammar School in Victoria. This was the first time anywhere in the world positive education interventions had been applied to a whole school. Waters (2011) reviewed evidence from 12 schools that had implemented positive psychology interventions focusing on gratitude, hope, serenity, resilience and character strengths, and found that these interventions were significantly related to student wellbeing, relationships and academic performance. James Ruse High School, a selective high school in north west Sydney, uses a positive psychology and strengths-based approach to address wellbeing concerns, conflict

resolution and discipline issues at the school. The principles of positive psychology – Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA) – form the foundation of the school curriculum, proactive wellbeing program and co-curricular programs to ensure all students learn and flourish in a happy, safe and supportive learning environment. Ravenswood, an independent girls' school on Sydney's north shore, also uses a positive education model, and has embedded this approach across the school from Kindergarten to Year 12. The principal and deputy principal have integrated positive education into the curricular, co-curricular and pastoral care programs. It is hoped that through using this approach, 'students will learn to identify their strengths and employ them in the service of something much larger than themselves, in turn establishing the foundations for meaningful lives'. Ravenswood was named an 'Innovative School for 2018' by The Educator magazine for its work in the area of positive education and STEM.

CESE case studies

In 2018, CESE completed a series of case studies which explore effective wellbeing practice in five public school contexts. The case studies were selected based on data that shows that these schools are excelling in student wellbeing. The case study schools were: Cecil Hills High School, Penrith Valley School, Rosehill Public School, South Wagga Public School and Trangie Central School.

A number of key themes emerged from the case studies. These included: effective leadership and staff collaboration; commitment to community; ensuring staff wellbeing; high expectations for all; and strong systems and structures to support and embed a whole-school approach. The case study schools distinguished between student *welfare* and student *wellbeing*, and they focused on wellbeing for learning which sets the trajectory for lifelong wellbeing.

There were also a number of specific practices that the case studies schools implemented to improve student wellbeing, including:

- Reorganising the Year 7 and Year 8 curriculum to build stronger teacher-student relationships and reduce the likelihood of student wellbeing concerns going unnoticed.

- Using resources strategically so that: year advisers have a generous period allocation that reflects the complexity of the role; and year advisers and head teachers have additional opportunities to connect with students as the school's relief teachers.

- Implementing a carefully planned transition program that begins when students are in Year 5.

- Using Trauma Informed Practice to give students a sense of security by creating a safe and predictable environment.

- A structured student-teacher mentor program to promote strong, trusting and respectful relationships.

- Flexible timetabling so the learning and support coordinator can support teachers to work more effectively with students.

- Increasing student engagement and sense of belonging through creative and performing arts, including dance and murals.

- Giving students a strong voice through 'student parliament'.

The case studies can be downloaded here: https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/known-valued-cared-for

House groups

House systems exist in a number of NSW schools and can be used to support students' sense of belonging. In a 'house' system, each student is nominated to one 'house' when they enrol at school. A school would typically have four to eight houses depending on its size. House groups are made up of students in a variety of year groups. The house system can provide schools with a framework that: allows students to be known, valued and cared for; encourages participation in a variety of academic, social and extracurricular activities; and promotes leadership development.

Northlakes High School on the NSW central coast introduced a 'house' structure in 2014 in response to TTFM survey data which showed that students had a low sense of belonging at school. The broad idea behind the house structure initiative was to increase the connection between students and staff, and to thereby foster a sense of belonging. The house system provides a way for students to feel a sense of belonging at school by giving them the opportunity to 'attach' themselves to an entity. This is particularly important for students who are not involved in other school activities such as the student leadership team, or sporting and/or extra-curricular activities. Oxley College, an independent K-12 co-educational school in the southern highlands of NSW also uses a house system to provide the 'pastoral' basis for the school. In K-6 all students are allocated to one of three houses. Each house is divided vertically and students participate in carnivals and school activities within their house. In 7-12 all students are allocated to one of six houses each of which is managed by a 'Head of House'. Each house is divided vertically into tutor groups of approximately 17 students, with students from each year group represented. Tutor groups each have their own staff member called a 'House Master'. Tutor groups meet each day with the full house coming together at a regular assemblies. Pastoral care of students in the house system is managed at the individual level by the house master, as well as more broadly by the head of house. Both the house master and head of house are sought after positions and are renumerated accordingly.

Cohort-based and targeted programs

Cohort-based and targeted programs involve bringing together groups of students for certain activities. They may be general groups based on age (e.g. roll call groups) or targeted groups of students (e.g. Aboriginal students, girls etc). Often cohort-based programs are managed by year advisers. At Chester Hill High School in Sydney's west, one of the teachers founded the 'Run Beyond Project' to support students from refugee backgrounds. The Run Beyond Project uses running as a mechanism to teach students the skills they need to excel in all areas of their life. Students work towards achieving a running goal between 10km and a half marathon. Through running, students learn about goal-setting, commitment and resilience. They also learn how to be active members of their own communities. The program, which supports students to achieve a goal beyond what they thought was possible, promotes wellbeing for learning by

'empowering young people to succeed in life beyond the finish line'. This program has been so successful that it is being replicated in other schools. At The Armidale School, an independent K-12 school in the northern tablelands of NSW, students in the middle school have 'adviser time' for four sessions a week, where homeroom teachers engage with students in programs that promote wellbeing. Frensham, an independent K-12 school for girls in the Southern Highlands, runs the 'Jamieson Programme' as part of the core curriculum for Years 7 to 10. This program focuses on: global citizenship; responsibility, services and leadership; health, fitness and physical challenge; and critical, ethical and flexible thinking. As part of this program, students participate in innovative and skills-based Cambridge Assessment International Education courses.

Programs that focus on transitions

Transition programs focus on transition points at school, for example between primary school and high school, or the transition from school to further education and work. Transition programs can be important to ensuring student wellbeing at these critical times in students' lives. The transition from primary to secondary school marks a significant change for most students. It usually involves an adjustment to a new, generally larger school, where students go from being the oldest in the school to the youngest. Students in secondary school have multiple classes with different teachers and classmates, as well as an increase in workload, responsibilities and travel to and from school. There are also significant changes in peer groups. One of the major challenges facing students moving from primary to secondary school is making friends and 'fitting in' at their new school.

The move across school settings and the changes that come with it can have positive and negative effects on students. Homebush West Public School, in the inner west of Sydney, places a strong emphasis on preparing its students for the transition to high school. Year 5 and 6 students at this school attend 'middle school'. This involves individual student timetables that require students to change classrooms, classmates and teachers according to ability and subject. The students attest that this approach allows them to build relationships with more than one teacher and become used to differing teaching approaches and teacher expectations. It also creates opportunities for students to continue making new friends in Year 5 and 6 with whom they share different classes.

Transition at the end of school is also important to student wellbeing. Knox Grammar, an independent K-12 boys' school in Sydney's north, has developed a comprehensive careers education program for students in Years 10 to 12. The Knox program gives students the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their post-school options. It includes: aptitude, interests and personality profiling; assistance with Stage 6 subject selections; information sessions about the

Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admission Test (UMAT), Australian Defence Force and tertiary courses; resume writing, presentation skills and interview skills training; individualised career planning; and preparation for cadetships, scholarships, universities and TAFE. The Hills Sports High School in Sydney's west similarly supports its students through the Talented Sports Program which aims to assist students to hone their special talent and obtain a pathway to the Australian Institute of Sport and state, national and Olympic representation. The provision of HSC Pathways allows students to balance their education and supporting commitments by completing the HSC over several years.

Connection with the local community

The local community of a school refers not only to students and teachers but also families and local community organisations. The local community often has the biggest influence on students' lives, so it is important for schools to work closely with their local community, so that they can support students in both their learning and wellbeing. Buninyong Public School has implemented a 'walking bus' to and from the local Apollo Estate. The walking bus provides opportunities for staff to build positive relationships with students outside of a classroom setting. It also creates a highly visible link between the community and school, and gives parents opportunities to speak regularly to staff about what is happening at school. School staff pick up and drop off children at designated 'bus stops'. These bus stops can be at meeting points along the route or at each child's front gate. Auburn North Public School in western Sydney has made a deliberate effort to establish parents as partners in the school community. They have established a welcoming culture for parents by developing and implementing a comprehensive program of parent initiatives. These initiatives include workshops for parents on how to support their children's learning at home, an online resource that assists parents with literacy and numeracy activities at home for their children; and the school's 'Harmony House' program, which provides opportunities for parents to attend sessions that focus on English, computers, Mathematics and positive parenting. At SCEGGS Darlinghurst, an independent K-12 girls' school in Sydney's east, their 'partnerships with parents' philosophy recognises the importance of building a strong partnership with parents for the wellbeing of the girls, and open communication between staff, students and families is fostered and encouraged.

Coordinating wrap-around services

Schools work with a variety of external services to ensure students and their families have access to the support they need so students are in a better position to come to school and learn. For example, schools may coordinate referral services including psychologist and speech therapist visits. Some schools may also facilitate drop-in health services and encourage community members to use these services when they are available on school grounds.

Forbes High School in western NSW supports student health and wellbeing with its 'Wellness Hub'. The Wellness Hub provides a facility for visiting services to provide professional support to students, and is also home to the school counsellor, youth worker and Aboriginal Education Officers. The Hub provides free private and confidential services to students and their parents/carers who may have a wide range of issues from everyday topics such as family, friends and school or simply feeling 'down' to more serious issues of bullying, nutritional health, mental health, smoking, alcohol and other drug use, homelessness and suicide. Similarly Doonside Public school in western Sydney runs an annual 'community expo' for all school families and friends. A number of community support agencies (including police, the local council and other government agencies) attend the expo to give advice and support to families. Not only does the expo provides an opportunity for parents to engage with government and community programs, it also gives different agencies a chance to engage and consult with one another to see what they can offer families and to see where there might be funding gaps in the local community. At Batemans Bay Public School on the NSW south coast, the school coordinates a number of wrap around services with a particular focus on services for Aboriginal students. For example, the school uses its RAM funding to employ a speech pathologist one day a week, and a designated teacher's aide who runs speech therapy groups. A paediatric occupational therapist visits the school one or two days a term. The school also works with the local Aboriginal medical service, Katungal, to host regular visits from the 'Dental Van' to provide dental treatment to Aboriginal children, and from health workers to screen for otitis media a common middle ear infection particularly prevalent in Aboriginal children.

Explicitly sharing information

Ensuring a whole-school approach is an important factor in supporting student wellbeing in schools, and part of an effective whole-school approach is ensuring that information is shared explicitly. This can refer not only to sharing information explicitly within the school, but also more broadly with the school community or between schools. At Burwood Girls High School, a large school in Sydney's inner west, a Student and Parent Portal has been launched through Sentral to explicitly share information with parent and students. Parents now have access to live data on their daughter's attendance, timetable details and activities their daughter had participated in, as well as access to copies of all formal semester reports issued. Students also have access to their own daily announcements. The MindMatters team post a wellbeing message each week to the student portal with links to relevant online resources and student quizzes. Engadine High School in southern Sydney asks parents of new students to share previous school reports and other related documents to help support a smooth transition. The wellbeing team at Cammeraygal High School on Sydney's north shore meets twice a term to share information about students that can be used to guide future planning and initiatives. The school makes an effort to create an environment where students sharing information with their teachers is the norm. Students have 'check-ins' with a specified teacher and all appropriate information is entered in Sentral so it can be accessed by relevant staff. Berry Public School explicitly shares TTFM student, parent and teacher survey results within the school community, and the school community are encouraged to provide feedback on the results. The student survey results are presented by the principal at a school assembly; the teacher survey results are presented to staff; and the parent survey data is presented by the principal to the P&C. Another example of explicitly sharing information across schools can be seen through the 'One Schools' project which operates in a number of small public schools in rural NSW and has a focus on developing high quality, integrated multi-stage units of work across the key learning areas of science, history and geography. The project supports students and staff in small multi-stage schools to deliver high quality learning and teaching as well as social opportunities for students. Built around collective efficacy, this collaboration is demonstrating success in reducing the effects of isolation that students and staff in rural and remote schools may experience.

Creative use of school structures and resources

Another way schools ensure every child is known, valued and cared for is through the creative use of school structures and resources to. At William Clarke College, an independent school in north west Sydney, the primary school timetable is structured so that classes in the early primary years are co-taught in the morning by two teachers. The school reports that this teaching structure has a positive impact on student engagement and provides greater opportunities for more personalised learning experiences. At Davidson High School in Sydney's north, 'creative' use of school resources include having therapy dog 'Scout' on the grounds to both work and play with students. Research shows that therapy dogs in schools can provide social and emotional support for students, improve attendance, decrease learner anxiety and enhance relationships with peers and teachers.

Effectively using school structures and resources to promote student wellbeing can also include effective use of the front office. A school's front office staff play an important role, as they set the tone for the school and are often the 'front line' for interaction and building strong relationships between students, teachers and parents. Effective front office staff can also reduce the administrative workloads of teachers and school leaders so they can spend more time with students. At Narrabeen Sports High School on Sydney's northern beaches, the front office is the 'centrifuge' of the school. The school has developed systems that support office staff to do their jobs effectively so that the school runs smoothly and teachers have the time and space they need to support student learning. Similarly at Macquarie Field High School in Sydney's south west, the ancillary staff are considered a 'crucial part of the school community' and they are invited to attend and contribute to all staff meetings.

Focus on staff wellbeing

Staff wellbeing is an important part of a mentally healthy school and is essential for effective teaching and learning. In a mentally healthy school, everyone's wellbeing matters. When school staff are mentally healthy, this has a positive impact on students, work colleagues and the culture of the school (MindMatters 2016). Lomandra School in Sydney's south west supports students in Years 5 –12 with severe challenging behaviours and/ or mental health conditions. At Lomandra, it is recognised that everyone (both teachers and students) need to feel safe in order to teach and learn. For this reason, there is a focus on building and maintaining a healthy school team with team culture seen as an essential protective factor for everyone – staff and students alike. Peak Hill Central School in western NSW makes staff wellbeing a priority using the 'Esteem Project'. This project employs a preventative approach to wellbeing to ensure individuals feel like valuable members of the community. It also promotes goal setting, better health, and is designed to reduce the risk of social and health problems. St Andrews Public School in south west Sydney runs a staff wellbeing week twice a term during Week 4 and Week 9. Staff meetings are not scheduled during this week, staff are encouraged to only work within the 9am to 3pm school day, limited emails are sent, staff have an opportunity to work offsite for a day, and staff have breakfast cooked for them on the Thursday morning. The wellbeing week aims to prevent staff from feeling too overwhelmed. Beginning teachers in the Sydney Catholic diocese participate in a two-day residential retreat as a way of providing additional support. Hills Grammar, an independent, co-educational K-12 school in north west Sydney supports all teachers who are new to the school through a comprehensive induction program. This includes a mentoring program to support new staff to implement quality practices in relation to student learning, wellbeing, growth and development.

Conclusion

Ensuring that every student is known, valued and cared for in our school is central to quality education. Both research and education practice have recognised the significance of wellbeing, and the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and learning. This paper has reviewed some of the key findings from the literature on student wellbeing, and has shown how student voice is used to measure student wellbeing. While there is not an extant evidence base that can identify best practice structural models, the paper has outlined a range of wellbeing practice from schools across the sectors in NSW.

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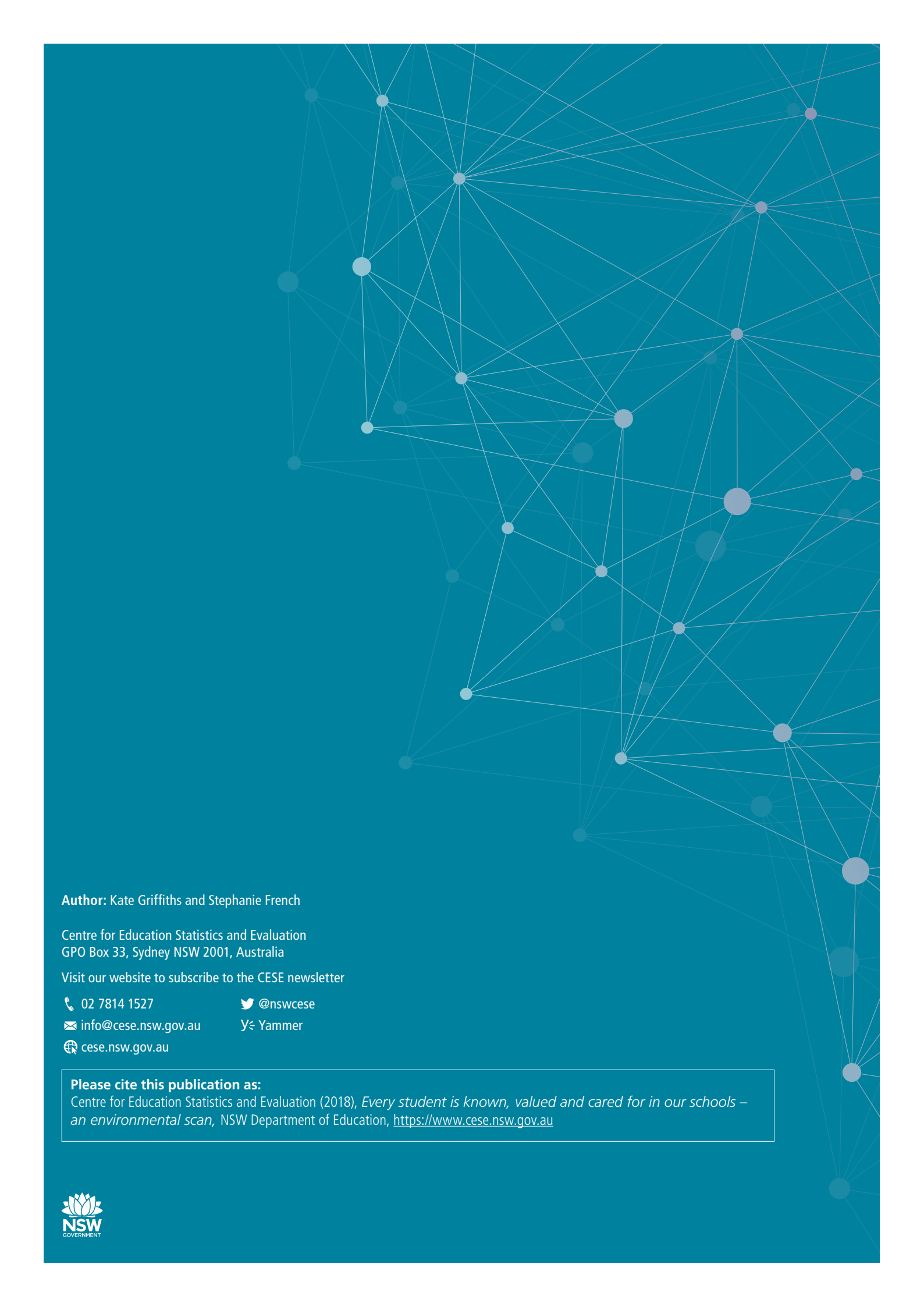
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Author: Kate Griffiths and Stephanie French

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation
GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001, Australia

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