

Schools Plus is a national charity that helps children facing disadvantage succeed at school. Our purpose is to close the education gap and ensure all young Australians reach their potential through access to a great education.



# SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

It is estimated that poor mental health accounts for up to 25% of the education gap caused by disadvantage.

Wellbeing and learning are inextricably linked. Schools are not just for academic learning – they are where students develop essential social, emotional and cognitive skills that will help them succeed later in life.

**It's a compounding cycle; children learn best when they are mentally healthy, and they develop a strong sense of wellbeing when they succeed in learning.**

**ONE IN SEVEN**  
children experience poor mental health

By Year 3, students with poor mental health are  
**9 MONTHS BEHIND**  
their peers

**HALF OF ALL**  
mental health issues emerge before  
the age of 24

**2x** Students facing  
disadvantage are  
**twice as likely**  
to experience poor  
mental wellbeing

In the classroom, poor mental wellbeing can appear as attachment issues, attention deficits, behaviour problems and low resilience. Students experiencing poor mental health are less engaged in learning, lack motivation and many turn to at-risk behaviours.

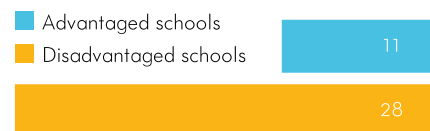


## The impact of disadvantage

Poor mental wellbeing and disadvantage interact to compound their negative influence on school attendance and academic performance.

It is estimated that poor mental wellbeing accounts for **10% - 25%** of the education gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children.

On average, students experiencing poor mental health in schools in disadvantaged communities miss almost one month more schooling each year than those experiencing poor mental health in schools in advantaged communities.



Students with poor mental health, average days absent from school per year.



## Wellbeing and learning outcomes

Children experiencing poor mental health are:



Effective prevention and early intervention is both more effective and less expensive than intervening later in life, and is key to enhancing mental health in adulthood.



## Schools are critical in supporting students' mental health

Schools promote student wellbeing by providing safe, supportive and inclusive environments for their students, where diversity is valued, positive social relationships are promoted and there is little risk of injury, harm or trauma. Strategies to support wellbeing include:



## How Schools Plus helps schools to promote mental wellbeing

We believe school leaders are best placed to develop wellbeing initiatives that will help their students to succeed. A targeted and strategic approach, driven by teachers and school leaders, helps to address the unique issues facing each school community. Schools Plus works with schools to identify and implement the most impactful and sustainable solution.

Schools Plus is seeing more demand for initiatives that support student mental health and wellbeing than ever before. In our most recent national application round, 42% of applications were for projects linked to improving student wellbeing, more than any other area of focus.





## Projects supported by Schools Plus

### Crookwell High School, NSW



**THE NEED:** Crookwell High School in rural NSW identified an increasing number of students suffering from serious mental health problems, with attendance rates dropping as some children became too anxious to go to school. Access to support services was limited, due to the community's remoteness and the limited number of professionals in nearby towns. Many families did not have internet or phone reception to access support online.

**OUR SUPPORT:** Crookwell developed a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing that emphasised wellbeing as an equal achievement to learning outcomes. Teaching staff were engaged in professional learning to better teach key wellbeing concepts and high-risk year groups were supported by resilience programs.

**THE IMPACT:** The community was highly engaged in the project, with 100% of families attending interviews about their child's wellbeing plan. Teachers reported increased resilience and positive coping strategies in their students, which was particularly evident during hardships like 2020's remote learning periods and the tragic death of a student at the school.

Student – “(Before the program) I never realized what my inner strengths were.”

### Warrnambool East Primary School, VIC

**THE NEED:** Many of the children at Warrnambool East Primary School begin school with significant developmental delays or trauma and by Year 12, student outcomes in the area are 15% below the state average. Warrnambool's Nurturing Room program aims to intervene early, by providing a small group environment for vulnerable students aged 5 – 8, to improve their self-worth, wellbeing, and whole-family engagement.

**OUR SUPPORT:** With our support, Warrnambool partnered with occupational, music and art therapists to bring sensory activities to the Nurturing Room, to help children who were over- and under-sensitised. Ongoing work with parents built their capacity to apply wellbeing activities, like mindfulness, at home.

**THE IMPACT:** After the program, the school observed improved student attendance rates and increased engagement from previously disengaged parents. Parents became more confident to ask for support and more engaged in their child's learning. In an Attitudes Towards School survey, Warrnambool now ranks above state average in motivation and interest in school and at average for attendance.



Student – “It helps me to be peaceful and not hurt anyone.”

Lesley Keilar, Social Worker - “Support through Schools Plus enabled us to identify key skills and actions... resulting in greater inclusion and engagement for vulnerable students.”

**Sadly, the number of applications for wellbeing projects, like these, far outweighs our capacity to support.**

**If you'd like to help schools as they work to improve student mental health and wellbeing, you can contact our team on 02 8880 0296 or at [info@schoolsplus.org.au](mailto:info@schoolsplus.org.au)**