The Welfare Needs of Victorian Catholic Schools

A report prepared by

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for the

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

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Acknowledgments

Foreword from Executive Director
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

I am pleased to present this research report, *The Welfare Needs of Victoria Catholic Schools*, on behalf of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV).

The genesis of this report is the concern expressed by principals in Catholic primary and secondary schools during consultation throughout 2003 about the escalating welfare needs of students and families in Victorian Catholic schools.

There are high levels of commitment in Catholic education to facilitating positive learning outcomes, enhancing the social and emotional health of students and establishing links with other professionals and support services. The centrality of pastoral care in Catholic education has facilitated and sustained a significant level of support to schools through policy development, service delivery and the implementation of innovative initiatives. Catholic schools embrace holistic preventative strategies and have established rigorous early identification and intervention approaches for students requiring additional support.

Yet even the most robust and system-wide efforts to provide for the pastoral care of students are proving insufficient in the face of current need. The CECV recognised that in order to present a case to Government for additional funding to support schools' preventative and intervention measures, some well-grounded, comprehensive and empirical evidence of need was required. The CECV noted that in the 2003–2004 State Government budget, funding for 256 additional Student Welfare Officers had been allocated in government primary education.

This study supports the CECV case for additional funding. Victorian Catholic schools are increasingly called upon to deal with challenging welfare issues that affect the capacity of children to engage in the learning process. An overall increase is needed in the resourcing of welfare problems, particularly those relating to family welfare and to student mental health problems. To expect Catholic schools to do more without additional funding is unfeasible.

The CECV strongly endorses the State Government's commitment to the student welfare needs in government schools and urges an equal commitment in Catholic schools. Victorian Catholic schools need support in meeting their responsibility to all students, their families and the broader community.

Susan Pascoe
Executive Director
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

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Overview

The Victorian Catholic Sector Context

Enrolments in Catholic schools in Victoria represent approximately 22% of the total student population: these students receive their education through the 387 primary, 93 secondary and 7 special schools. In 2003, these 487 schools provided places for 179,865 students.

The CECV recognises the significant role that Catholic schools play in the welfare of students. Schools are well placed to assist students in developing self-esteem, self-confidence and to identify and support students at risk. In Catholic schools, there are high levels of commitment to facilitating positive learning outcomes, enhancing the social and emotional health of students and establishing links with other professionals and support services. This commitment is central to the ethos of Catholic education. Christian principles and practices support an educational process that seeks to:

- focus on the development of the whole person – spiritual, moral, intellectual and social
- pursue respect for the dignity and rights of the individual
- ensure a just environment in which every student has access to the best quality learning
- foster cooperation, engagement and participation in the wider community
- pay particular attention to the poor, vulnerable or marginalised in society.

The CECV supports schools in this role by promoting a multi-dimensional approach to the delivery of services that facilitate:

- the ongoing development and review of policies that are shaped by current research evidence and initiatives which relate to gospel values in the contemporary community
- the provision of direct services to students, teachers and parents
- holistic preventative strategies and rigorous early identification and intervention approaches for students requiring additional support
- facilitation of professional development through accredited training and partnerships with universities and specialist agencies
- cross-sectoral collaboration and the delivery of services to schools through partnership arrangements.

Victorian Catholic schools are increasingly called upon to deal with challenging welfare issues that affect the capacity of children to engage in the learning process. The centrality of pastoral care in Catholic education has facilitated and sustained a significant level of support to schools through policy development, service delivery and the implementation of key initiatives. At the end of this Overview, funding for student support in the Catholic sector is outlined.

POLICIES

A number of policies are in place to support schools to meet the welfare needs of students. Some are under the auspice of the Catholic Education Office of Victoria (CECV) and others the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM).

The CECV policy 'Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools' was developed in 1994. It builds on 1983 guidelines designed to assist schools to develop their own pastoral care policies and to guide practice. This policy:

- provides the philosophy and principles of pastoral care in schools
- provides dimensions and features of pastoral care
- articulates approaches to policy formulation, review and implementation
- guides the development of discipline policies and pastoral responses to serious offences.

There are a number of supporting and related policies:

- Drug Issues in Catholic schools: Education, Prevention and Intervention (CEOM)
- Guidelines for the Enrolment of Year 7 Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (CEOM)
- Guidelines and Procedures for Mandatory Reporting of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse (CEOM)
- Christian Education for Personal Development (CEOM)
- Pathways and Transition in the Post-Compulsory Years (CECV).

SERVICE DELIVERY

Catholic education has a long history of supporting schools through its *Pastoral Care strategy*. The current and recently established *Student Wellbeing Unit* in the CEOM incorporates previously separate areas of the Office including: Christian Education for Personal Development, Pastoral Care, and Youth Services. The CEOs in country dioceses address pastoral care needs in similar ways.

Catholic Education Offices in each diocese provide school communities with advice on critical incident management through telephone support and school visits. School communities receive advice on effective resources, strategies and approaches. Diocesan CEOs also provide a wide range of professional development programs for schools. Members of staff, principals, deputy principals, and others with leadership responsibilities have access to centrally-provided programs on:

- whole-school approaches to pastoral care
- collaborative approaches to student welfare and discipline
- preventing/managing bullying, anger and violence in students
- social justice and low income families
- school attendance issues
- responding to grief and loss in school communities.

Professional development has also provided at school levels in such areas as:

- prevention and early intervention approaches to enhance student safety and resilience (such as, Road Beyond the Gatehouse: A Whole School Approach to Pastoral Care, the National Safe Schools Framework – NSSF)
- application of these approaches to practical realities such as student attendance, behaviour management, and school–family liaison.
- restorative justice and practices promoting a view of misconduct as a violation against people and relationships in the school and wider community
- child protection strategies.

A Legal Officer has also been appointed to provide information and support schools in a range of legal areas including family law and criminal matters. Schools are supported through policy formulation, the delivery of professional development programs and the provision of consultancy services.

KEY INITIATIVES

The CECV has established and implemented a number of key initiatives to support schools in their efforts to meet welfare needs of their communities. These initiatives outlined below include: a Student Support – Youth Services professional development program; a project to implement the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF); and the School As Social Core Centre Project.

1. Student Support: Youth Services

In 1996 an audit was conducted on the provision of student welfare in Victorian Catholic and Government schools which was included in a report on Youth Homelessness (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1997, *Youth Homelessness: Towards Early Intervention and Prevention*). The report indicated that there was a constant turnover of student welfare coordinators, that 40 percent of welfare coordinators had no professional training and that time allocation for welfare staff was inadequate. The report concluded that an important strategy for changing teacher attitudes and practice was to incorporate student welfare issues, pastoral care and counselling skills into pre-service and in-service training. This finding complemented other research which found that the most significant barriers to mental health promotion in schools was the lack of teacher confidence with mental health issues (Department of Health and Family Services, 1996).

The Catholic Education Office response to the Victorian Government Suicide Prevention Taskforce Report (1997) was the development of the Youth Services Strategy. Funding from the State Government to the Catholic sector has supported 700 teachers, in over 300 Catholic primary and secondary schools across Victoria, to undertake the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Student Welfare) from the Department of Learning and Educational Development at The University of Melbourne. This represents a significant coverage of over 60% of the 490 Catholic schools in Victoria having some level of representation in this credentialled professional

development strategy. Over 90% of Catholic secondary schools have had staff enrolled in the first six years of this strategy.

The Catholic Education Office and The Australian Youth Research Centre of The University of Melbourne have recently completed an Australian Research Council, Strategic Partnerships with Industry – Research and Training Scheme (SPIRT) grant, to research the impact of staff participation in the Post-Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare.

Although the CECV has supported school capacity building through this initiative, there is powerful evidence that principals and teachers do not have the time or resources to deal with the increasing volume of welfare matters brought to their attention at school.

2. National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)

The NSSF has been developed and endorsed by the Ministerial Committee for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The vision statement of the NSSF is for all Australian schools to be safe and supportive environments. The impetus behind this initiative is the concern by school communities about issues associated with bullying, harassment, violence, child abuse and neglect.

The NSSF assists schools to promote safe school environments and promote the physical and emotional wellbeing of their students, by providing a set of guiding principles and strategies. The CECV is implementing this framework through an Australian Commonwealth Quality Teacher Program (ACQTP) project, *Implementing the National Safe School Framework: A Pastoral Care Approach*. The concept of 'friendly schools' is used as a model for implementing the NSSF. There are 11 primary schools participating in this project. The project builds on learnings and skills of personnel. Small grants are allocated to these schools to assist them to develop, implement and evaluate school-based actions.

3. The Schools as Core Social Centres Project

In 2002 the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM), in partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), established the *Schools as Core Social Centres* project. A Project Officer was employed to work across three inner-city Catholic primary schools in Melbourne. The project is developing a model to inform the development of collaborative school community partnerships to facilitate the promotion of wellbeing and the development of social capital. The project acknowledges the links between the promotion of wellbeing, inclusivity and learning outcomes and effectively explores the interface between health and education in practice.

The origin of the concept of *Schools as Core Social Centres* is one of the 3 scenarios for the future of schooling presented in the OECD report *Schooling for Tomorrow: What Schools for the Future?* (2001). This scenario is concerned with three major aspects of schooling: public trust and funding; schools as centres of community and social capital formation; and social equity. It describes a school institution strengthened by the links formed between the school and the local community. The project represents a practical implementation of this scenario.

The interim evaluation report (February 2004) outlines the processes developed and strategies implemented by the three schools through a whole-school approach. The evaluation focuses on assessing the effectiveness of the partnerships developed to facilitate collaboration between community groups, agencies and schools.

STUDENT SUPPORT FUNDING

Over the past decade the number of students with disabilities who have enrolled in Catholic primary schools and secondary colleges has grown significantly. Parents have sought the choice of the local school rather than specialist settings throughout Victoria in both the Victorian Government sector and the Catholic sector. The growth in the number of students attending each sector has been parallel. Victorian government schools' students with disabilities were 5,666 in 1993 and 18,500 in 2003. Catholic schools' students with disabilities were 1,346 in 1993 and 4,100 in 2003.

The criteria for eligibility for funding support has been uniform for each sector. The funding difference between the sectors per capita is significant and can be influential to parent choice. It is estimated that the average amount allocated per pupil in the government sector is $12,972 compared with $5,249 in the Catholic sector.

The response of the Catholic education system to parent choice and to the legal requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) and the *Equal Opportunity Act* (1995) has been to supplement funding from recurrent funding sources. Despite that strategy, significant differences of funding remain.

The funding of student support services introduced in 1995 has provided for parents and Catholic schools services such as Psychology, Speech Pathology and visiting teacher services. Through a funded referral system, parents and schools have sought access to support services (in excess of 20,000 requests) since implementation of the service. The funding available for this service in 2003 was $3.7 million in comparison to $45 million provided to the Victorian Government sector.

In the 2003–2004 the State Government budget provided for the employment of 256 additional Student Welfare Officers to work in government primary education. Anecdotal evidence from principals of acute welfare needs in Catholic schools prompted the CECV to commission this study.

The Welfare Needs of Victorian Catholic Schools

Executive Summary

Aim of the project

The aim of this research project was to investigate the nature, range and impact of the welfare issues Principals are called upon to deal with in their role as leaders of Catholic school communities.

This project was not designed to describe the processes by which Catholic schools, or the Catholic Education sector, provide for the pastoral care of students. Documentation of policy and practice at prevention level and intervention levels can be accessed through other sources.

The research team

The research was conducted in Victorian Catholic primary and secondary schools by Helen Cahill, Professor Johanna Wyn and Dr Graeme Smith of the Australian Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne. It was commissioned by the Catholic Education Commission Victoria in October 2003.

Methodology

School Principals were used as the key informants for this study as they are uniquely placed to observe the nature of welfare challenges that affect the capacity of children to engage in the learning experiences provided by the school. They play a key role in leading the school's proactive and pastoral response to the needs of all students. In addition, they are in close contact with staff, families, communities and services and in managing the provision of additional support for students in need.

The *range* of welfare problems schools are dealing with was distinguished through a series of focus group interviews with Principals. A state-wide survey was then used to gather quantitative data about the *frequency* with which schools deal with these problems and the level of *impact* of those problems. The survey also collected data about the Principals' perceptions of the adequacy of current *resources* to assist with effective management of these problems. The case studies provided opportunity to describe the impact of student welfare issues in a particular school context.

Summary of findings

The range of problems

This study distinguished that schools respond to a very broad *range* of welfare problems, including those that arise in relation to:

1. *the home or community context,* such as poverty, family violence, family breakup, and mental health or drug abuse problems in families;

2. *student physical wellbeing*, including disabilities, illness and nutrition;
3. *student mental health*, including depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other conduct-related mental health problems;
4. *social behaviours and attitudes*, including bullying and negative classroom behaviours;
5. *student sexuality and drug use,* including problems arising from student use of alcohol, sexual risk-taking and sexual preference issues;
6. *learning problems,* particularly the impact of literacy and numeracy problems on student wellbeing and participation in schooling*;*
7. *the impact of new technologies,* such as the use of the Internet and mobile phones to harass others;
8. *staff mental health,* including the impact on students of poor relationship or class management skills and staff burnout or fatigue.

Priorities: Impact, Frequency of Welfare Issues and Adequacy of Resourcing

Schools are experiencing considerable *impact* in terms of the energy, time, resources and emotional labour that is required to respond appropriately to the needs of that proportion of students who require additional welfare support from the school.

Analysis of the survey data utilised a 'priority' rating which identified those issues that rated high on *frequency* and *impact* and low on adequacy of *resourcing.* Five key issues emerged at the top of the 'priority' index.

1. *Learning problems* were identified as having a significant impact on student wellbeing, particularly *literacy* and *numeracy* problems. Secondary Principals in particular identified a significant concern with the *lack of alternative settings* for troubled students and the *lack of pathways* for less academic students.
2. *Student mental health* problems were given high ratings, particularly the impact of the *affective disorders* of depression and anxiety and the *conduct-related mental health disorders* including ADHD, Autism, Aspergers and Conduct disorders.
3. *Family problems*, particularly *family breakup,* and *family mental health problems* including mental illnesses, suicide, gambling, violence and drug and alcohol problems.
4. *Social health* was another area of high concern, particularly the prevalence of *bullying* and the impact of *negative or defiant classroom behaviours.* An accompanying need for high-level *classroom management skills* was distinguished.
5. *Staff wellbeing* issues also rated at a high level of concern. Principals identified *staff mental health* and *staff burnout,* as well as *poor class management* skills and *poor relationship* skills to be of significant concern in relation to potential impact on the students.

Section 1: The Project

INTRODUCTION

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The *range* of welfare problems schools are dealing with was distinguished through a series of focus group interviews with Principals. A state-wide survey was then used to gather quantitative data about the *frequency* with which schools deal with these problems and the level of *impact* of those problems. The survey also collected data about the Principals' perceptions of the adequacy of current *resources* to assist with effective management of these problems. The case studies provided opportunity to describe the impact of student welfare issues in a particular school context.

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2. *student physical wellbeing*, including disabilities, illness and nutrition;

3. *student mental health*, including depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other conduct-related mental health problems;

4. *social behaviours and attitudes*, including bullying and negative classroom behaviours;

5. *student sexuality and drug use,* including problems arising from student use of alcohol, sexual risk-taking and sexual preference issues;

6. *learning problems,* particularly the impact of literacy and numeracy problems on student wellbeing and participation in schooling*;*

7. *the impact of new technologies,* such as the use of the Internet and mobile phones to harass others;

8. *staff mental health,* including the impact of on students of poor relationship or class management skills and staff burnout or fatigue.

Priority Areas

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2. *Student mental health* problems were given high ratings, particularly the impact of the *affective disorders* of depression and anxiety and the *conduct-related mental health disorders* including ADHD, Autism, Aspergers and Conduct disorders. (Interview data indicated that the conduct related disorders have a particularly high impact on the class, the teacher, and the school as well as on the individual student.)

3. *Family problems*, particularly *family breakup,* and *family mental health problems* including mental illnesses, suicide, gambling, violence and drug and alcohol problems.

4. *Social health* was another area of high concern, particularly the prevalence of *bullying* and the impact of *negative or defiant classroom behaviours.* An accompanying need for high-level *classroom management skills* was distinguished*.*

5. *Staff wellbeing* issues also rated at a high level of concern. Principals identified *staff mental health* and *staff burnout*, as well as *poor class management* skills and *poor relationship* skills to be of significant concern in relation to potential impact on the students.

UNDERSTANDING THE BROADER SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the reading of this report it is helpful to keep in mind the broader social context within which schools are dealing with these challenges. It is also useful to consider this data in relation to the conceptual models now used to describe the multifactorial nature of health and learning problems.

What is meant by the term 'welfare'?

In this study, the term 'welfare' is used in its broadest sense to encompass physical, social, emotional, financial, mental, physical and spiritual health. As the definition used encompasses mental health as well as physical health, it is informed by the World Health Organisation model whereby mental health is described as:

> a state of emotional and social wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively or fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO 1999).

This definition is also in alignment with that used by the National Mental Health Strategy, which defines mental health as 'not simply the absence of a mental illness', but

> the capacity of individuals and groups to interact with one another and their environment in ways that promote subjective wellbeing, optimal development and use of mental abilities (CHAC 2000, p.3).

In addition, account is taken of the link between learning and health, in particular the attainment of literacy and numeracy. It is known that there is a strong link between socio-economic status and attainment in literacy and numeracy and that those students who fail to attain appropriate standards of literacy are more likely to leave school early and to encounter more negative health and financial outcomes (McMillan & Marks 2003). Health problems can interfere with learning, and failure at school can impact negatively on a student's wellbeing.

Understanding population approaches to promoting health and wellbeing

The impact of poverty, disrupted family life, mental illness or drug problems in the family can significantly interrupt children's learning and social development (CHAC 2000). While traditional welfare responses have tended to focus on the needs of the individual, more recent approaches to health promotion take an ecological approach. Research in the fields of public health, resilience, social capital and the structural determinants of health have led to an increasing awareness of the importance of an environmental approach to enhancing wellbeing (ANCD 2001). This approach now informs federal strategies for enhancing the health outcomes of young people. The National Mental Health Strategy, for example, recommends an approach that recognises the complex and multi-factorial nature of the causes of mental health problems and addresses the importance of collaborative inter-sectoral partnerships to promote social and emotional wellbeing (Sawyer et al 2000).

> The determinants of physical and mental health status, at the population level, comprise a range of psychosocial and environmental factors including income, employment, poverty and access to community resources … as well as demographic factors, most notably gender, age and ethnicity. (Commonwealth Health and Aged Care (CHAG 2000, p. 11).

Risk and protective factors

Attention is now directed toward the risk and protective factors that can impact young people's wellbeing and learning at community and family levels as well as at school and individual levels.

Community risk factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing include economic disadvantage, social or cultural discrimination, isolation, neighbourhood violence, population density and housing conditions and lack of facilities and services. Children living in poverty are more likely to be exposed to illness, family stress, inadequate social support and parental depression. An ongoing cycle of disadvantage that occurs in population groups experiencing poverty is heightened in those groups experiencing stigma and social marginalisation (CHAC 2000).

Family risk factors include mental illness, unemployment, substance use disorders, and inadequate supervision, family violence and disharmony (CHAC 2000).

School risk factors include experiences of bullying, peer rejection, poor attachment to school, inadequate behaviour management, membership of a deviant peer group, and school failure. Experiences of failure and bullying or rejection within the school environment place young people at increased risk of negative health and learning outcomes (CHAC 2000). Those who have experienced bullying are more likely to experience mental health problems. Protective school responses include the provision of caring relationships, high expectations and ongoing opportunities for participation and contribution (Benard 2004).

Individual risk factors include temperament, intelligence, physical and intellectual disability, poor social skills and alienation. Young people who encounter adverse *life events* or circumstances are also at greater risk of experiencing mental health problems that may in turn impact on their learning. Life situations which have been identified as risk factors include: physical, sexual and emotional abuse, school transitions, divorce and family breakup, death of a family member, physical illness or impairment, war or natural disasters, unemployment, homelessness, poverty and incarceration (CHAC 2000).

Societal change

Principals identified that schools are increasingly called upon to deal with family and community problems that are part of a broader societal change. Schools are increasingly becoming a central point for care as well as education.

Social capital is a term now used to refer to the levels of trust, mutual responsibility and reciprocity within a community (Putnam 2000). Social capital research suggests that families are increasingly isolated and perceive or encounter lower levels of social,

emotional or instrumental support (Stansfeld 1999). Children and their parents have lower levels of participation in neighbourhood activity, civic service, sporting or hobby clubs and church groups.

It is now known that social support has a positive effect on learning and on physical and mental health (Burns, 1996; Cox & Caldwell, 2000). Thus, those children and families with lower levels of support are a greater risk of negative health and learning outcomes. As levels of social capital have diminished, schools have increasingly become the central point of community connection available for many families. This can place an increased burden on the school as the remaining universal institution with direct access to children and families.

Family change

The composition of Australian families is also changing at a significant rate. Between 1986 and 2001, the number of one-parent families in Australia increased by 53%. In contrast, the number of couple families with children increased by 3%. In 2001, 53,400 children under 18 were affected by divorce. This is a rate of 11.1 per 1,000 young people (AIHW 2003).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics predicts that single-parent families will increase by between 30% and 60% over the next 20 years. Much of the increase in single-parent families is due to marriage breakdown, which can have a significant impact on children's wellbeing and educational attainment. Children of separated families, for example, are more likely to leave school early. Single-parent families are also more likely to experience financial hardship. Risk can multiply in families, particularly in the face of poverty. Poor families are less likely to be able to access childcare, healthcare and leisure services (AIHW 2003).

There is also an increasing rate of the number of children and young people who are in need of protection due to abuse, harm or neglect occurring in the home. Child abuse and neglect is associated with low socio-economic status, family disruption, family violence and substance abuse (AIHW 2003). In the 2001–2 period, there were 6,419 children aged 12–16 years who were the subject of substantiated protection orders (a rate of 4.8 per 1,000). Females were almost twice as likely to be the subject of a child protection substantiation than were males (AIHW 2003). Schools in poorer areas are therefore more likely to be called upon to support students who are in need of protection, and may play a particularly important role in the provision of a stable and caring environment. These schools may also play a key role in the early identification and notification of child neglect or abuse.

Mental Health

This report identifies the considerable impact that dealing with student and parent mental health problems has on the school. This is not surprising given the prevalence of mental health problems in the community. More than one million Australians are estimated to have a mental health disorder and around one in five people will be affected by a mental health problem at some time in their lives (CHAC 2000).

Mental health problems are also prevalent in the school-aged youth population. In 1998, 13% of Australian teenagers aged 13–17 years had mental health problems that scored in the clinical range. The most common mental health problem was delinquent behaviour (12% of both males and females). This was followed by aggressive behaviour (6% of males and 9% of females) and attention problems (7% of both males and females). Anxiety and depression ranked fourth overall (7% of both males and females) (ABS 2002).

In the 18–24 year age group the incidence rate of mental health problems is higher with 27% in this age group experiencing mental health disorders. An even higher prevalence of mental health disorders occurs amongst those young people who do not complete secondary education. In 1998, 35% of those who did not complete secondary education experienced mental health problems as compared to just under 25% of those who did (ABS 2002).

Suicide accounted for 19% of deaths among older teenagers (aged 17–19 years) in 2000, making it the second most common cause of death in that age group. Among younger teenagers (aged 13–16 years), it was the third most common cause of death (accounting for 12% of all deaths in that age group). The incidence of self-harm is more prevalent. Hospitalisation rates due to deliberate self-harm are relatively high among female teenagers (293 per 100,000 in 1998–99 for females aged 13–19 years and 107 per 100,000 for males aged 13–19 years) (ABS 2002).

The 1998 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing established that children and adolescents with relatively more emotional and behavioural problems had more difficulties than their peers in many other areas of their lives (for example, self-esteem, peer relationships and school activities). Adolescents who reported relatively more problems were also more likely to report using tobacco, alcohol and/or marijuana (ABS 2002).

A number of public health strategies including the National Mental Health Strategy, the National Drug Strategy and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy have been implemented to address the challenge of mental health, and mental health promotion is one of the six national health priority areas for Australia.

Sexual activity

The National Survey of Australian Secondary Students carried out in 1997 gives information about a range of physical and social health issues. Just under 25% of Year 10 students report having had sexual intercourse. This number rises to 50% at Year 12. The majority of Year 10 and Year 12 students report using condoms as a means of contraception, though 11% of sexually active females in Year 10 and 18% of those in Year 12 used the withdrawal method. Approximately 10% of Year 10 girls did not use any form of contraception. It is not surprising therefore that schools are called upon to assist some young people who have experienced problems as a result of sexual activity.

Sexual preference

Whilst the majority of young people are sexually attracted to the opposite sex, one in ten young people in Years 10 and 12 do not identify themselves to be exclusively heterosexual, but identify as same-sex or both-sex preferred. These young people are seen to be at risk of marginalisation and isolation (AIHW 2003).

Changing trends in work and education

Changes to the economy and shifts in the youth labour market over the last two decades have also put an increased pressure on schools. Without access to jobs, many young people have elected to stay on at school and post-compulsory education has become the norm for Australian youth. Between 1951 and 2001, the number of higher education students increased from 31,700 to 614,100 (ABS, 2003). Over the period 1991–2000 there has been a 30 per cent increase in the total number of higher education students (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002: 57).

Australia lags behind other OECD countries in terms of national spending on education as a proportion of GDP. Australia also has relatively low rates of secondary school completion and participation in higher education (Watson, 2003, p. 17).

Socio-economic status and participation in education

There is evidence that the longstanding gap between those who participate in education and training and those who do not is widening. An analysis of lifelong learning in Australia shows that 'Australia's capacity to achieve higher levels of educational participation may be undermined by a widening socio-economic gap between individuals who participate in education and training and those who do not (Watson 2003, p. 38).

Non-completion of schooling

A low level of literacy and numeracy achievement is a major influence on school non-completion. Low achievers are more likely to leave and to leave earlier. Socio-economic background is associated with early school leaving. Of those students with parents in unskilled manual jobs, 26% left before end of Year 12. Of those students whose parents were in professional or managerial jobs only 15% left school before the end of Year 12 (McMillan & Marks 2003).

Independent and Catholic school students are less likely to become non-completers though this can partially be explained by the higher socio-economic status of the students in those schools (McMillan & Marks 2003). As distinguished in the 2004 study of the affordability of Catholic schools, Catholic children from families with lower incomes are less likely to attend Catholic primary schools than are those from families with higher incomes, and even less likely again to attend Catholic secondary schools. The share of the enrolments from the lowest income groups (as indicated by those on EMA) declined in Catholic schools between 1998 and 2002 (CEET 2004).

Participation in further education

Literacy and numeracy achievement at Year 9 influences tertiary entrance performance. According to data collected in the 1995 Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth, 66% of boys and 74% of girls were assessed as having acceptable levels of mastery in reading and comprehension, and 85% of boys and 84% of girls were assessed as having an acceptable mastery of numeracy (cited in AIHW 2003).

Though literacy and numeracy at Year 9 influences tertiary entrance performance, socio-economic background has influences over and above prior academic performance. Parental occupational status, parental education and wealth are all correlated with tertiary entrance performance. Of these three dimensions, parental occupational status has the strongest impact. The relationship between students' socio-economic background and tertiary entrance performance does not differ substantially between the three school sectors. (Marks et al 2001).

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still only half as likely to participate in higher education as those from medium and high socio-economic backgrounds (James, 2002). Rural students are also less likely to attend higher education. A study of young people's higher education choices found that on a per capita basis, for every ten people from urban locations who go to university, only six people from rural or isolated Australia do so (James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis & Stephanou, 1999).

While completion of senior secondary education is encouraged, it is not sufficient for economic security. Around half of those school completers who do not apply for entry to tertiary education are in 'an economically precarious situation' nine to ten months after completing mainstream Year 12. Based on his research on educational outcomes for Victorian youth, Teese, 2000, concludes:

> The link between the senior certificate and employment is often weak. Credentials inflation is eroding employment opportunities and imposing on young people not only school completion, but post-school education and training as well. (p. 53).

Section 2: Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques was used to explore this issue. The qualitative research occurred in the form of focus groups conducted with school Principals and interviews conducted with Principals and key staff as part of the development of four case studies. The focus groups were used to distinguish the nature and range of problems schools were encountering. The case studies provided opportunity to describe the impact of student welfare issues in a particular school context.

The qualitative data collection occurred in the form of a state-wide survey. This survey gathered data about the *frequency* with which schools deal with these problems and the level of *impact* of those problems. The survey also collected data about the Principals' perceptions of the adequacy of current *resources* to assist with effective management of these problems.

Principals were used as the key informants for this study as they are uniquely placed to observe the nature of welfare challenges that affect the capacity of children to engage in the learning experiences provided by the school. They play a key role in leading the school's proactive and pastoral response to the needs of all students. In addition, they are in close contact with staff, families, communities and services and in managing the provision of additional support for students in need.

Focus groups

Three focus groups were conducted to explore the nature and range of welfare challenges impacting on schools, and to provide a basis for the preparation of a survey.

1. Focus Group One involved four Principals of primary schools representing communities of low socio-economic status and high cultural and ethnic diversity. (The percentage of students in the school receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was used as indication of very low socio-economic status as these student live in families with incomes of lower than $27,000 per anum.)

Primary Focus Group One: (Lower SES)

School type	location	size	% on EMA
Co-ed PS	Outer urban fringe	830	21
Co-ed PS	Urban	395	50
Co-ed PS	Inner city	129	53
Co-ed PS	Inner city	158	84.8

2. Focus Group Two involved six secondary Principals or deputy-Principals. Two rural schools were represented (co-ed), and the four urban schools (one co-ed, one girls' school and two boys' schools). Four of the schools represented a middle-class or wealthier school community, and two schools represented a community of lower socio-economic status.

Secondary Focus Group Two

School type	location	size	% on EMA
Boys SC	Outer urban fringe	679	12.52
Girls SC	Urban, Inner city	619	16.2
Co-ed SC	Urban	798	31
Boys SC	Urban	713	21.3
Co-ed SC	Rural	886	20.65
Co-ed SC	Rural	841	12.7

3. Focus Group Three comprised five Principals from primary schools representing middle class or wealthier communities, and included a rural representative.

Primary Focus Group Two (Higher SES). (Note 3 of these schools should have been in the low SES focus group.)

School type	location	size	% on EMA
Co-ed PS	Outer urban fringe	213	15
Co-ed PS	Outer Urban fringe	249	28
Co-ed PS	Urban	303	18
Co-ed PS	Urban	291	11.3
Co-ed PS	Rural	156	56
Co-ed PS	Outer urban fringe	279	33

Survey development

The focus group data informed the development of the survey tool. The survey was approved for release by the CECV and sent to all Victorian Catholic primary, secondary and special schools early in December 2003. The survey was administered via the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and anonymous returns were sent directly to the Australian Youth Research Centre. Data entry was conducted late December and analysis in January-February 2004.

Case studies

Four case studies were conducted in February 2004. Two primary schools (one inner urban and one rural) and two secondary schools (one outer urban and one regional centre) were visited and interviews took place with Principals and staff with leadership roles in the welfare area. The case studies were written up and returned to the school

leaders for edit and approval. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the Principals and their schools.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Survey distribution and returns

Surveys were despatched to all Catholic primary, secondary and special schools. The return rate for the primary and secondary sectors, and for each diocese was not significantly different from the proportions of these schools in the system. The overall return rate was 38% with 184 schools out of 493 returned. Primary schools had a return rate of 39% with 149 returns, and secondary schools had a return rate of 37.6% with 32 returns. There were 3 returns from the 'other' category.

Table 1: Survey returns

School sector	Frequency	Per cent of total returns
Primary	149	81.0
Secondary	32	17.4
Other	3	1.6
Total	184	100.0

School population

A range of school population types was represented in the sample, including 169 co-educational schools, 9 single sex (female) and 6 single-sex (male) schools. Note the combinations in the table below.

Table 2: School population

School population	Primary	Secondary	Other	Total
Single sex(male)		6		6
Single sex(female)		9		9
Co-ed	149	17	3	169
Total	149	32	3	184

School location

The sample included a representative 55 rural schools, 85 metropolitan schools and 44 outer metropolitan schools. The response rate for each sector was not significantly different from the proportion of schools from each sector.

Table 3: School location

School location	Frequency	Per cent
Rural	55	29.9
Metropolitan	85	46.2
Outer metropolitan	44	23.9
Total	184	100.0

School size

Primary and secondary schools had a different distribution of size with the majority of primary schools in the 150–300 category and the majority of secondary schools in either the 500–750 group or the over 1000 category.

Table 4: School size

School sector		Frequency	Per cent
Primary	up to 150	34	22.8
	150–300	67	45.0
	300–500	31	20.8
	500–750	17	11.4
	Total	149	100.0
Secondary	300–500	4	12.5
	500–750	11	34.4
	750–1000	6	18.8
	>1000	11	34.4
	Total	32	100.0
Other	up to 150	2	66.7
	300–500	1	33.3

School size versus school location

In both secondary and primary sectors, rural schools tend to be smaller. Of the rural primary schools, 93.5% had populations of under 300 students, with 45.7% of them under 150 in size. Only 12.5% of rural secondary schools had populations of over 1000 whereas 50% of metropolitan secondary schools were over 1000.

Table 5: School size versus school location

School sector				rural	metro	outer metro	total
Primary	No. of students	up to 150	Count	21	11	2	34
			% within location	45.7%	16.4%	5.6%	22.8%
		150–300	Count	22	29	16	67
			% within location	47.8%	43.3%	44.4%	45.0%
		300–500	Count	2	18	11	31
			% within location	4.3%	26.9%	30.6%	20.8%
		500–750	Count	1	9	7	17
			% within location	2.2%	13.4%	19.4%	11.4%
	Total		Count	46	67	36	149
			% within location	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Secondary	No. of students	300–500	Count	3	1		4
			% within location	37.5%	6.3%		12.5%
		500–750	Count	1	7	3	11
			% within location	12.5%	43.8%	37.5%	34.4%
		750–1000	Count	3		3	6
			% within location	37.5%		37.5%	18.8%
		>1000	Count	1	8	2	11
			% within location	12.5%	50.0%	25.0%	34.4%
	Total		Count	8	16	8	32
			% within location	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Other	No. of students	up to 150	Count		2		2
			% within location		100.0%		66.7%
		300–500	Count	1			1
			% within location	100.0%			33.3%
	Total		Count	1	2		3
			% within location	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%

Some socio-economic indicators

Schools were asked to indicate the percentage of their student population receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). Only 146 of the 184 schools reported their EMA figures. This included 120 (80.5%) of primary schools and 25 (78%) of secondary schools.

Distribution of EMA

EMA is distributed differently between primary and secondary schools. This can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below. The mean EMA distribution in primary schools is 20% whereas in secondary schools it is 15% (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Mean of percentage of students receiving
Education Maintenance Allowance

School sector	Mean EMA%	No.
Primary	23.03	120
Secondary	16.93	25
Other	32.00	1
Total	22.05	146

In the survey sample there are 56 primary schools with an EMA of over 20% and only 5 secondary schools with an EMA of over 20% (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 1: Primary schools and EMA distribution
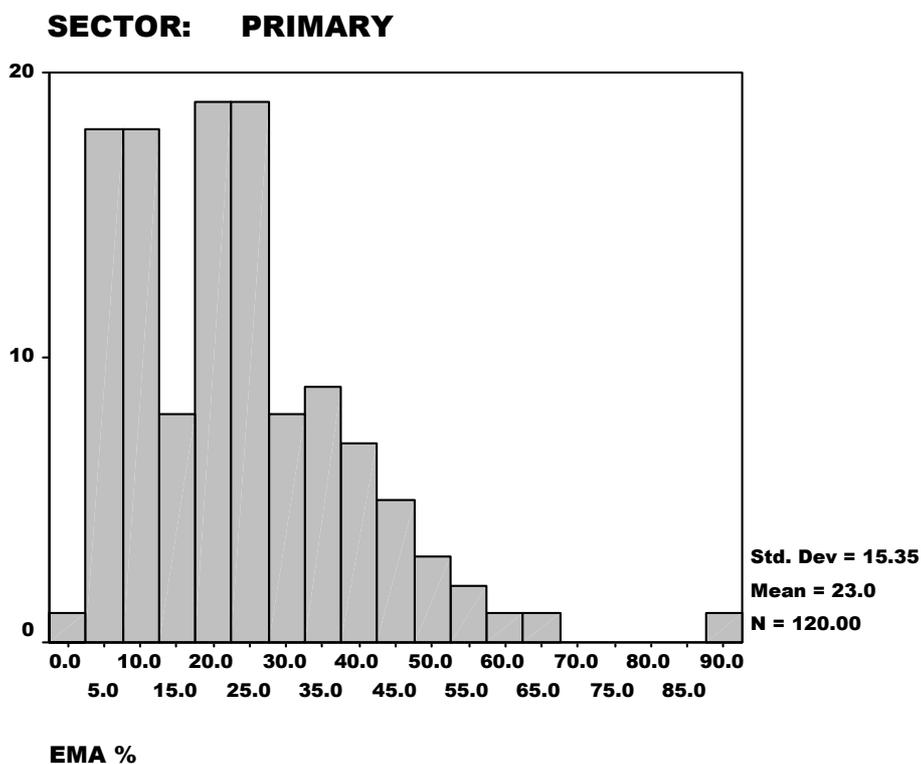
Figure 2: Secondary schools and EMA distribution

SECTOR: SECONDARY

Std. Dev = 9.93
Mean = 16.9
N = 25.00

EMA %
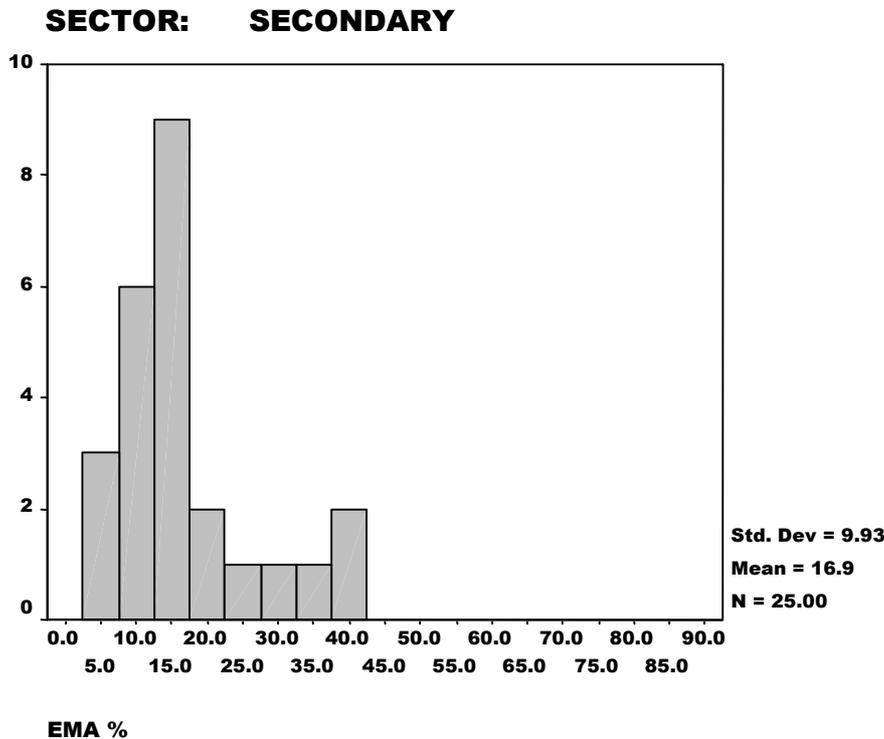
EMA and Diocesan distribution

It can be noted that the state-wide EMA data for Catholic schools indicate that there are no secondary schools with EMA populations of over 20% in the Dioceses of Sale and Ballarat and only one in the Diocese of Sandhurst (CECV 2003). In contrast, close to two-thirds of the primary schools in Sale and in Ballarat dioceses, and almost three-quarters of the primary schools in Sandhurst diocese have EMA population over 20% (see Table 7 below).

Table 7: Diocese and EMA

Diocese	Mean	No.
Ballarat	23.14	17
Sandhurst	22.68	15
Sale	20.64	14
Total	22.13	145

EMA and City schools

Data collected in this survey set indicate that the secondary schools with the highest EMA populations are located in inner urban areas of Melbourne. In the Archdiocese of Melbourne there are 9 secondary schools with EMA populations of between 20 and 30 %, and 3 secondary schools with populations between 30% and 40%, one between 40% and 50% and one between 50% and 60% (see Table 8 below).

Table 8: Location and EMA

Location	Mean	No.
Rural	22.05	47
Metropolitan	22.78	66
Outer metropolitan	20.59	33
Total	22.05	146

Correlation of NESB and EMA

The scatterplots in Figures 3 and 4 below show the correlation of the percentage of students of non-English Speaking Background (NESB) with students on EMA. It can be noted that there is a general correlation of NESB with EMA, however there is a range of schools with very low NESB populations that have significant EMA populations. These are rural schools.

Figure 3: Primary schools, EMA and NESB

Figure 4: Secondary schools and EMA versus NESB

SECTOR: SECONDARY
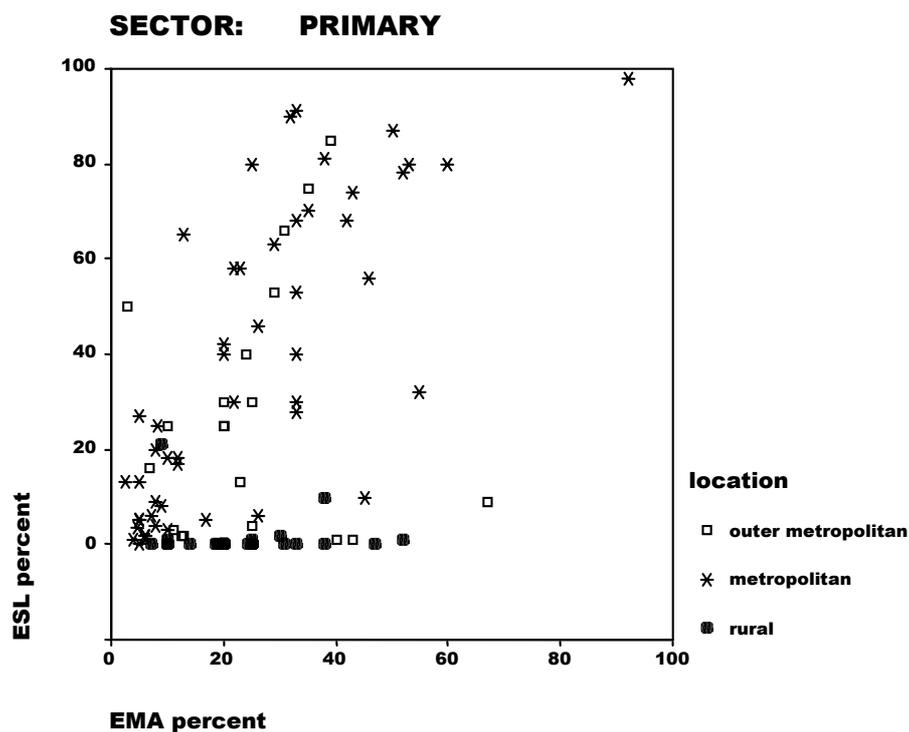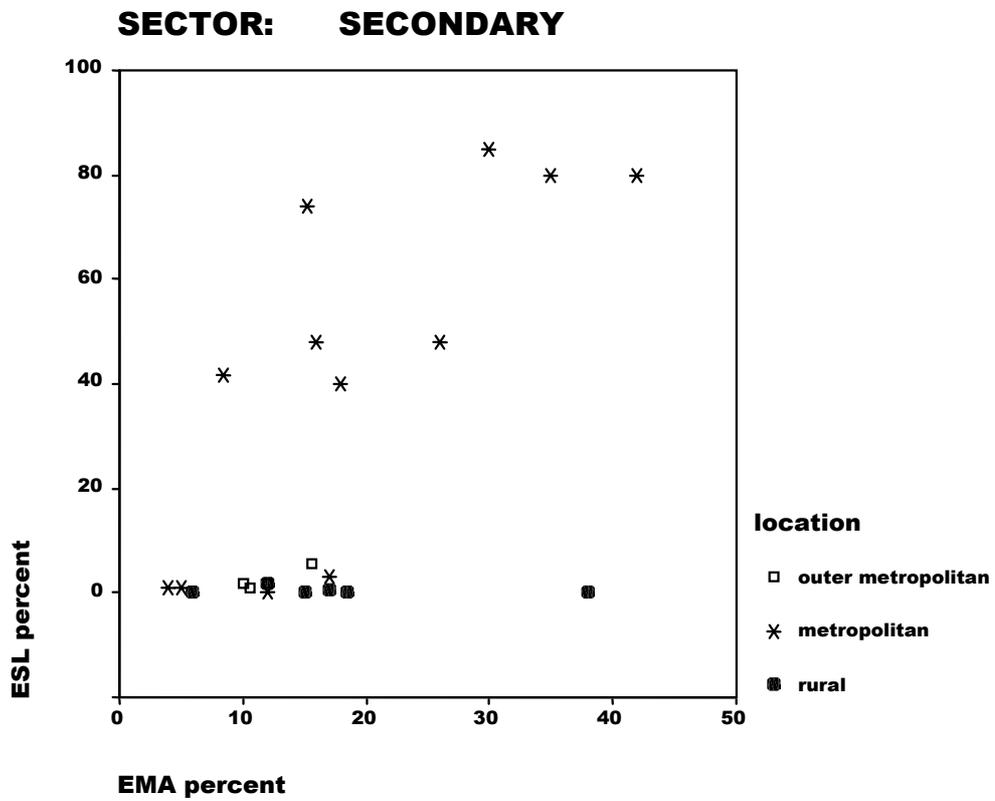
Section 3: Survey Data

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The *range* of welfare problems schools are dealing with was distinguished through a series of focus group interviews with Principals. The survey was then used to gather quantitative data about the *frequency* with which schools deal with these problems and the level of *impact* of those problems. The survey also collected data about the Principals' perceptions of the adequacy of current *resources* to assist with effective management of these problems. Opportunity was provided on the survey form for respondents to indicate additional 'other' welfare issues, and thus add to the range of welfare issues. None of the respondents contributed to the 'other' section.

The welfare issues were grouped in six themed blocks categorised as:

1. Home, environment and community context
Items in this section included: separation or family breakup, death of a family member, chronic illness in family, suicide or attempted suicide in family or community, parent or family member's mental health problem, parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem, parent or family member's gambling problem, poverty or financial problems, unemployment in family, retrenchment in family, over-employment of parents, violence in family, violence or crime in community, incarceration of family member, racism impacting on family, refugee status impacting on family, recent arrival status impacting on family, troublesome outsiders entering school premises, parental threats to litigate, parental or community involvement in student disputes, student participation in criminal behaviour, homelessness, impact of natural disasters, and terrorism.

2. Student wellbeing: physical health
Items in this section included: learning disability, physical disability, intellectual disability, poor nutrition, overweight/obese, insufficient exercise, lateness of bedtime/lack of sleep, time/distance taken to travel to school, and incontinence.

3. *Student wellbeing: mental health*
Items in this section included: depression, anxiety, eating disorders, victim of bullying, ADHD or ADD, aspergers, autism, conduct disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, suicide attempt, student death due to suicide , and self-harming (e.g. slashing or cutting).

4. Sexuality and drug issues
Items in this section included: use of cigarettes, use of alcohol at school, use of alcohol outside school, use of cannabis at school, use of cannabis outside school, use of illicit drugs at school, use of illicit drugs outside school, recreational or inappropriate use of over-the-counter medications (e.g. painkillers, asthma medications), recreational or inappropriate use of prescription medications (e.g. sleeping pills, ADHD, medications), unprotected sexual intercourse, unplanned pregnancy, sexual preference, sexual activity under influence of alcohol or other drugs, and sexual abuse.

5. Student social behaviour and learning issues

Items in this section included: defiant or negative classroom behaviour, truancy, lateness, bullying of others, violence, racism, rudeness to staff, offending and running away from home.

6. Learning problems

Items in this section included: literacy problems, numeracy problems, lack of appropriate curriculum/education pathways for less academic students, lack of support for ESL learners, lack of alternative setting for troubled students, and early school leaving.

7. Impact of new technologies

Items in this section included: impact of television/video/other visual media programs on student behaviour, student Internet access to or use of pornography, impact of computer or internet games, use of mobile phones to harass others, and use of mobile phones to involve others in conflict situations.

8. Staff wellbeing

Items in this section included: staff mental health problems, staff family breakup, staff child/family care, staff caring for the aged, death in family, staff physical illness, staff bullying of students, parent threats or bullying of staff member, students bullying staff, staff drug/alcohol use, inappropriate class management strategies, poor relationship skills, staff conflict with colleagues, and staff burnout or fatigue.

Frequency, impact and adequacy of resourcing

The respondents reported on three aspects of each issue:

    A. the *frequency* with which they dealt with the issue.
    B. the *impact* of the issue on student wellbeing.
    C. the *adequacy of current resourcing* for each issue.

Further questions asked respondents to indicate their needs relating to professional development and to respond to a series of questions about staff welfare. (For a copy of the survey tool see Appendices.)

Priority index

An analysis that combined the three aspects of frequency, impact and resourcing was used to develop a 'Priority' index. The top five welfare issues which scored high on a combination of frequency, impact and adequacy of resourcing are presented in a priority index (refer p. 39).

Socio-economic status and needs

Further analysis is presented which investigates the effect of the proportion of students receiving EMA on responses to all questions. This section of the report presents a summary of key findings around Principals' reports about the frequency, the impact and the adequacy of resources to assist schools to respond. Findings are reported separately for primary and secondary schools. (A comprehensive collection of the data can be found in the Appendices.)

FREQUENCY

Community and family

The questionnaire asked principals to indicate the frequency with which they dealt with each problem: from 'many times a day', 'daily', 'weekly' etc. to as infrequently as 'every few years'.

The most frequently reported home and environment problems reported by primary Principals included poverty or family financial problems, unemployment, family breakup and mental health problems in the family.

Community and family Frequency with which the issue presents: PRIMARY (top 10)	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Poverty or family financial problems	24%	26%
2. Separation or family breakup	18%	23%
3. Unemployment in family	15%	24%
4. Parental or community involvement in student disputes	10%	12%
5. Parent or family member's mental health problem	15%	12%
6. Retrenchment in family	4%	12%
7. Chronic illness in family	5%	3.4%
8. Death of family member	2%	5%
9. Violence in family	5%	12%
10. Over-employment of parents	8%	7%

The most frequently reported home and environment problems reported by secondary Principals included poverty or family financial problems, unemployment, family break up, chronic illness in family, violence in the home and mental health and drug problems in the family.

Community and family Frequency with which the issue presents: SECONDARY (top 10)	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Poverty or family financial problems	24%	31%
2. Separation or family brea up	59%	19%
3. Chronic illness in family	25%	31%
4. Unemployment in family	23%	26%
5. Violence in family	19%	25%
6. Death of family member	3%	35%
7. Parental or community involvement in student disputes	13%	8%
8. Parent or family member's mental health problem	19%	16%
9. Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	9%	28%
10. Violence or crime in community	8%	7%

Student wellbeing: physical health

Primary school Principals identify that the physical health issues they deal with most frequently are those that arise in relation to learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and illness. A similar pattern is evident in the secondary responses. These responses occur at a high rate with half to two-thirds of Principals noting that these issues are dealt with on a daily to weekly basis.

Student physical health **Frequency** with which the issue presents:	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common(monthly)
PRIMARY (top 3)		
1. Learning disability	72%	3%
2. Intellectual disability	58%	2%
3. Illness	43%	8%
SECONDARY (top 3)		
1. Learning disability	84%	6%
2. Illness	52%	19%
3. Intellectual disability	67%	6%

Student wellbeing: mental health

Principals reported bullying, ADHD, and other conduct disorders, anxiety, and depression as the mental health problems their schools were dealing with frequently. This is not surprising considering the prevalence of these problems in the population. (See Section 1 of this report.)

Student mental health **Frequency** with which the issue presents:	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
PRIMARY (top 5)		
1. ADHD or ADD	52%	6%
2. Victim of bullying	40%	22%
3. Conduct disorders	41%	7%
4. Anxiety	31%	10%
5. Aspergers syndrome	42%	4%
SECONDARY (top 5)		
1. Victim of bullying	72%	16%
2. ADHD or ADD	69%	0
3. Anxiety	53%	28%
4. Depression	54%	25%
5. Conduct disorders	55%	14%

Adolescent risk-taking

Secondary Principals reported that schools are called upon to deal with the outcomes of adolescent risk-taking in the areas of substance use and sexuality. The school may be called upon to provide counselling for students in relation to risk-taking behaviours conducted outside of the school hours.

Adolescent risk-taking **Frequency** with which the issue presents: SECONDARY (top 3)	Very often (Daily + to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Use of cigarettes	66%	28%
2. Use of alcohol outside school	48%	21%
3. Sexual activity under influence of alcohol	44%	15%

Social behaviours

Primary and secondary Principals report a high frequency of problems such as student lateness, bullying and negative classroom behaviour. The frequency with which these problems are reported increases in the secondary schools.

Student social behaviours **Frequency** with which the issue presents: PRIMARY (top 4)	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Lateness	83%	15%
2. Defiant or negative classroom behaviour	65%	9%
3. Bullying of others	53%	22%
4. Rudeness to staff	23%	25%
SECONDARY (top 4)		
1. Lateness	100%	0
2. Defiant or negative classroom behaviour	90%	6%
3. Rudeness to staff	69%	16%
4. Bullying of others	72%	22%

Learning issues

Principals are closely attuned to the impact of literacy and numeracy problems on students' wellbeing and also of the potential of student and family welfare problems to interfere with learning. Literacy and numeracy problems are omnipresent for both primary and secondary Principals. In general the secondary Principals report these learning problems slightly more often: for example, lack of pathways for less academic students is reported by 40% of secondary Principals and 31% of primary Principals as a problem occurring weekly or more often.

Student learning issues Frequency with which the issue presents: PRIMARY (top 4)	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Literacy problems	82%	5%
2. Numeracy problems	82%	5%
3. Lack of pathways for less academic students	31%	5%
4. Lack of support for ESL learners	33%	1%
SECONDARY (top 4)		
1. Literacy problems	94%	6%
2. Numeracy problems	94%	6%
3. Lack of pathways for less academic students	40%	23%
4. Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	34%	3%

Impact of new technologies

Secondary Principals report a higher frequency than do primary Principals of dealing with the impact of new technologies including Internet access to pornography and use of mobile phones to harass others. primary schools report dealing with a significant exposure to visual media.

Impact of new technologies Frequency with which the issue presents: PRIMARY (top 2)	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
1. Impact of television/video/visual media	50%	13%
2. Electronic games	35%	13%
SECONDARY (top 4)		
1. Impact of television/video/visual media	57%	9%
2. Electronic games	35%	26%
3. Use of mobile phones to harass others	28%	24%
4. Student internet access to/ use of pornography	20%	28%

Staff wellbeing impacting on students

Secondary Principals report a far higher frequency of staff wellbeing issues affecting student welfare, particularly around poor classroom management skills and poor relationship skills.

Impact of staff wellbeing **Frequency** with which the issue presents:	Very often (Daily+ to weekly)	Common (monthly)
PRIMARY (top 5)		
1. Staff physical illness	21%	16%
2. Poor relationship skills	17%	10%
3. Poor class management	15%	9%
4. Staff/child/family care	10%	21%
5. Staff burnout or fatigue	6%	10%
SECONDARY (top 5)		
1. Poor class management	58%	19%
2. Staff physical illness	50%	22%
3. Poor relationship skills	29%	26%
4. Staff/child/family care	35%	19%
5. Staff conflict with colleagues	16%	23%

IMPACT

This section of the survey asked Principals to identify the *impact* of each of these problems on students as opposed to the prior section in which Principals indicate the *frequency* with which they deal with these problems. Some problems do not occur very often, but when they do are of particularly high impact. Other problems occur with greater frequency but may have less impact.

The Principals rated the impact on a five-point scale ranging from very high, high, moderate, low and no impact. The great majority of Principals ranked most of the problems as having a high or very high impact on student wellbeing. The most severe problems were those that were frequently ranked as very high, sometimes by from 40–50% of Principals. As in the prior section, a summary of the ranking tables is provided. (See Appendices for complete data set.)

Community and family

The highest *impact* issues reported by primary Principals were family breakup (82% high/very high), death (89%) or violence (80%) in the family, and mental health problems in the family (79%). The secondary Principals noted a few high impact problems in addition to those ranked most highly by primary Principals, notably suicide or attempted suicide in the family or community, which was rated as 94% high/very high impact.

Student physical health

The highest impact issues in this category were reported by both primary and secondary respondents to be learning disabilities (89% high/very high) and intellectual disabilities (82% high/very high).

Student mental health

In terms of level of impact of mental health problems, primary Principals identified ADHD (84%), being a victim of bullying (83%), anxiety (79%), depression (77%) and conduct disorders (73%) to be the most significant in impact of the student mental health problems. Depression (100%), conduct disorders (88%), anxiety (100%) and self-harming (85%) and being a victim of bullying (87%)were identified to be the most significant in impact by the secondary Principals.

Learning issues

Besides noting the high impact of literacy and numeracy problems, secondary Principals see a need for alternative settings for troubled students. Of the secondary Principals, 93% note the lack of alternative settings to be of high/very high impact on students.

Impact: the Top 30 issues

The tables below show the 30 issues that are considered to be of highest *impact* for primary and for secondary schools. These charts should not be confused with the *frequency* data presented in the previous section. Some problems occur rarely, but make a considerable or lasting impact. It can be noted that a range of issues relating to student mental health, family problems and learning problems feature at the top of both lists.

These charts can be read with the community prevalence data in mind, particularly that relating to the prevalence of mental health problems, family breakup and substantiated child protection orders (see Section 1).

Primary impact: the Top 30 issues

PRIMARY: issues of highest impact	No.	Mean
1. Learning disability	142	1.63
2. Literacy problems	141	1.65
3. Numeracy problems	139	1.67
4. Defiant or negative classroom behaviour	144	1.69
5. ADHD or ADD	135	1.77
6. Separation or family breakup	145	1.79
7. Death of family member	145	1.82
8. Victim of bullying	144	1.85
9. Intellectual disability	140	1.85
10. Violence in family	134	1.87
11. Anxiety	135	1.95
12. Poor class management	136	1.97
13. Parent or family member's mental health problem	138	1.97
14. Bullying of others	145	2.02
15. Chronic illness in family	144	2.06
16. Reporting to Human Services	132	2.07
17. Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	128	2.09
18. Depression	124	2.09
19. Lack of sleep	130	2.12
20. Conduct disorders	118	2.12
21. Aspergers syndrome	122	2.13
22. Violence	134	2.18
23. Illness	141	2.20
24. Suicide/attempted suicide in family or community	123	2.24
25. Sexual abuse	114	2.24
26. Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	115	2.26
27. Lateness	144	2.28
28. Staff burnout or fatigue	132	2.28
29. Poverty or family financial problems	140	2.29
30. Staff mental health problems	131	2.31

Secondary impact : the Top 30 issues

SECONDARY: issues of highest impact	No.	Mean
1. Suicide/attempted suicide in family or community	32	1.41
2. Death of family member	32	1.41
3. Depression	31	1.45
4. Learning disability	30	1.47
5. Violence in family	32	1.47
6. Sexual abuse	32	1.56
7. Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	30	1.57
8. Literacy problems	31	1.58
9. Conduct disorders	25	1.68
10. Anxiety	30	1.70
11. Suicide attempt	30	1.70
12. Homelessness	31	1.71
13. Separation or family breakup	32	1.72
14. Self-harming	27	1.74
15. Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	29	1.76
16. Victim of bullying	30	1.77
17. Numeracy problems	31	1.77
18. Lack of pathways for less academic student	31	1.81
19. Early school leaving	29	1.83
20. Running away	31	1.84
21. ADHD or ADD	29	1.86
22. Poor class management	31	1.87
23. Incarceration of family member	27	1.89
24. Aspergers syndrome	27	1.89
25. Reporting to Human Services	31	1.90
26. Intellectual disability	29	1.93
27. Unplanned pregnancy	29	1.93
28. Lack of sleep	30	1.93
29. Parent or family member's mental health problem	31	1.94
30. Defiant or negative classroom behaviours	30	2.00

RESOURCING

Following reports on *frequency* and *impact,* Principals were asked to indicate their view on the *current adequacy of resourcing* they had to support them in dealing effectively with welfare issues. They indicated their response on a four-point scale ranging from very good, to adequate, inadequate and highly inadequate. A fifth option allowed them to select a 'not relevant' category.

In the following summary the order of the resource adequacy for all the issues is ranked. In each table the top issues are shown. (The top issues in the lists are those that are judged to be the *most inadequately* resourced.)

Primary Principals considered that their schools were most inadequately resourced in the areas of family mental health problems, family breakup, poverty or family financial problems, student mental health problems and staff burnout.

Primary Adequacy of resources (with highly inadequate at top of list)	Mean	Not relevant	Very good	Adequate	**Inadequate**	**Highly inadequate**
1. Parent or family member's mental health problem	2.93	3.6%	1.4%	18.8%	**50.7%**	**25.4%**
2. Violence in family	2.80	3.8%	1.5%	26.9%	**46.2%**	**21.5%**
3. Separation or family break up	2.77	1.4%	2.1%	31.2%	**48.2%**	**17.0%**
4. Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	2.73	7.6%	1.5%	19.8%	**51.9%**	**19.1%**
5. Poverty or Family financial problems	2.68	.7%	4.9%	38.0%	**38.0%**	**18.3%**
6. ADHD or ADD	2.67	3.0%	7.5%	34.6%	**29.3%**	**25.6%**
7. Staff burnout or fatigue	2.64	3.8%	1.5%	37.9%	**40.2%**	**16.7%**
8. Depression	2.64	11.3%	3.2%	19.4%	**42.7%**	**23.4%**
9. Anxiety	2.64	5.9%	3.7%	29.6%	**42.2%**	**18.5%**
10. Unemployment in family	2.61	2.9%	4.3%	39.3%	**36.4%**	**17.1%**
11. Chronic illness in family	2.58	2.8%	3.5%	38.5%	**43.4%**	**11.9%**
12. Learning disability	2.56		13.5%	35.5%	**32.6%**	**18.4%**
13. Intellectual disability	2.54	3.6%	9.4%	36.2%	**31.2%**	**19.6%**
14. Staff mental health problems	2.53	12.2%	1.5%	29.8%	**34.4%**	**22.1%**

Secondary: resourcing

Secondary Principals identified their most significant resource issue to be the lack of alternative settings for troubled students. This was followed by the need for resources to deal with student mental health problems, staff mental health problems, family mental health problems, and staff burnout.

Secondary Adequacy of resources (with highly inadequate at top of list)	Mean	not relevant	very good	adequate	**inadequate**	**highly inadequate**
1. Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	3.10			23.3%	**43.3%**	**33.3%**
2. Self-harming	2.68		10.7%	28.6%	**42.9%**	**17.9%**
3. Staff mental health problems	2.63		6.7%	40.0%	**36.7%**	**16.7%**
4. Violence in family	2.63		12.5%	28.1%	**43.8%**	**15.6%**
5. Numeracy problems	2.62		3.4%	41.4%	**44.8%**	**10.3%**
6. Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	2.59		12.5%	28.1%	**46.9%**	**12.5%**
7. Lack of pathways for less academic students	2.55		13.8%	31.0%	**41.4%**	**13.8%**
8. Violence or crime in community	2.55		6.5%	41.9%	**41.9%**	**9.7%**
9. Parent or family member's gambling problem	2.55		6.5%	45.2%	**35.5%**	**12.9%**
10. Aspergers syndrome	2.54	3.6%	3.6%	39.3%	**42.9%**	**10.7%**
11. Staff burnout or fatigue	2.53	3.3%		40.0%	**53.3%**	**3.3%**
12. Depression	2.53		16.7%	30.0%	**36.7%**	**16.7%**
13. Incarceration of family member	2.52	3.4%	6.9%	34.5%	**44.8%**	**10.3%**
14. Suicide/attempted suicide in family or community	2.50		15.6%	28.1%	**46.9%**	**9.4%**
15. Homelessness	2.48	3.2%	16.1%	29.0%	**32.3%**	**19.4%**
16. Sexual preference	2.48		13.8%	37.9%	**34.5%**	**13.8%**

POVERTY

The data on *frequency*, *impact* and *resourcing* was also analysed to explore whether those Principals in schools with high percentages of students on EMA were indicating different needs. Both primary and secondary schools were grouped into 4 quartile bands of EMA level. Such a division in the secondary schools would have resulted in groupings which were too small to make reliable comparisons which could be generalised to all secondary schools; thus the sectors have been treated together.

For all issues, schools with higher EMA proportions tended to report the problems more frequently. Given the higher prevalence of health problems in lower socio-economic groups, it is not surprising that those schools with high EMA populations identified higher impacts in the areas of family breakup, violence, crime, incarceration of family member, presence of troublesome outsiders and higher parental involvement in student disputes. Schools with poorer populations were also more likely to note the impact of lateness, truancy, racism, bullying, violence, sexual abuse, poor nutrition, and obesity and to express a greater need for alternative settings for some students. High EMA schools also identify a greater need for professional development for staff, specialists and school leaders, and they report greater intrusion on staff time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy.

The following tables illustrate the issues where EMA has an easily discernable effect on the frequency with which problems are reported.

EMA and Frequency of community and family problems

Community and family problems Frequency vs EMA	Many times a day	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Yearly	Every few years	Never
LOW EMA QUARTILE								
Poverty or family financial problems		6.3%	3.1%	18.8%	40.6%	15.6%	15.6%	
Unemployment in family		3.1%	6.3%	12.5%	43.8%	18.8%	15.6%	
Violence in family				6.7%	30.0%	16.7%	36.7%	10.0%
HIGH EMA QUARTILE								
Poverty or family financial problems	3.4%	27.6%	17.2%	20.7%	27.6%	3.4%		
Unemployment in family	3.4%	20.7%	13.8%	27.6%	31.0%	3.4%		
Violence in family		3.3%	13.3%	26.7%	23.3%	10.0%	13.3%	10.0%

EMA and Frequency of student wellbeing issues

The *frequency* of the problems of poor nutrition, obesity and being a victim of bullying are significantly related to EMA levels as shown below.

Student wellbeing issues Frequency vs EMA	Many times a day	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Yearly	Every few years	Never
LOW EMA								
Poor nutrition	3.2%	12.9%	6.5%	9.7%	3.2%	16.1%	22.6%	25.8%
Overweight/Obese		9.4%	3.1%		28.1%	25.0%	18.8%	15.6%
Victim of bullying	3.1%	9.4%	12.5%	25.0%	40.6%	3.1%	6.3%	
HIGH EMA								
Poor nutrition	3.6%	42.9%	10.7%	7.1%	21.4%		3.6%	10.7%
Overweight/Obese	6.9%	27.6%	10.3%	6.9%	17.2%	10.3%	13.8%	6.9%
Victim of bullying	3.4%	20.7%	24.1%	24.1%	13.8%	6.9%	3.4%	3.4%

EMA and Frequency of social problems

The problems where the *frequency* or reporting is EMA related are truancy, bullying, violence, and racism.

Social problems Frequency vs EMA	Many times a day	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Yearly	Every few years	Never
LOW EMA Truancy			3.2%	6.5%	9.7%	16.1%	25.8%	38.7%
Bullying of others	3.1%	18.8%	25.0%	15.6%	34.4%	3.1%		
Violence			9.7%	16.1%	19.4%	3.2%	29.0%	22.6%
Racism			6.7%		23.3%	6.7%	26.7%	36.7%
HIGH EMA Truancy		10.3%	20.7%	17.2%	10.3%	3.4%	17.2%	20.7%
Bullying of others	10.0%	23.3%	36.7%	10.0%	13.3%		3.3%	3.3%
Violence	6.7%	3.3%	26.7%	20.0%	33.3%		3.3%	6.7%
Racism		3.3%	13.3%	13.3%	26.7%	10.0%	20.0%	13.3%

IMPACT AND EMA

EMA and Impact of community and family issues

A number of community and family impact issues are associated with EMA level. These include refugee status of family, incarceration of family member, family breakup, poverty, student participation in criminal behaviour, unemployment, parental involvement in student disputes and the presence of troublesome outsiders on the school premises. The degree of difference in the first three of these issues is shown in the table below.

Family issues Impact vs EMA	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	No impact
Low EMA quartile Refugee status impacting on family	8.3%	8.3%	4.2%		79.2%
Incarceration of family member	12.5%	16.7%	4.2%	4.2%	62.5%
Separation or family breakup	28.1%	37.5%	28.1%	6.3%	
High EMA quartile Refugee status impacting on family	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	8.3%	29.2%
Incarceration of family member	26.9%	42.3%	23.1%		7.7%
Separation or family breakup	55.2%	34.5%	10.3%		

EMA and the Impact of behaviour and Learning issues

High EMA schools indicated higher levels of impact of offending, truancy, racism, bullying of others, violence, defiant or negative classroom behaviour, running away, lack of pathways for less academic students and rudeness to staff.

Behaviour Impact vs EMA	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	No impact
Low EMA quartile Offending	4.8%	19.0%	28.6%	19.0%	28.6%
Truancy	18.5%	37.0%	11.1%	7.4%	25.9%
Racism	7.7%	38.5%	19.2%	3.8%	30.8%
Rudeness to staff	10.0%	23.3%	36.7%	23.3%	6.7%
High EMA quartile Offending	20.0%	40.0%	15.0%	10.0%	15.0%
Truancy	50.0%	33.3%	4.2%	4.2%	8.3%
Racism	29.6%	40.7%	14.8%	7.4%	7.4%
Rudeness to staff	14.8%	33.3%	25.9%	18.5%	7.4%

EMA levels and perceived general welfare needs of school

There is a significant correlation between the EMA level and the perceived needs for professional development. High EMA schools indicated a higher need for professional development for specialist staff, general staff and school leaders.

Need for PD vs EMA	Very high	High	Moderate	Low
Quartile 1: (low EMA schools) Professional development/training for general staff'	31.3%	34.4%	28.1%	6.3%
Professional development/training for specialist staff	23.3%	43.3%	26.7%	6.7%
Professional development/training for school leaders	38.7%	38.7%	16.1%	6.5%
Quartile 4: (High EMA schools) Professional development/training for general staff	43.3%	43.3%	13.3%	
Professional development/training for specialist staff	40.0%	40.0%	16.7%	3.3%
Professional development/training for school leaders	56.7%	26.7%	13.3%	3.3%

EMA levels and its effects on staff

The impact on staff of stressful situations was assessed in questions 126–138. The impacts of various situations: reduced time for preparation, fatigue and burnout on staff and leaders were investigated.

There was little discernable effect of EMA levels of schools of the impact of these stressful situations. There was a small significant correlation between 'reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy' and EMA level. This is illustrated in the table below.

Effects on staff	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	No impact
Low EMA					
Reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy	19.4%	48.4%	19.4%	12.9%	
Reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy	31.0%	41.4%	17.2%	6.9%	3.4%
High EMA					
Reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy	29.6%	48.1%	18.5%	3.7%	
Reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy	36.7%	50.0%	10.0%	3.3%	

STAFF WELLBEING

The Principals identified that teaching staff were affected in a range of ways as a result of their effort to deal appropriately with student welfare issues. Primary Principals perceive a greater impact on their staff than do secondary Principals. A similar hierarchy of impact is illustrated though, with particular effect on teachers' time to develop their curriculum and pedagogy and complete preparation and correction tasks. Also of note is the level of staff fatigue and burnout and staff reluctance to take up leadership roles.

Impact on staff	Primary % very high to high	Secondary % very high to high
Reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy	80%	66%
Preparation/correction pushed into out-of-school hours	72%	70%
Fatigue	65%	56%
Reduced willingness to take on leadership roles	57%	43%
Burnout	50%	50%

Coping strategies for school leaders

Principals were asked to indicate the strategies they used to assist them to cope with a demanding job. The preferred coping strategies used by school leaders are ranked in the table below. It can be noted that there is a considerable variation between the primary and secondary respondents. Primary leaders seem to make more use of a range of social, professional and physical coping strategies.

Coping strategies for school leaders	Primary % very high to high	Secondary % very high to high
Leadership networks	74%	63%
Involvement with friends or community	71%	56%
CEO support staff	59%	34%
Use of family for debriefing or stress management	59%	50%
Use of fellow staff for debriefing or stress management	54%	50%
In-service training	42%	34%
Hobby or leisure activity	47%	31%
Professional reading	34%	36%
Sport or exercise program	39%	25%
Use of private counselling for debriefing or stress management	19%	9%

Resignation anticipated

Principals were asked to indicate their anticipated resignation or retirement and to indicate the degree to which their decision about leaving relates to the negative or stressful impact of their job. Fifteen per cent anticipated leaving within two years. An additional 20% anticipated leaving in three to five years and a further 43% anticipated leaving in five to ten years.

Those Principals who intend to resign soon, link their intentions to the stressful impact of the job. Of those intending to leave within two years, 68% identify that the negative or stressful impact of their job has a high to very high influence upon their decision. Of those intending to leave between three to five years, 55% identify that the negative or stressful impact of their job has a high to very high influence upon their decision.

Resignation anticipated		Stress nexus					
		Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Not at all	Total
Within 2 years	Count	7	6	4	2	0	19
	%	36.8%	31.6%	21.1%	10.5%	.0%	100.0%
3–5 years	Count	8	8	5	3	5	29
	%	27.6%	27.6%	17.2%	10.3%	17.2%	100.0%
5–10 years	Count	14	13	13	15	9	64
	%	21.9%	20.3%	20.3%	23.4%	14.1%	100.0%
Other	Count	4	4	4	7	14	33
	%	12.1%	12.1%	12.1%	21.2%	42.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	33	31	26	27	28	145
	%	22.8%	21.4%	17.9%	18.6%	19.3%	100.0%

FROM IMPACT TO URGENCY

In order to create a 'Priority' index, we can combine the frequency rank of each issue with the *impact* rank and the *resourcing* rank by simple addition. This creates a new ranking combining each of these parameters which we will call 'Priority index'. Thus if an issue has high *frequency* and/or *impact* on students, and is *inadequately resourced*, it will be assessed as having a high priority.

In this analysis, learning problems, mental health problems and problems associated with family breakup present with the greatest *urgency* for primary schools.

Priority scale: frequency, impact and resourcing in primary schools

Rank order of Priority	PRIMARY Problem	Rank order: Frequency	Rank order: Impact	Rank order: Resourcing	Rank order: Urgency
1	Numeracy problems	2.00	16.00	5.00	23.00
2	Literacy problems	1.00	8.00	18.00	27.00
3	Depression	18.00	3.00	11.00	32.00
4	Learning disability	4.00	4.00	28.00	36.00
5	Conduct disorders	19.00	9.00	15.00	43.00
6	Anxiety	14.00	10.00	22.00	46.00
7	Separation or family breakup	17.00	13.00	18.00	48.00
8	Violence in family	40.00	5.00	4.00	49.00
9	Lack of pathways for less academic student	25.00	18.00	7.00	50.00
10	Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	42.00	7.00	1.00	50.00
11	ADHD or ADD	12.00	21.00	25.00	58.00
12	Self-harming	49.00	14.00	2.00	65.00
13	Aspergers syndrome	38.00	23.00	10.00	71.00
14	Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	51.00	15.00	6.00	72.00
15	Truancy	13.00	34.00	29.00	76.00
16	Lack of sleep	15.00	27.00	43.00	85.00
17	Suicide/attempted suicide in family or community	70.00	2.00	14.00	86.00
18	Poor class management	20.00	22.00	47.00	89.00
19	Intellectual disability	7.00	26.00	58.00	91.00
20	Poverty or family financial problems	16.00	41.00	34.00	91.00

Priority scale: frequency, impact and resourcing in secondary schools

The table below combines the ranking on the *impact* and the *resourcing* with *frequency* for each issue for secondary schools. In this analysis, learning problems, mental health problems, family breakup and lack of pathways and alternative settings for troubled students present with the greatest *urgency* for secondary schools.

Rank order of Priority	SECONDARY Problem	Rank order: Frequency	Rank order: Impact	Rank Order: Resourcing	Rank order: Urgency
1	Numeracy problems	2.00	16.00	5.00	23.00
2	Literacy problems	1.00	8.00	18.00	27.00
3	Depression	18.00	3.00	11.00	32.00
4	Learning disability	4.00	4.00	28.00	36.00
5	Conduct disorders	19.00	9.00	15.00	43.00
6	Anxiety	14.00	10.00	22.00	46.00
7	Separation or family breakup	17.00	13.00	18.00	48.00
8	Violence in family	40.00	5.00	4.00	49.00
9	Lack of pathways for less academic student	25.00	18.00	7.00	50.00
10	Lack of alternative setting for troubled students	42.00	7.00	1.00	50.00
11	ADHD or ADD	12.00	21.00	25.00	58.00
12	Self-harming	49.00	14.00	2.00	65.00
13	Aspergers syndrome	38.00	23.00	10.00	71.00
14	Parent or family member's drug or alcohol problem	51.00	15.00	6.00	72.00
15	Truancy	13.00	34.00	29.00	76.00
16	Lack of sleep	15.00	27.00	43.00	85.00
17	Suicide/attempted suicide in family or community	70.00	2.00	14.00	86.00
18	Poor class management	20.00	22.00	47.00	89.00
19	Intellectual disability	7.00	26.00	58.00	91.00
20	Poverty or Family financial problems	16.00	41.00	34.00	91.00

PRIORITY AREAS

A grouping of the 'like' items at the top end of the primary and secondary priority scales can be used to identify the five highest priority areas. These are identified as learning support, mental health of students, family support, social health, and staff wellbeing. Each of these issues is heightened by a community or family context of socio-economic disadvantage. The table below outlines the particular issues incorporated and requiring address in relation to these areas.

	Priority areas for student welfare support	Incorporating	
NEEDS ARE HIGHER IN AREAS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE	1. **Learning support**	• literacy • numeracy • alternative settings for those who are very difficult to manage in mainstream	• learning disabilities • pathways for less academic students
	2. **Mental health of students**	• depression • anxiety • suicide • self-harm	• ADHD • conduct disorders • Autism • Aspergers
	3. **Family support**	• family breakup • mental illness in family • substance use problems in family	• poverty • domestic violence
	4. **Social health**	• negative classroom behaviour	• dealing with bullying
	5. **Staff wellbeing**	• staff fatigue and burnout • classroom management	• Impact on school leader

Using the interview data to deepen understanding of the survey data

It is useful to consider the quantitative data in the light of the qualitative data gathered in the focus group and case study interviews. The focus group interview data, presented in Section Four, deepens our understanding of the impact of welfare problems and sheds light on how these challenges affect students, staff and peers. The case studies in Section Five of this report heighten our awareness of the way in which some schools face additional challenges due to the level of disadvantage in their community. The case studies also illustrate the comprehensive efforts schools make to provide for the learning and pastoral care of their students via policy, organisation, curriculum and pedagogy.

Section 4: Interview Data

This section presents data gathered in three focus groups and in interviews conducted in four case study schools. (The four case studies are presented in detail in Section 5.) Discussion with school leaders focused on the nature and range of the welfare challenges impacting on their schools.

Most of the welfare problems impacting on students were seen to arise from their **community** or **family** circumstances. A range of **individual** factors and **school-based** problems was also identified. The range of common and concerning welfare problems described by the Principals has been grouped within these categories though it should be noted that there is significant overlap and casual interplay between these categories.

Of the problems described, *poverty, family breakup*, *mental health problems* and *lack of resourcing to support needy students* were the dominant concerns.

At the **community** level problems described in the focus groups included**:** poverty, community health problems, impact of new technologies, the breakdown of trust, and inadequacy of cross-sectoral welfare provision. In comparison, community issues identified in the survey data as occurring most frequently on students' wellbeing were the *impact of television and visual media*, and, for secondary schools, *adolescent risk-taking* out of school hours. Other common problems were of a *financial* nature. They included the impact of poverty, retrenchment, unemployment, and financial problems.

At the **family** level problems described in the focus groups included**:** mental health problems in family, family breakup, family violence, and family transience. This echoes the survey data, which identified that the most common family problem affecting student welfare was *separation or family breakup*. Also of a high level of frequency was *chronic illness* and *mental illness*, including substance abuse problems, and violence in the family. These problems were also assessed as having a very high impact on the students.

At the **school** level problems described in the focus groups included lack of alternative options, bullying, staff welfare, provision of in-house welfare support, impact on curriculum planning and impact on leaders. This is resonant with the survey data that identified *literacy and numeracy* were the school-based issues having the most frequent and severe impact on student wellbeing, followed by negative or defiant classroom behaviours, bullying, and poor classroom management. The secondary school-based issues identified as having the most frequent and severe impact on student wellbeing were literacy problems and the lack of alternative settings for troubled students. Also of impact was bullying, poor classroom management by teachers, the lack of pathways for less academic students and early school leaving.

At the **individual** level problems described in the focus groups included mental health and learning problems. Similarly the survey identified that *mental health* problems and *learning disabilities* of highest frequency and impact, particularly ADHD and anxiety for primary students and attempted suicide in family or community, depression and anxiety for secondary students. Both primary and secondary Principals rated learning disabilities to be of very high impact.

Catholic Principals' perspectives on the welfare needs impacting on their schools

Community level: poverty, community health problems, cross-sectoral welfare provision, impact of new technologies, litigious stance, low community aspirations

Family level: mental health problems in family, family breakup, family violence, poor parenting skills, family financial problems, recent arrival status

community

family

school

individual

Individual level: mental health problems, disabilities, learning problems

School level: lack of alternative options, bullying, impact on staff welfare, provision of in-house welfare support, impact on time for curriculum planning

COMMUNITY FACTORS

Many of the most serious welfare problems described arise from the impact of community disadvantage, particularly poverty and poor provision of the community or specialist services administered to families through the health sector.

Poverty

Principals in poorer schools identified that considerable time every day is devoted to dealing with the welfare needs of a disadvantaged population. This can be particularly true in the case of primary schools where families tend to use the school as a first port of call for assistance with financial, emotional and legal problems. (This is apparent in Case Study A: *Cityside* Primary School.)

> *My previous school was nothing like I'm experiencing now. Some schools are much harder ... It is because the community is so disadvantaged – you get more needy families and more disabilities. (PS)*

> *I find I'm doing a lot of mediation outside of the school community. I'm like the parish priest now. Parishioners will walk in off the street and say we don't have kids in the school but could you please help me fill this form in. I've been phoning consulates and phoning services and interpreting. (PS)*

In addition, the school must devote time to work with parents who cannot afford to pay the school fees – negotiating fee concessions. This often involves dealing with recent arrivals, or single mothers without financial support from partners, or those who are unemployed. Family financial problems may also rise as a result of mental health problems, gambling or drug use disorders and are compounded by lack of local services to support a struggling family. Poverty has a multiplier effect on these problems.

> *I drove past a factory once, 9.00 o'clock at night, and I saw a young kid's head – one of our students. I stopped and I went over to the car and I asked what he was doing there. 'Oh my Dad's working and I'm not allowed to be at home by myself and my Dad's working overtime and I can't go into the factory so my Dad said I have to stay in the car for four hours.' I asked if he had eaten. 'My Dad bought me a sandwich.' Next day I got on the phone to the Dad and I said if I see that kid in the car again I'd call Human Services. No wonder that kid was coming to school tired and cranky ... (PS)*

Inadequacy of cross-sectoral welfare provision

Principals and welfare staff attempt to link students and their families to services provided by agencies. A number of key problems were identified as making inter-agency work very difficult. Foremost was the **staff time** required for someone to liaise with these agencies. In those schools without welfare staff (particularly primary schools) the Principal was doing this work.

A second major problem identified was that caused by restricted **access** to services. Access problems include long waiting lists, cost of some services (e.g. private counselling); language barriers, the tendency for service providers to refuse to work outside of their provision zones, and the intermittent nature of services provision as projects and agencies gained or lost staff and funding or shifted priorities. Problems of delayed or limited response were particularly noted in relation to Human Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMS).

> I used to have a counsellor from the Council but then they closed that down and for four years they haven't had any counsellor. Now we've got this lady who comes and she works with the parents if we can get an interpreter. (PS)

Principals were also concerned about the **lack of any information or advice** from specialists to the school that might guide their ongoing work with the child and the family. In some instances, families refuse to use available services, preferring to deal only with the school. The school is then left to 'pick up the pieces'.

> *I've made numerous reports and what Human Services do is they refer it on to either to Strengthening Families or Disability Client Services but nothing happens because it's consensual and these organisations close the books fairly quickly ... This mother was eligible for intellectual disability services but she rejected them. Now we're picking up the pieces. (PS)*

The Principals interviewed agreed that schools need to be able to direct families to a range of social services but that it would be better if these services could be coordinated and managed through a school-based social worker. They also believed that it would be preferable if a greater range of services could be delivered on the school site – particularly those for primary school parents and children.

Community health problems

Principals are increasingly aware of the element of risk to their students that can occur if outsiders come into the school and of the need to maintain **security** at school and during travel to and from school. Sometimes teachers and principals are called upon to deal with troublesome outsiders and this can be quite threatening. In addition, some students live or study in environments in which the impacts of poverty, violence and drug use are obvious and this can affect the students. A **culture of low expectations** can also disadvantage a school community, particularly when there is little expectation or modelling in relation to attainment through education. Principals pointed to this as a problem affecting some rural students and poorer families who also face additional barriers around access to tertiary education.

Home/school relations

The Principals perceived that parents have become more fearful for their children and are demanding more of the school. Threats of **litigation** by parents over instances involving bullying of their child are increasingly common. A focus on the rights of the

child can now be at odds with the school expectations, rules and values. The Principals reported that there is now an increasing tendency for parents to side with their children when those children are disciplined for breaches of school rules. This has the effect of undermining the school's response.

Some parents respond negatively to the presence of 'unwell' or 'difficult' students in the classroom, particularly those who exhibit violent or disruptive behaviours. It can be difficult for the school when these parents complain about the impact on their children and demand the removal of the 'difficult' children. Parents can seem to be more like customers who are buying an education than simply parents of a community.

> *Parents come in with the demand that 'Either you get rid of that kid or I take my child out of your school!' (SC)*

Impact of new technologies

Principals, particularly those in secondary schools, described the increasingly complex way in which new technologies are becoming interlaced with endemic problems such as bullying and school–family conflict. Some of these new manifestations are creating particular difficulties for teachers. Common situations include students using mobile phones to contact outsiders and parents or to harass other students. The tendency for children to call parents when involved in a school incident can lead to unfortunate escalation of bullying incidents.

> *We have parents up at the school demanding redress before we have even heard about the incident. Their kids will call them up on the mobile phone and the whole thing is escalated. (SC)*

Other less common but nonetheless concerning problems include use of the Internet to interact late into the night, harassment via email, and accessing of pornographic sites. These activities, whilst occurring outside of the school and out of school hours, nonetheless impact on the students and parents call upon the school to assist.

> *With the Internet nothing is out of student reach now and they can be exposed to all sorts of inputs in the home without adult supervision. Then what happens at home spills over to school and that requires a school response. (SC)*

FAMILY FACTORS

Principals were particularly aware that the learning, health and safety of the child were highly correlated to the wellbeing of the child's family. Of particular concern to the Principals was the prevalence of family breakup as a 'stressor' behind student welfare problems. Mental health problems in family (including mental illnesses, gambling and drug and alcohol disorders) were also identified as having a major impact on student wellbeing.

Family breakup

All of the Principals interviewed identified family breakup as one of the key welfare needs impacting on the students. The effect of family breakup on students can include distress, inability to concentrate, disruption of school attendance, disruptive behaviour, risk-taking with drugs, depression and anxiety. In addition, some students find it hard to manage their belongings and homework when moving between homes, and this can affect their concentration, learning, endeavour and expectations of their own attainment.

Sometimes family breakup is associated with neglect and the school is required to give parenting advice or to intervene through Human Services. This can be particularly distressing for primary school Principals due to the age and vulnerability of the children.

> *Separation is a big factor in all these cases. Calling the Dad in, sorting ou, – alright Mat needs this, this, and this on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. You have to tell him the routine of caring for the child in order to get him to school. Then the kid doesn't turn up at school. I ring home and one of the two preschoolers answers the phone. I said put a big person on who I can talk to, so the big person is Mat in Grade 3. I can't talk he said; Dad's sleeping and I'm minding the kids and my sister is being really rude. I ring Human Services again and at the response team level by that stage, the response team can't respond for another week. This is all before you sit down and say what's 2 + 2. How are you going to teach? And how can you run your school? (PS)*

Mental health problems in the family

Many welfare problems in the school are associated with the impact of parent mental health problems on student attendance and behaviour. Violence associated with parental mental health problems may lead to security threats for staff or other community members on the school location and may involve parents confronting teachers, students or other parents in inappropriate or violent ways.

> *It is almost impossible to make a difference to what is going on in the home. Even when the school tries to involve other agencies to work with the family the problem often persists after a first wave of welfare attention. Students may be dealing with challenges such as parental violence, drug addiction, prostitution, or gambling. This is often then related to abuse and neglect of the children. (SC)*

Parents with mental health problems, drug use disorders and gambling problems pose a particular challenge for the school. It is difficult to work with some of these parents and in some instances their treatment of their children can range from neglect to abuse. This may entail the school notifying the Department of Human Services via a mandatory notification. The school may also have to deal with behaviour problems exhibited by the children, but be limited in the use of the home to assist.

Family violence and neglect

Some children are affected by ongoing patterns of **violence and volatility** in their family. This often entails consistent effort on the school's behalf to support the children or to intervene to help keep them safe. Schools are required to work with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMS) and the Department of Human Service (DHS) around mental illness, violence, criminality and sexual abuse occurring in families. This can be very time consuming and stressful. It is particularly stressful when a waiting list for a CAMS appointment can be six months and when DHS is not perceived to make an adequate response and when a problem augments rather than diminishes with intervention. The teachers must continue to care for children in these families but often are left to operate without any professional advice about how best to manage the child or interactions with the parent.

> *The problem with CAMS is that there is such a long waiting list – sometimes six months ...(PS)*

SCHOOL FACTORS

The Principals reported that a range of school-based factors could negatively affect the welfare of students. These included **bullying and negative peer relationships**, staff wellbeing and relationships with students, and organisational factors such as delivery of a relevant, rigorous and responsive education program. Of particular concern to the secondary Principals was the **lack of alternative option**s for difficult students. Both primary and secondary Principals identified the inclusion of students with conduct and learning disabilities and the **lack of appropriate disability support** as a major and constant challenge impacting on the individual student, the classmates and the teacher.

Professional burden associated with the knowledge-response gap

Dealing with mental health problems was seen to be a growing concern and challenge for schools. Principals identified that with diagnosis and awareness comes a greater sense of responsibility and accountability on the school's part – but that this is occurring without any increase in response-capacity in terms of time and resourcing. The effect of this was to leave a growing gap between what is known to be needed and what can be provided. This 'gap' itself becomes a major stressor upon committed staff – especially those working in year level coordination, senior management and counselling roles.

> *Since increased awareness has brought about knowledge of the needs and rights of these young people to receive an education in a mainstream setting, there has been an increased burden of responsibility to find ways to support them. However, there has not been any increase in resources to match this responsibility – quite the opposite. There is now a higher expectation around inclusion and a pressure from parents and the system for schools to meet a high standard. The provision of funded support is highly inadequate. (SC)*

Bullying

Principals reported that schools deal with instances of bullying between students everyday. Commonly bullying is managed effectively by the teacher at the classroom level. Many schools also have strong anti-bullying programs, and policies and procedures that guide the staff response. When serious incidents arise, they are dealt with at a more senior level and at this stage incidents are very costly in terms of staff time.

Instances that are of particular concern include parents responding to incidents of student-to-student bullying by attacking other parents, student violence towards other students and student violence towards staff. Principals pointed out that the school was most effective when able to address this problem at a proactive and preventative level through the provision of social skills and pastoral programs.

> *Our policy of having teachers with our year sevens and eights for a number of subjects helps in the prevention of behaviour problems. We can follow through and we have time to get to know the kids and their families, making it more like a primary school. (SC)*

Lack of alternative options

Principals identified that a key structural problem was the **lack of alternative options** for those students who cannot learn effectively in large group settings or in the mainstream classroom due to extreme behavioural or learning difficulties. They pointed out that some students drop out when it becomes obvious that the schooling system cannot cater for them. Others are asked to leave when the school finds it can no longer cope or take the continuing risk or toll of their presence. Those who do not drop out of schooling are likely to enter the state schooling system.

> *Some schools are working well together to manage passing students between them who need a new start. (SC)*

Some Principals described it as 'difficult', others as 'impossible' to get other Catholic schools to enrol the most demanding students when they need a new start. At the very least a Principal's personal brokerage is needed to get a child placed in another Catholic school.

> *I am extremely disillusioned with my colleagues who are now refusing to take these children. (SC)*

> *In my area I am not taking kids from our other Catholic schools because some of them just want to move kids out for no legitimate reason. (SC)*

It was perceived that a system-level approach was needed to facilitate the CECV policy of negotiated transfers between Catholic schools and to provide alternative options for those students whose needs could not be met in mainstream settings. The lack of such system was of significant concern to the secondary Principals.

The Principals also identified that some schools have more challenging disability profiles or behaviour problems to deal with because these problems are disproportionately present in their community demographic. This is particularly true for schools serving poorer populations.

Transition

Primary Principals described transition to secondary school as stressful for some students and parents. Some students do not gain entry to the school of their choice. Some families cannot afford to send their child to a Catholic secondary school where fees are higher.

> *There aren't enough secondary schools to go around ... Disadvantaged families are the ones who miss out and they can't afford all those non-refundable enrolment fees you have to put down in a number of schools to hold a place. It can be $100 each time. (PS)*

Sexuality

The secondary Principals identified that a gap can exist between school values and student and community values in relation to sexuality. Catholic schools teach sexual morality according to Church teaching. Some students experience problems as a result of sexual risk-taking or as a result of sexual preference issues. Principals identified a need for specific policy and practice guidelines to assist teachers and school counsellors to work in a positive pastoral way with same-sex-attracted young people.

> *The school is currently working with its rectors around the challenge of developing a policy to guide our response to same-sex-attracted students. This is a difficult issue for Catholic schools, particularly when a boy's welfare is at stake. At this stage we rely on our anti-bullying policy to protect these students from taunts and abuse and on our philosophy of care in providing individual pastoral support. There is a need for more defined policy and practice guidelines in this area. (SC)*

Welfare support

Both primary and secondary Principals identified that there is a lack of time to follow up in a pastoral way with all students who need extra care and attention. The Grade teachers (primary) and the home group teachers and year level co-ordinators (secondary) who provide the frontline pastoral care are severely constrained in the time they have to follow through with students. This is due to their heavy teaching loads and large class sizes.

It was also observed that an ongoing tension tends to exist between disciplinary responses and welfare responses. It can be difficult to balance needs of the individual against the rights of the group and breaches of school rules and expectation must be responded to.

The secondary schools represented in the focus groups had at least one student counsellor. The primary schools were without this staffing allocation and each was struggling to place someone at least part time in this role. In the primary schools the role was more likely to be carried out by the Principal, deputy Principal, a staff member with a leadership duty (and perhaps a time allocation) or a private provider hired through school funds. A strong view was expressed that primary schools need the services of staff specifically trained to deal with the more problematic end of the spectrum, particularly in relation to mental health problems and family counselling. Currently, most of this burden was being borne by the primary Principals.

All staff are seen to be vulnerable to fatigue and burnout, particularly those who are very committed.

> *The most committed and able tend to be given these welfare roles – but run risk of burnout as they have to do more and more with inadequate resources.(SC)*

Impact on school leader

The constant time and emotional energy devoted to dealing with these problems takes its most significant toll on the school leaders. They respond by working harder and by extending their hours well into the evenings and weekends. The leaders saw themselves to be particularly vulnerable to burnout.

> *I do the people part of the job during the day and the paperwork and finances after hours and at the weekends. (PS)*

> *These welfare issues are contributing to the emerging problems of succession planning in our schools. Other staff look at what happens and do not want to take on that load as it conflicts with family and health priorities. (SC)*

Staff welfare

Principals also noted the significant impact that staff welfare problems can have in terms of smooth running of the school program. Common staff welfare problems include the impact that distress in family or personal life can have on the capacity of staff members to carry out their job effectively. Common stressors include dealing with marriage breakups, caring for sick children or frail or elderly parents, mental health problems or death in family. Other significant stressors that impact on staff arise in the school setting. These include interpersonal disputes between staff and the impact of dealing with difficult students or managing violence in their workplace. Staff may respond to this distress by pressuring the school to 'get rid of' difficult students. It was observed that some older teachers have multiple needs in relation to serving two generations in family – both children and elderly parents.

Impact on curriculum planning and delivery

One outcome of teachers' efforts to respond effectively to welfare needs can be a diminished focus on teaching and learning. Dealing with the emotional, social, behavioural and learning problems that arise as a result of welfare problems requires an enormous investment of staff time and energy. A reduced focus on curriculum and pedagogy was seen as placing all students at greater risk due to the diminished time and energy available to devote to teaching and learning. Thus the potentially protective nature of well-managed and vibrant class programs can be jeopardised. This situation can take a toll on staff morale, as teachers feel thwarted in the accomplishment of their core duties when they struggle with difficult behaviours in the classroom or with insufficient time to prepare for class.

> *These welfare issues are usually urgent and have to be dealt with immediately. This pushes out other issues that are important but don't present as an emergency. This contributes to longer and longer working hours. People are forced to do their preparation and correction at home, and there is not enough time for all the meetings. There is an increasing problem of burnout as we get more limited teaching done by tired staff. (SC)*

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Principals identified disabilities and mental health problems, particularly conduct-related disorders, as key individual factors that affected the wellbeing of the students, their cohort and their teachers.

Student mental health problems

The ongoing daily challenge of managing children with conduct-related mental health problems such as Asperger's, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, and ADHD, was cited as a major impact on staff time, energy and wellbeing.

The Principals observed that they were dealing with more students with mental health problems and with disabilities. Expectations around the right of the individual child to be included in a mainstream classroom were regularly at odds with the needs and rights of the rest of the class cohort. Considerable middle and senior management support was needed to assist teachers to manage some of these students in their daily teaching. Incident response and counselling take up considerable amounts of the pastoral time allocated for a year level, and mean that staff members have little capacity to be involved in proactive or preventive type programs which may be directed at a whole year level.

Alongside the demands associated with teaching and managing children with behaviour disorders, there was a growing awareness of the prevalence of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Those staff who had received appropriate training (such as the Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare) were seen by the Principals to be better

equipped to follow up with students experiencing social and emotional distress. The Principals pointed out that these teachers were still constrained by the small amount of non-teaching time that they had to engage in individual or small group conversation. Thus whilst training was seen to be an excellent investment in staff as a key resource, Principals insisted that the training itself was not enough to deal with the challenge of provision of care.

> *Skilled, capable and committed people are necessary but not sufficient – they also have to be given the time and the resources to do the job. (SC)*

Section 5: Case Studies

The following four case studies have been developed following visits to the schools. Interviews were conducted with the school Principal and one or two senior staff with responsibility in the area of student welfare. A summary of the conversation was prepared and returned to the school Principal for comment and alteration where necessary. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of the respondents and their schools.

The purpose of the case studies is to illustrate the education context within which the school responds to the welfare needs of its population. In each case a description of the school environment distinguishes the nature of the community that the school serves. Each school population brings its own needs which the school responds to through its school program. The broader proactive approach of the school can be seen in the description of the school program. It can be noted that each school shapes its curriculum, leadership structure, policy and practices to provide for the learning and wellbeing of the students.

It can be argued that a school's key welfare role is carried out in the arena of prevention, through the provision of education programs and pastoral approaches. In addition, however, each school provides additional support for those with particular needs. This may be in the form of extra services and programs for individuals or small groups (such as literacy support groups, grief support groups, peer mediation, anger management, social skills development or basic counselling). The school also plays a key role in the identification and referral of children who need specialised assessment, treatment or services and the school continues to work with students and their families whilst these services are pursued or undertaken.

The case studies include two primary schools and two secondary schools. *Cityside* Primary School is a small inner-city school serving a high-needs population of recent arrivals of chiefly Vietnamese and Chinese origin. In contrast, *Orchard* Primary School is a large school serving a growing rural community. *Eucalyptus* Secondary College is an outer-metropolitan secondary boys school of medium size, serving a trades and business community. *OceanSpray* College, also a medium-sized school, is located in a large regional centre, serves a larger feeder area and provides a low-fee co-educational option in an area served by single sex Catholic schools.

SCHOOL 1: *CITYSIDE* PRIMARY SCHOOL

School environment, community and context

Cityside is a small inner-city parish primary school. The school comprises three buildings tucked between the church and the hall and linked with covered corridors. Surrounded by residential and commercial buildings, it has only very small grounds and students play in a section of the street that is blocked to traffic. This section of the play space is a thoroughfare to the public. The local community includes a large number of the poor and destitute, including those who access the nearby Welcome House (serving breakfast and lunch) and the soup kitchen (evenings only).

The school has a population of 154 students and serves one hundred and ten families who are, in the main, recently arrived migrants living in the nearby housing commission flats. Of the 110 families represented in the school, 108 do not speak English at home. Most of the students in the school go to Catholic secondary schools upon completing at *Cityside*.

Cultural background

Eighty-nine per cent of the students are of Asian origin, with 79 Vietnamese, 45 Chinese and 8 Hmong children. Other children in the school include 7 from African countries, 6 children from Chile, 2 from Turkey and 2 from England.

Socio-economic status

Of the children in the school, 87% come from families receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance. The Brotherhood of St Laurence operates a breakfast program in the school which is used daily by around 30 children. Families regularly seek support and advice from the school Principal and administrative officer to assist them with completion of forms to enable them to access health and social services, accommodation, financial advice and legal aid. This places a significant extra burden on the school.

Staff

The school is served by a stable core group of staff, half of which have been in the school for over ten years. The Principal (non-teaching) is supported by 6 classroom teachers, an allocation of 1.9 staff across reading recovery, literacy and science coordination. A 0.8 Full time Equivalent (FTE) allocation is spread between two language aides serving the two key language groups (Vietnamese and Chinese). A 0.5 (FTE) integration aide supports 8 students with disabilities.

A full-time administration officer also assists with family liaison as she speaks Vietnamese. The Principal accounts for the high degree of staff stability in this challenging school context by describing the high level of appreciation that the teachers receive from the parents and the children who clearly value the school's crucial role in supporting and educating their children.

> *The staff love it. They get such rewards from these children. These children hate it when the holidays come. We are thanked by the parents. Parents always end meetings by thanking us for what we do.*

School programs

The children are allocated across six classrooms, with discreet Prep, Year One and Year Two classes, and combined classes at Years Three, Four, Five and Six.

The entire school curriculum is conceptualised and planned within the notion of pastoral care and is responsive to the needs of the community. The school is part of the 'Schools as Core Social Centres' project.

A major emphasis is placed on attainment in literacy, numeracy and science. A rigorous testing program guides provision of literacy and numeracy support to those who are not attaining the desired standards for their developmental stage. An additional reading aide is employed just to listen to children read their readers as most children cannot read to a parent due to a lack of home literacy in English.

A strong emphasis is placed on parent participation in the school with high attendance at parent evenings, feast days and theme days, maths nights, literacy week and science week.

> *We encourage the parents to attend because we believe that if the parent comes into the school and is interested in the child, the child does better.*

Interpreters are actively used at all parent events. This is a Catholic school which teaches the Catholic faith, however, acknowledgment is made of the other religious groups represented in the school and teachers include aspects of education about Buddhist and Muslim traditions as part of their SOSE, literacy and religious studies programs.

The school participates in science programs with the museum and seeks to provide excursions and off-campus activities, which will enrich the students' life experience as many of the families in the school, cannot provide such experiences for their children.

As well as a strong academic program the school offers a rich health and personal development program, including drug education with visits from Life Education, involvement in the Police in Schools program, Bike Education, personal development activities and the Stillness Program, a tri-weekly 15 minutes set aside for quiet meditation or stillness.

An assertive discipline program is used in the school using the Lee Canter model. Teachers have received training in this approach and the school actively manages the reward program and the warnings system whereby parents are notified and involved if a child repeatedly infringes the rules. Rules and expectations of the school are made clear to the parents in school newsletters and at parent forums. Since the introduction of this system some six years ago, the staff has found it easy to maintain a high standard of classroom and schoolyard behaviours.

Social relationships

Teachers actively mix students during class activities as a means to promote tolerance and to cross ethnic divides. Students tend to organise their friendship groups along ethnic grounds and this can be observed in friendship groupings in the schoolyard. It is unusual, however, for any overt racism to be expressed, and the student population is described as friendly.

Arguments, escalating into significant physical violence, do occasionally occur between mothers in the schoolyard. (It is common for mothers to attend the school at lunchtime to bring lunch to their children.)

Additional support

Additional programs for children requiring extra support include Reading Recovery, and the *Seasons* grief support program. The student welfare coordinator manages a school-wide case management approach to students at risk. All teachers use a referral form to pass on their concerns to the welfare committee. Each case is reviewed and in-house strategies and assessments and referrals are managed and recorded.

Parents are included in the process with a parent meeting taking place each term to discuss the progress and management of students requiring extra support.

The school actively liaises with a local Council social worker who comes to the school each week to provide individual parenting support to mothers who are having difficulty managing their children.

> *Because she comes to the school, the mothers trust her and the school finds an interpreter.*

Advice given may range from the management of bedtimes, television viewing and nutrition, to advice with developmentally appropriate expectations of the child. The children's needs tend to be identified first by the classroom teacher who is the one to note early warning signs, such as difficulty with social skills, inappropriate behaviours, poor concentration, delayed language or motor development or fatigue.

When students are referred for assessment the school pays for the services as families in this community do not have the financial capacity to pay for this.

Additional support is provided each day to parents who come to the school seeking advice and support. This role is generally fulfilled by the Principal and on occasions by the administration officer.

Common and concerning welfare problems

Common and concerning welfare problems include the impact of poor or disrupted parenting on the younger children. Poverty is a significant issue as is the impact of parents working night shifts. Many parents find it difficult to cope or to maintain a regular parenting routine in the face of poverty and dislocation. Of particular concern is the impact of family violence and the limited capacity of the school to provide assistance in this area.

> *It's not unusual for children to say they didn't go to bed last night because mum took them to the casino. Sometimes children are at home alone just watching television, getting their own meals and putting themselves or their younger siblings to bed. Or they are out on the streets at night. They are streetwise though and seem to know how to keep themselves away from harm. I worry about nutrition and what they are exposed to on TV or the Prep children playing on their own after school until 6pm.*

In addition many parents put significant pressure on their children to attain in education. In a new migrant community this is seen as the only way out of the poverty trap. Some students are enrolled in language and mathematics classes on the weekends or after school.

Impact on the Principal

The school leader reports that she spends a major part of every day attending to the welfare needs of the parents and the children. This often involves responding to traumatic and continuing situations that place children at considerable risk.

> *The demands of this job take an enormous amount of my personal life. I just work on. I am responsible for all the finances and building projects as well as the general leadership of the school. During the day I am a social worker and I support my staff and those taking the leadership in various areas of the school program. After hours I must continue on to do all those tasks that I can't do during the day while I am responding to needy people. I do not know how a family person could do this job.*

This means that the other business associated with running a school is pushed into personal time. In addition, there is a significant toll on the wellbeing of the Principal due to the distressing nature of the incidents she is called upon to deal with. Often she is the first line of support and the gateway to further services.

SCHOOL 2: *ORCHARD* PRIMARY SCHOOL

School environment, community and context

Orchard is a large rural parish primary school. It has a population of 520 students and serves three hundred and fifty families who are, in the main, long-term residents in the area, though the population is increasing due to a pattern of growth in the town. The school is located adjacent to the parish church and the Catholic secondary school. The two schools share an administration building, which facilitates a high level of contact between the Principals and support staff.

Cultural background

Almost all of the families speak English at home and there is little cultural diversity aside from a few Indian and Chinese families who have joined the school in recent years. The school is described as a friendly one with students presenting few behavioural difficulties. The parents participate actively in school and parish events and many know each other well, having been students in the school themselves. Ninety-five % of the students go on to study at the local Catholic College.

Socio-economic status

Most of the children in the school come from middle class or lower middle class families. Sixty families or 19.6 % of the students receive the Education Maintenance allowance. 20 children receive disability funding.

Staff

The school is served by a stable group of 38 staff. The Principal (non-teaching) is supported by a Deputy Principal (non-teaching), a Home-School Liaison Officer (0.4 FTE) and a Student Welfare Co-coordinator (0.2 FTE).

School programs

The children are allocated across 20 classrooms, with combinations of Prep/Year One, Year One/Two, Year Three/Four, and Year Five/Six. To facilitate organisation of the large school population the school is divided into three units representing the Infant, Middle and Senior levels. Each unit has a leader responsible for teaching and learning in that section of the school.

> *The challenge in a big school is to make sure every child is known.*

Each year the first four weeks of the curriculum is focused on the theme of Building Community. Each class engages in a program that structures activities designed to promote friendship and cooperation and class work focuses on developing a strong code of behaviour. The Religious Education program continues to build on this investment in social skills and religious values are a strong element throughout the behavioural and organisational framework of the school.

In addition to their own Building Community program, the school uses the *You Can Do It* program and the *Bully Busters* program. All Year Five/Six students do a unit on conflict resolution which is facilitated by the Home-School Liaison Officer and a number of Year Six children receive a leadership training program and then go on to be trained as peer mediators. This training is also provided by the Home-School Liaison Officer.

> *The peer mediation program is very popular and we now start to hear students using terms from the program. They will often outline the steps they have taken to solve a problem.*

School assemblies are used to acknowledge students for attainment in social skills such as showing consideration for others.

> *The senior students make a short speech about the social skill that is being acknowledged and then an award is issued. This illustrates and reinforces the values we are teaching.*

Additional support

The school also offers grief support through the *Seasons for Growth* program. Programs are offered both for parents and for children. It has been observed that since the Home-School Liaison Officer started offering one-to-one support for those students who have been bereaved or whose parents have separated, there is less need for the children's *Seasons for Growth* program. The school also provides an Art therapy program that entails one-to-one sessions with the art teacher. These sessions are very popular with the students. The art teacher runs this program.

A referral system is used by all teachers to pass on concerns about the 10 per cent of students they consider being most at risk. All staff are asked to make their referrals at the end of the first month of the school year. Staff are required to read a child's file before making their own referral. The Student Welfare Co-coordinator manages a committee that reviews these referrals and assists the year level teacher to develop strategies. Most children referred will also receive counselling from the Home-School Liaison officer.

The case-management approach to students at risk includes an active referral program. The school refers families (via a GP) to a local pediatrician. Families must first visit the pediatrician and then around six weeks later the pediatrician will meet at the school with parents and the welfare team. The pediatrician commonly gives the school observation tasks to complete so that the required information is brought to the interview. This is particularly common in response to behavioural disorders such as ADHD. Parents pay for both the private and the school-located consultations with the pediatrician but they can recover the Medicare component.

> *The advantage with the pediatrician is that he can very firmly give the family quite prescriptive advice, parenting advice. This is not something the school can do, as we have to build and maintain the relationship with the family. He will manage the prescription of medication if it is needed and we will do any counselling at the school through the Home-School Liaison Officer.*

The school pays for a regular consultancy service from a psychologist who completes IQ and learning assessments. She attends the school every two weeks for two hours. The school also employs a speech pathologist and an occupational therapist on a regular consulting basis.

The Home-School Liaison Officer completes most counselling of the student in the school. In instances where there is a high level of risk or concern about the mental health status of the child then the school refers the family to CAMS. This is seen to be a problematic and unsatisfactory process due to long waiting list (up to 6 months) and lack of feedback from CAMS to the school.

> *The problem with CAMS is that due to inadequate resourcing there is such a long waiting list – sometimes six months, and then they can't always follow through with advice for the school.*

This situation has led the school to invest in other possible pathways, such as using the local pediatrician and staff. Whilst the school is proud of its accomplishment in this area there is a significant degree of frustration that CAMS is not a more accessible and responsive service.

> *We do need support from CAMS however – we have had suicidal and depressed children and we have ended up supporting them ourselves.*

Common and concerning welfare problems

The impact of marriage breakup is seen to be the most common and concerning problem impacting on the students.

> *There is always a spate of marriage breakups after the Christmas holidays. We might have six or seven all at once at the start of the year.*

The Principal is commonly the person who deals with the parent informing the school of the marriage breakup. A standard response is to offer support and information about the signs of stress that the parents can watch out for in the children, particularly those that would indicate the need for additional support. The Principal offers the support of the Home–School Liaison Officer to talk with the children involved. Most parents take up this offer.

Other common welfare issues of concern include managing the difficult behaviour of boys (often first showing up at Year Three) and the ongoing challenges of bullying.

> *We feel we do well with the bullying issue here as we have programs like Bully Busters and we do audits and keep record of incidents. It is more the family problems that are difficult – the ones where you can't intervene or where the family will not accept support and deny the problem.*

The impact of poor parenting skills is also of concern to the school. Many parents do not understand how to set appropriate expectations around their children's behaviour or activities and do not understand how to reward or punish appropriately. The pediatrician has been helpful in giving parenting advice; it is difficult for the school staff to give such advice as it can be seen to be in conflict with their role.

Staff welfare is also a concern that the Principal must manage. Both the Principal and the Home-School Liaison Officer engage from time to time in supportive counselling conversations with staff who may be dealing with mental health or family problems, marriage or relationship breakup, a dying family member, a sick elderly parent or managing small children along with fulltime jobs.

Another significant stressor is the annual funding hurdle whereby the school must reapply for its entitlement to disability support. Significant effort goes in to this which detracts from the time that could be spent in direct welfare support and detracts from building a longer-term plan for the school response to children's needs. In addition, needy children often do not qualify under the guidelines and thus receive no funding at all. The school must then create ways to offer that child the support that is needed.

Less common welfare issues of significant concern

Of particular concern in the recent past has been dealing with a number of child or adolescent deaths in the school or local community and the management of children with suicide ideation. This has been particularly worrying in a community with a high suicide rate.

> *A suicide or death of a child or teenager makes a big impact here as everyone knows each other and people are connected to lots of folk, even in the neighbouring towns. This area has a high suicide rate and a high drink-driving rate. We have had a lot of deaths.*

Another problem of great concern is sexual abuse of children, particularly when there is not enough information for the school to intervene, but there is enough evidence to suggest something is amiss in the home.

> *Once it is known and the response is set in place that is OK, but it is when you strongly suspect that sexual abuse is going on and you make a mandatory report, but then nothing changes, that is very distressing.*

Parent mental health problems are also noted to be of particular concern to the school in terms of managing an appropriate welfare response.

Impact on the Principal

Living in a country town is a particular challenge for the school Principal, as he or she will meet members of the school community around the town when shopping, supporting children at sporting events or socialising.

> *The job does have a personal toll, and I am never free of it. Any time I am out shopping or at a local sports' event with my children I will be stopped and people will want to talk with me. On a Saturday morning I might have twenty to fifty approaches and at least one of them will be a significant welfare issue that must be followed up. In addition, being part of the parish and the town as well as the school I will always get calls from people in the holidays. Whenever there is a crisis in a family, they will call me. Sometimes I just need a break from this.*

This Principal described the essential support she received from close personal and professional relationships with two others in the school community who were also privy to the same welfare knowledge as she was.

> *I have a high level of personal and professional support from the Home–School Liaison Officer and from the secondary Principal. I also use two other Principals I know and meet them once a term for a support meeting. The cluster network is now working very well and there we can deal directly with what is concerning us and support each other.*

SCHOOL 3: *EUCALYPTUS* SECONDARY COLLEGE

School environment, community and context

Eucalyptus is a boys' school located in the outer metropolitan fringe. It caters for 722 students drawn chiefly from four feeder Catholic schools and a number of local state primary schools. Teachers (52.5) and ancillary staff (21.3) support a school now growing in size following a previous pattern of declining enrolments. Upon exiting the school at Year 12, 40% of students go to University, 30% go to TAFE courses and 30% go to the labour market.

Cultural background

The school population is predominantly Anglo-Celtic. Though the school is relatively mono-cultural, it is receiving increasing enrolments of children of Indian background as well as Muslim families and a range of other Christian denominations seeking a religious school or a boys' school for their sons.

Socio-economic status

The school draws from a middle to lower middle-class community. The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is paid to 11.5% of students receive and 6.5% of students come from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB). There are no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students. Disability support entitlements are received by 3.5% of students (N = 26).

Culture and traditions

The school programs are strongly grounded in the founder's philosophy that is the school's heritage. This entails an orientation towards prevention rather than punishment models. Under the current school leadership, the principles of Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness are equated with holistic approaches to building resilience and maintaining an environment of care and high expectations.

Once seen as a catchment school for students with problems, the school is now heralded as one that takes a strong pastoral focus and works with a firm commitment to caring for all boys, regardless of the challenges they present to the school. The last six years have seen an emphasis on stronger academic achievement for all, enrichment in extra-curricular offerings, a stronger focus on positive discipline using the logical consequences model, and a significant investment in staff training in the areas of welfare provision, pedagogy and behaviour management. Many parents choose this school for their sons as they see it as a place that will deal well with boys and their needs.

There is a strong sense of renewal in the school, both in relation to its academic profile and its pastoral focus. This is reflected in the school retention figures. The school has grown from 495 students in 1998 to 722 in 2004. A previous pattern of transience in the senior years has now altered and a great deal more students now stay on through VCE.

School programs

Renewal of the school programs has centered on structural approaches to improving staff support, accountability and care in teacher-student relationships. Strategies include:

a.) **High expectations around behaviour**

A major focus on strengthening school discipline has entailed:

recognition that a proportion of students have special needs (those with Asperger's, Autism, ADHD and conduct disorders) and as such need specific case management entailing the development of teacher strategies often in partnership with families to manage and support these children in the classroom and beyond;

the development of a rigorous school-wide logical consequences approach to discipline to replace a personality and power-based approach. All staff receive professional development to skill them in the use of this disciplinary style;

a school-wide anti-harassment and anti-bullying focus, including individual counselling of teachers who used bullying tactics; and follow-through (including suspension) with students who broke the rules.

b.) **Academic opportunities**

Professional development activity focusing on learning styles and effective pedagogy has been provided for the whole staff.

Teaching at Years 7 and 8 has been structured to minimise the number of teachers per class. A teacher works with a class for 4 subjects, and parallel classes to allow for team-teaching.

The team-teaching structures are used as a mentoring system, matching experienced and capable staff with newer staff. Classes at these levels have their own homeroom. This minimises the impact of the transition from the primary school single teacher model and enables high levels of continuity, care and follow-up from those teachers who work with these core classes.

Planning is under way for the development of a Year 9 mini-school program focusing on authentic and applied curriculum designed to enhance connectedness, student governance and pastoral care.

Year 10 students are encouraged to use the accelerated options available in taking a VCE subject and to alternative pathways available via VET options or within the new VCAL (currently only 8 students, but expected to grow rapidly as the program becomes established).

c.) **Extra-curricular options**

The Arts, Chess, IT and Debating programs are seen as opportunities for students who are not well-connected to the dominant sporting culture of the school to find challenge, self-expression, shared endeavour and social support. Staff who run these activities often dedicate significant voluntary time to run these informal clubs or programs. Programs include an IT club which has students designing web pages for the school, a debating club which attracts intelligent high-achieving students who may not feel they can really voice their thoughts in the classroom, and music and visual arts programs which give students opportunities to express themselves outside of the dominant culture. It is common for staff to identify students who are disconnected, excluded, bored or alienated and to refer them to activities that will match their interests and capabilities.

d.) **Health promotion activities**

In Health/PE and in Religious Education, students encounter a values, education and cover topics such as drug and sexuality education. In addition, Year Level Co-coordinators run health promotion events that direct broad health messages to the whole year level on issues such as Safe Partying, and Car Safety. They often work with local agencies or council services to support such events. The Seasons Grief Support program is also to be offered in the school.

Staff support

This College has for some time had the reputation of being a demanding school for teachers to work in. A great deal of thought and energy has gone into providing staff with best practice induction programs and one-on-one assistance to learn how to effectively teach boys. When students act in ways that cause staff distress the College responds in a swift and unequivocal manner. The result of this hard work has been a significant lift in teacher morale and a major turnaround in staff exits, especially in relation to disaffection.

Additional support

The Year Level Co-coordinators play a strong pastoral role, working with students at both disciplinary and welfare levels. They take a case-management approach to dealing with students with particular and ongoing needs, developing strategies and assisting staff to manage the students appropriately. The school has two part-time school counselors who are available for more ongoing work with students and their families. The Year Level Coordinators refer students to the school counsellors.

The assistant Principal manages contacts with outside agencies that offer specialist treatment, advice or family support. He also case-manages the most challenging students, particularly those facing suspension or expulsion. The Principal or AP negotiates with other Catholic schools to place students when the school asks them to leave. The school has a zero tolerance to students bringing illicit drugs to school. Students who break this rule are assisted to find a place in another Catholic College.

A number of teachers have completed the Post-graduate Diploma in Student Welfare. These staff members provide an additional level of support to students dealing with family problems or social or mental health problems.

Common and concerning welfare problems

Common and concerning welfare problems include mental health disorders, particularly those involving conduct problems such as Aspergers, Autism, ADHD and conduct disorders and the impact of family breakup and family conflict. A significant amount of staff time is spent in developing strategies and in managing these students day to day.

Mental health disorders

> *Since increased awareness has brought about knowledge of the needs and rights of these young people to receive an education in a mainstream setting, there has been an increased burden of responsibility to find ways to support them. However, there has not been any increase in resources to match this responsibility. Quite the opposite. There is now a higher expectation around inclusion and a pressure from parents and the system for schools to meet a high standard. The provision of funded support is highly inadequate. For example, we receive approximately $5,000 for one boy with Asperger's Syndrome, but he is so violent we need an aide with him the whole time to maintain student safety. The school has to fund this. Even with a full-time aide, we have to work hard with our teachers to assist them to understand that they cannot manage this boy as they would the other students.*

> *We also struggle to find ways to get the other students and their parents to understand this. Due to privacy requirements we cannot always discuss why a student is receiving what can be seen as special treatment. There is often a conflict for the school with the needs of the group sitting at odds with the needs of a particular individual. These sorts of dilemmas become particularly fraught when the student involved assaults or threatens other students. Parents rightfully ask 'Why is this student allowed to remain in the school?' However we are not able to provide full answers, but know a transfer would be disastrous for the student with this condition.*

Family breakup and family conflict

The impact of family breakup often shows up in the students demonstrating poor concentration or difficulty in behaving in class and in problems such as depression, anxiety and school refusal. A number of students are experiencing significant grief and disruption, particularly when family breakups involve ongoing conflict and disputation.

Family conflict can be of such severe and ongoing nature that it affects behaviour and attendance at school. It may entail experiences of homelessness for some students. There is a great need for families to learn mediation techniques.

Less common welfare issues of significant concern

Some parents have significant and ongoing mental health or drug abuse problems which impact severely on their capacity to parent their children or to manage the home. These are particularly difficult for the school to deal directly with. Also difficult is the management of disruptive behaviours in those children living in dysfunctional family circumstances. It is also very challenging for the school to provide the appropriate support and care for some students experiencing distress due to their status as same-sex attracted young people.

Managing the behaviours of high-needs children

The school can be placed in a situation of trying to manage the symptoms (in the form of the child's behaviour) of a problem beyond its reach.

> *It is almost impossible to make a difference to what is going on in the home. Even when the school tries to involve other agencies to work with the family (such as Anglicare) the problem often persists after a first wave of welfare attention. Students may be dealing with challenges at home such as parental violence, drug addiction, prostitution, or gambling. This is often then related to abuse and neglect of the children.*

> *The school then finds itself called upon to maintain some children who are having difficulty coping due to the impact of living with extremely dysfunctional families. Human Services deals with the most severe circumstances but often the child needs some other institution to provide care and attention when the home is not. Service offered by CAMS is also very limited, providing support only to the most acute needs.*

> *Sometimes these children leave the school anyway because it is too hard for them to keep coming to school. We try to track these students or to place them in other schools but this is not always possible.*

Sometimes the school asks students to leave. This usually follows a long process of seeking other solutions and seeking other forms of support.

> *This school has a strong philosophy of care, but sometimes we have to acknowledge that it is the end of the road for a student and we have to inform the parents that they need to take the child to another school. We assist them to find another school that will take their child. We don't find that too hard, as we maintain strong links with the other Catholic secondary schools in our locality – trust and goodwill really help with this process.*

Supporting same-sex attracted students

The school is required to respond to the needs of some students who are same-sex preferred. This is an area in which policy and practice guidelines are lagging behind current needs.

> *The school is currently working with its Rector to address the challenge of developing a policy to guide our response to same-sex attracted students. This is a difficult issue for Catholic schools responding faithfully to Church teaching whilst at the same time managing a variety of community expectations that often can be reflected in family attitudes. At this stage we rely on our anti-bullying policy to protect these students from taunts and abuse and on our philosophy of care in providing individual pastoral support. We also have developed an ethic of respecting difference to counter intolerance such as homophobic attitudes. There is a need for more defined policy in this area.*

Support for staff

The wellbeing of staff is an area of focus in this school and support processes are offered in both the professional and the personal realm.

> *The College offers staff a great deal of support. Often this is pastoral care relating to professional issues, but a significant amount of time is also devoted to supporting staff through grief, separation and illness. Our deputy Principal for staff support provides staff with a lot of assistance in this area.*

Resources needed

> *My dream is to develop an annex or sub-school that can work closely, offering the full welfare provision model whilst also providing a strong, clear, discipline framework. It would have its own alternative setting with the right staff to run it. This would mean students could be easily reintegrated or only placed in that setting for part of the time. I would like to see better linkage with agencies who can work with families or who can provide for specialist needs. We need quality well-trained school counsellors who can work both proactively and reactively. We need the time and the resources to do what we know needs to be done.*

> *However what we don't need is for one or two schools to be known as welfare schools as this can lead to the schools being typecast and over time producing a loss of community confidence in that school's capacity to provide a comprehensive education for all. That can be disastrous.*

Impact on leader

> *Currently I work very long hours – about 11–12 a day – and often even then need to come to school on the weekend to do the paper work; I do not have time to do it during the week. I love this job, but there is always the worry of burnout. I also worry that the time that I need to put into the welfare support for students impacts on my capacity to provide best practice in areas of curriculum and pedagogy, which I am also very passionate about.*

SCHOOL 4: *OCEANSPRAY* SECONDARY COLLEGE

School environment

Oceanspray is a co-educational regional college owned and operated by the local Catholic parishes. It is located in a large regional city.

The school serves a largely mono-cultural community of business and trades people. With low to moderate fees it maintains a policy of providing access to families from all socio-economic backgrounds seeking a Catholic education.

The student population is 750 with 57 full-time equivalent staff. It has an EMA population of 20.6%. Around 25% of families negotiate some form of fee concession with the school. This group includes a large proportion of single mothers who are dealing with changed financial circumstances following separation or divorce. Thirty-five students currently receive disability funding. There are no students from Non-English speaking background.

Around 70% of students go on to University, TAFE or apprenticeships.

The school has a stable core of older long-term staff. The school serves a large geographic area with students drawn from up to 50 primary schools, including a number of very small rural schools. Consequently the school places a considerable focus on the program assisting with transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

School programs

The school provides a specifically designed middle-school program that focuses on providing strong pastoral relationships and engagement in learning. Informed by research in the middle years of schooling, the school runs a mixed Year 7/8 core classes and staff them with two key teachers, each of whom teaches the class for three or four subjects and remains with the class for two years. Teachers work in teams, sharing curriculum design and preparation. A strong emphasis is placed on the development of an engaging and relevant curriculum incorporating student participation and choice. A Year 9 program provides an experiential learning program with a focus on community service, again served by a small team of teachers working intensively with classes.

The school's leadership structure, timetable, meeting schedules, class allocation and curriculum program is structured around this student-centered team approach. This strategic departure from the more conventional learning area or faculty-based approach to staff allocation and school organisation reflects the school's focus on engagement in learning and on developing supportive relationships. The year level coordinators have observed a diminished need for disciplinary interventions in Years 7 to 9 since the move to this structure.

Additional support

The school has a student counsellor. Staff, parents or students can organise referrals. The homeroom teacher or the year level co-coordinator does most counselling.

A reading program supported by a 0.4 staff allocation assists children with significant literacy problems. Most additional support is provided by the homeroom teacher or year level co-coordinator. The school works in a locality well served by youth services and refers families to local agencies.

Most concerning welfare problems

Family breakdown and economic hardship

Family breakdown and economic hardship are two recurrent problems impacting on the welfare of the students and on the school as a support agency.

Anti-social behaviour of boys

Anti-social behaviour of boys is also of concern to the school. The school has a large and increasing number of students diagnosed with ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome.

> *Children with conduct problems can be very difficult to manage in the classroom and their behaviour impacts on the rest of the class and on the teacher. Any given class is likely to have five or six students (or roughly one fifth of the class) who either qualify for disability support or, in the school's view, should do so due to their problematic behaviour. Some local pediatricians are now referring families to this school, identifying it as a school that deals well with children with conduct problems. This puts additional stress on the school.*

> *It is not unusual for other parents to lobby the school to get rid of some of the more difficult students sometimes threatening to remove their own child if the difficult child is not moved on. Some teachers and students will also make this request, believing that their rights to learn or to teach are intruded upon by having to work with the difficult behaviours of some of those with mental health problems. The school focus on inclusion can thus be associated with significant work and stress.*

Bullying

Bullying and negative social interactions are another cause of concern for the school as students bring to school social disputes that have occurred at parties outside the school. These disputes can escalate and need staff intervention.

Sexuality education

The school's requirement to teach sexuality education according to Catholic teaching can place a strain on staff and many teachers do not feel comfortable to teach about sexuality issues. The school also perceives a need for guidance as to how to act more proactively to support same-sex attracted young people who they know to be disproportionately at risk of mental health problems and suicide.

Low aspirations

The parent community does not have high aspirations for their children in relation to entry to tertiary education and this is reflected in the students' own dreams and expectations. The students tend to identify with the local stereotype of opting for trades or semi-skilled occupations. These expectations affect student choice and endeavour in their senior college years. The tendency for some students to drop out of school is an indicator of this problem.

> *Our boys seem to be lacking in confidence and without role models.*

Resourcing needs

The key resourcing need for the school is reduced class sizes as *'If you get the teaching and learning right, a lot more of the other problems will dissipate'.*

This would require sufficient staff allocation for classes of around 20 to 22 in size. This would allow the home-group teachers to give adequate time and follow up to each student. Additional time release for coordinators would also allow for more suitable intervention with those children with particular needs.

Section 6: Discussion

PRIORITY ISSUES

Analysis of the data gathered in the survey and in the focus group and case study interviews distinguished several key problem areas which have high level of *impact* on the students, occur with *frequency* and are currently *under-resourced*. This grouping was used to identify the highest 'priority' areas. These are identified as learning support, mental health of students and family support, social health, pathways and alternative settings and staff wellbeing. Each of these issues is heightened by a community or family context of socio-economic disadvantage (see table below).

It is not within the scope of this study to make recommendations for action in relation to these challenges. However, some discussion of each of the five identified 'priority' areas follows and implications are raised to contribute to future discussion and further research.

	Priority areas	Addressing	
NEEDS ARE HIGHER IN AREAS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE	1. **Learning support**	• literacy • numeracy • alternative settings for those who are very difficult to manage in mainstream	• learning disabilities • pathways for less academic students
	2. **Mental health of students**	• depression • anxiety • suicide • self-harm	• ADHD • conduct disorders • Autism • Aspergers
	3. **Family support**	• family breakup • mental illness in family • substance use problems in family	• poverty • domestic violence
	4. **Social health**	• negative classroom behaviour	• dealing with bullying
	5. **Staff wellbeing**	• staff fatigue and burnout • classroom management	• impact on school leader

Learning support

Literacy and numeracy
Supporting students in their learning is clearly part of the core business of schools. Principals identified that those students encountering difficulties in the areas of literacy or numeracy were at increased risk of behaviour problems. It is known that students who experience learning difficulties are more likely to leave school early. School non-completers face an increased risk of mental health problems, substance use problems and longer-term financial disadvantage in relation to employment options. Intervening early and effectively with learning problems is therefore an important element in the prevention of welfare problems.

Pathways and alternative settings
Secondary Principals saw a particular need for alternative settings in which a higher level of care could be offered for troubled students. They argued that all schools attempt to provide an ongoing stable environment for all students. At times however they deal with what can seem to be an irreconcilable conflict between the rights of an individual student to be included in the school program and the rights of the class group to learn in a safe and rigorous environment. (Equity policy may on these occasions appear to be in conflict with Occupational Health and Safety policy. This policy clash may become even more problematic when Privacy policy prevents open discussion of the particular student's predicament in a way that could potentially harness higher levels of support or goodwill towards the student.)

According to the Principals, secondary schools can face an additional 'market-place' pressure when parents request that the school shed difficult or disruptive students. Principals identified the widespread reluctance of schools to enroll students who had been asked to leave another Catholic school. Schools with a stronger ethic of care tend to accumulate students with problems, whilst other well-resourced schools are perceived to take on diminishing levels of responsibility for students with significant welfare needs. Public health research indicates that the prevalence of physical and mental health problems is likely to be lower in more privileged communities. This can lead to a ongoing cycle of inequity in school settings in which the advantaged are relatively 'sheltered' from the burden of the needy and the disadvantaged encounter additional challenges in the face of fewer supports or services.

Student mental health

Principals report that schools are struggling with the management of students who manifest difficult or dangerous behaviours as a result of their mental health problems (e.g. Aperger's, Autism, ADHD). Commonly, schools do not have additional resources to supply aides to assist in the management of these children and the students may not qualify for funded assistance. If the student is eligible for funding at all, the aide is often only parttime.

In both the focus group and the case studies, Principals pointed out that the presence of aggressive and disruptive behaviours in the classroom puts a particular toll on the teacher and the student cohort. They argued that mental health problems are

inadequately funded and that there is insufficient account taken of the degree to which disorders of this nature impact on the teacher, the class and the school management as well as the particular individual. Hence there is need for a revision of the assessment and funding schedule. The presence of additional aides may be necessary if only from an occupational health and safety perspective. It seems that Integration Policy can at times be difficult to reconcile with Occupational Health and Safety Policy. In an increasingly litigious society, Principals were concerned that schools may be at risk of negligence cases around a failure to ensure student and staff safety.

Some schools are using case-management approaches with staff-wide referral systems. This assists them to identify and develop management plans for students who require additional support. A case-management approach costs time and can be easily thwarted if services are not accessible or if the school does not have the funds or resources to carry out the support it sees as necessary.

The basic counselling skills gained in courses, such as the Post-graduate Diploma in Student Welfare, are observed by the Principals to be of great use in equipping general staff for more effective frontline follow-up with students. Those familiar with the course argued that many more teachers could benefit from gaining basic counselling skills, even without taking on the larger commitment to complete the entire Post-graduate Diploma in Student Welfare. The Principals pointed out that the skills on their own are not enough without non-teaching time for teachers to follow up with students. An evaluation of this course as a system initiative to support student welfare confirms the views expressed by these Principals (Freeman et al 2003).

In the focus groups Principals argued that additional access to counsellors and psychologists is needed to complete assessments and deal with the range of more challenging mental health issues confronting some students.

Family problems

The impact on children of family breakup was a commonly cited concern. Principals were aware that many students need counselling or support in managing their response to disruption in their family. Some family breakup is also associated with ongoing poverty, dislocation, mental health problems or violence in the home. These students and their parent(s) need considerable support. Schools are limited in what they can provide. They have little scope to assist parents and none to intervene in the home. The school is frequently the point of referral when problems escalate, but health and social services may be inadequate, spasmodic, costly, short-term, untimely or difficult to access.

Principals identified that even when equipped with well-trained generalists, schools still require staff with specialist skills as counsellors and social workers. The more challenging welfare situations require a greater level of expertise and more time to follow up. Social work skills may be particularly relevant to assist with family liaison and parenting skills in primary settings.

In the focus groups with primary school Principals it was argued that a social worker or student welfare coordinator may be needed to manage connections with and referrals to external services. In primary schools this role is commonly carried out by the Principal who is already very busy. This may lead to a diminished capacity to link with and

utilise the services of external agencies. They argued that there is a need for improvement in the level of services available through the health sector particularly in relation to provision of mental health services for children and adolescents.

Social health

Many children are entering primary school with less well-developed social skills. Primary schools have proactive approaches to developing social skills throughout the curriculum. In the survey, primary schools identified the need for classroom curriculum resources designed to support the development of social competencies. In focus group discussions identified a need for parenting education to assist parents to work with their junior primary-aged children in the area of social skills development.

There is a need for parenting education to assist parents to work with their junior primary-aged children in the area of social skills.

Staff wellbeing

Many schools, and key individuals within them, make heroic efforts to work with needy children and families. Some staff, particularly school leaders, school counsellors and year level coordinators, can be called upon to witness situations which are very disturbing and which the school can do little about.

School Principals face an increasingly difficult job. Student and staff welfare issues are increasingly burdensome, concerning and time consuming. Principals report juggling the roles of social worker, senior administrator and educational leader. Principals also report that it is increasingly onerous to comply with externally-driven change particularly around compliance with various Occupational Health and Safety policies, and system-level reporting and accountability processes. Workloads have escalated without accompanying provision of increased staffing. Principals must carry out key aspects of their administrative duties in their personal and family time.

Fatigue and burnout is a general concern. Principals of small primary schools may have less access to administrative and financial support and to non-teaching staff allocation to support them in their duties. Principals serving needy populations were seen to have far more difficult jobs and additional support is not seen to be proportionate to the task.

One of the concerning impacts on staff identified in the survey was the reduced time to focus on curriculum and pedagogy due to the impact of dealing with student welfare and management problems. This must be considered alongside the impact of pushing preparation and correction into non-work hours and the impact of fatigue and burnout. Research identifies that without long-term resourcing and support, school change efforts may simply lead to teacher frustration, burnout and despair (Hargreaves 1997, Fullan 1997, Dworkin 2001). One of the costs of offering a high level of care without a sufficient allocation of staff time for this service is on the wellbeing of staff and ultimately on the wellbeing of students.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Holistic approaches

Much work has been done to research the ways in which schools can best provide supportive environments for young people and integrative frameworks, such as that of the Health Promoting School, are recommended to assist schools to take a whole school approach to enhancing social connectedness and to promote participation in learning (Glover et al 1998, Wyn et al 2000).

Guided by this work, many schools have embraced holistic preventive strategies and have established rigorous early identification and intervention approaches for those requiring additional support from the school.

Even the most robust, strategic system and school-wide efforts to provide for the pastoral care of students are not in themselves sufficient in the face of current needs. Excellent schools, such as these, are already stretching their most committed and able staff. To expect schools to do much more without providing additional levels of support may be counter-productive and amount to a denial of the serious and changing nature of the welfare issues affecting some students. Societal change has brought an increased burden of care to the door of the school.

A great deal has been written about how schools can improve their capacity to cope with change. (Hargreaves 1997; Fullan 1999; Bond et al 2001). Hargreaves (1997) identifies that school change often falters because the change is too broad, causing teachers to have to work on too many fronts. In addition change is often poorly resourced or resources are withdrawn before the initiative is integrated (Fullan 2000). Without long-term commitment, resourcing and support, change efforts may simply lead to teacher frustration, burnout and despair (Hargreaves 1997, Fullan 1997, Dworkin 2001).

Skills and resources

Systematic and long-term professional development can make a significant contribution to equipping teachers to work more proactively in the area of student welfare, especially in relation to the introduction of basic counselling skills (Freeman et al 2003). Those teachers equipped with such skills nonetheless identify that time is a key constraint moderating their capacity to engage in pastoral conversations with students (Freeman et al 2003). Little (1993) argues that training will not on its own enable us to build school reform as real reform is systematic and collective, whereas professional development tends to be highly individualistic.

This is a most pertinent point. All too easily, debate about school responses to welfare issues can take a blaming stance, as if somehow schools are 'causing' or aggravating the problems that young people are experiencing. Simply improving teacher skills, or re-doubling the efforts of those already at the helm, is not in itself enough to address the wave of change affecting families, young people, and consequently their schools.

Impact of societal change

It is perhaps more useful to consider that school Principals are uniquely positioned to view the impact that societal change is having on young people. Using their knowledge, we can be alerted to the shifting role of schools and the need for whole-of-government approaches to the management of youth health and education. This may require a re-conceptualisation of the role of school as a core social institution and open the way for a new funding model that respects the realities of schooling for the fragmented society.

The Catholic schooling system, as described in the introduction, already strategically addresses the challenge of equipping schools to address the welfare needs of students. This occurs through policy development, research, and the provision of services and resources. It should be noted, however, that the education sector generally is currently constrained by its mandate and its level of funding.

Re-thinking the role of schools

This report makes clear that the time has come for debate and planning to occur about equipping schools for an augmented role in the face of societal change. The State government has a key role in this debate. It needs to consider the way in which a *whole-of-government* approach can support the work of all schools. This may be done through the co-location of services or through inter-sectoral funding of health services delivered through education settings.

Schools, staffed in the main by educators, are increasingly called upon to provide the services traditionally provided by social workers and psychologists. In addition to providing for the education of children, they are now increasingly called upon to intervene in relation to the welfare of students. This may be a result of a diminishing circle of care and services around families at a community level.

It can be argued that two of the top three 'priority' areas identified in this study: family problems and student mental health problems, should rightfully be funded through the health dollar. The school may now be an ideal *setting* through which to intervene, but this may more adequately be done through the co-location of services or through inter-sectoral funding of health services delivered through education settings.

It is no longer sufficient to look only to education budgets to equip schools. Given they are now consistently called upon to intervene at the nexus of education and health, they should be resourced and funded accordingly.

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