

# What Works Best 2025

## Practical guide

# Wellbeing

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

### How to use this guide

This resource is part of the **practical guide series** for What Works Best 2025. It provides teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for supporting student wellbeing in their school. It is not intended to capture all aspects of wellbeing, and it is important to consider how strategies and practices should be responsive to the learning and wellbeing needs and goals of students.

Before engaging with these ideas, it may be useful to first consider your current practice, and how it influences teaching, learning and student wellbeing. What is working well, and which areas could be strengthened? The following ideas may support you when planning next steps.



## What is wellbeing?

Student wellbeing is a broad term that encompasses many dimensions including cognitive, social, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (CESE 2015). Student wellbeing is influenced by many interconnected elements of school and home life. A strong sense of being known, valued and cared for is a key part of student wellbeing. Students experience positive wellbeing at school when they have a strong sense of belonging and feel supported in learning and building healthy relationships. A sense of belonging reflects the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others at school (CESE 2024).

## Why does wellbeing matter?

Students' positive wellbeing at school is associated with improved student outcomes across a broad range of domains. Higher levels of wellbeing at school are linked to greater academic achievement, strong primary to secondary transitions, Year 12 completion, lower absenteeism, positive social behaviours and other beneficial outcomes (Australian Catholic University and Erebus International 2008; The Centre for Adolescent Health 2018; CESE 2019; O'Connor et al. 2019; Tape et al. 2021; AERO 2023).

## The relationship between wellbeing and explicit teaching

Wellbeing at school has many dimensions but the experience of learning success is sometimes overlooked for its contribution to student wellbeing. Explicit teaching provides students with a well-scaffolded, inclusive learning environment, which helps build their academic self-concept and a sense of belonging at school.

# Build a positive learning environment in the classroom that is characterised by supportive relationships, feelings of safety and inclusivity

- **Provide students with multiple opportunities throughout the day to build relationships with their peers and teachers.** This can include quick daily check-ins, collaborative group tasks or brief one-on-one conversations during lesson transitions. In primary school settings, teachers might start a lesson with a question to the whole class (for example, “What is one thing that you are excited about today?”), use class circle time for students to share some of their favourite things related to a topic (for example, “What animal would be your dream pet and why?”) or work closely with students during group activities. In secondary schools, teachers might connect with individual students by asking about their interests before the lesson gets underway, greeting students by name as they enter the classroom or using group projects to encourage peer interaction. When teachers consistently take time to get to know their students and foster meaningful connections, it helps build trust and strengthens relationships. Positive teacher–student and peer relationships are closely linked to improved student wellbeing (Hoare et al. 2025).

Further examples:

- Where possible, schools can offer a diverse range of co-curricular activities that cater to students’ interests, such as sports, creative arts and robotics. Regardless of the activity offered, co-curricular activities provide students with opportunities to connect with their peers and teachers in a low-pressure, supportive environment outside of the classroom through structured and unstructured activities.
- In primary schools, students with disability may benefit from consistent routines for peer interaction, such as a classroom buddy system for group work or lunchtime clubs that support shared interests. These structures can help reduce anxiety and foster predictable, safe interactions.
- In secondary schools, students with disability can be supported to join interest-based groups (for example, coding, debating or art) by assigning a peer mentor to help them navigate social situations and build confidence over time.
- For students in regional, rural and remote areas, schools can facilitate relationship building with the wider community, including attending local events (for example, the Anzac Day service or sporting events) and partnering with local businesses or health services on mentoring or wellbeing initiatives.

- **Develop opportunities for student voice so that students feel connected at school and have a sense of contributing meaningfully to school life.** For example, teachers could seek student evaluations, or incorporate student voice during the development of classroom norms and expectations. Doing so enables students to have input into aspects of school life, including areas such as the uniform, school policies and co-curricular activity offerings. This process should be as inclusive as possible so that all students can participate. For example, students with language or literacy support needs can be provided with visuals or response cards (such as images of thumbs up/down to indicate yes/no). It is also important that schools communicate any changes that are made as a result of student feedback to show students that their opinions and experiences have been considered and are valued. Including student voice in decision-making processes at school can allow students and teachers to work together to find solutions, help build connection and a sense of belonging for students and help create an overall positive classroom culture (NSW Department of Education 2025a).

Further examples:

- Teachers can invite students who may be reluctant to share their thoughts in front of the class to participate in other ways. Younger students can use sticky notes to draw or write down questions and leave them on the teacher's desk. For older students, teachers can use technology as a discreet way for students to communicate their thoughts, including the use of anonymous polls, exit slips or online surveys.
  - LGBTQIA+ students, particularly in secondary school settings, may be invited to contribute ideas for inclusive signage, affirming posters or respectful language guides. This can help shape a visibly safe environment.
- **Ensure that students – especially vulnerable groups such as those with disability or additional learning needs – experience high levels of advocacy at school.** For example, teachers in both primary and secondary schools can regularly use age-appropriate, informal formative assessments such as quick one-to-one feedback activities to gauge students' current understanding. In-class conversations or check-ins with students that are initiated by teachers can demonstrate interest in, and care for, students' wellbeing.

Providing advocacy at school is important to ensure that students feel supported by adults in the school community. When teachers provide consistent encouragement and are available to provide advice when needed, students feel as if they have an adult or adults 'on their side'. Advocacy in schools supports both students' academic success and their overall wellbeing. Students are more likely to have increased motivation and effort in lessons, an enhanced sense of belonging and an improved chance of completing school (CESE 2020). It is also important for students with disability and/or additional needs to learn how to advocate for themselves, which means knowing how to ask for help or equipment when they need it and how to decline support when they don't require it (AERO 2025a). Student-led conferences, modified feedback tools and visual supports may help empower students in developing self-advocacy skills by creating safe, accessible opportunities for students with additional needs to express their views, preferences and concerns.

Further examples:

- Advocacy is especially important for students during periods of transition, such as between primary and secondary school. One way to offer support during this time is through Year 7 teachers working with students from Years 5 and 6 by visiting partner primary schools and offering ‘sample secondary school lessons’ before they begin their first day in secondary school. This early engagement helps students become familiar with their future school and ensures they have a trusted teacher to support them from the very first day of Year 7.
  - Consider assigning a consistent staff member – for example, a school learning support officer (SLSO) or year advisor – to act as an advocate or case manager for students requiring additional support. This person monitors progress, coordinates support and ensures the student’s voice is heard.
  - Primary and secondary students in out-of-home care may benefit from having a nominated teacher or SLSO check in with them regularly to track wellbeing alongside academic progress, building trust and continuity.
- **Create a safe, culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment for all students.** Creating safe classroom, playground and online learning environments helps ensure that these spaces are predictable and secure. A safe classroom environment helps students to develop their confidence, foster respect among peers and strengthen positive relationships between students and teachers. To achieve this, it is important to set clear expectations, establish routines and implement accountability systems that promote responsibility among all participants. Other key strategies include fostering positive language and inclusive play during recess and lunch, providing safe areas for students during breaks and ensuring that teachers actively supervise playgrounds and common areas.
  - **Foster cultural responsiveness and facilitate a positive sense of cultural identity for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.** This can be achieved by:
    - integrating students’ cultural knowledge into learning (for example, by implementing an Aboriginal culture and language program)
    - collaborating with families (for example, by creating a welcoming environment and providing opportunities for families to come into the school)<sup>1</sup>
    - building staff cultural competence (for example, by engaging in ongoing professional learning about culturally responsive teaching and how to effectively embed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledge and perspectives into the classroom).

Culturally responsive teaching can ultimately lead to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students’ knowledge and skills being situated within their lived experiences and frames of reference. This form of teaching can improve students’ wellbeing by recognising their cultural and self-identity and having learning content that is more personally meaningful (CESE 2022).

1 For the purposes of this and other What Works Best practical guides and illustrations of practice, ‘families’ includes biological parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, kin carers, out-of-home (foster) carers, extended family members and other significant adults with caring responsibilities.

- **Acknowledge and celebrate days of religious and/or cultural significance, and build positive partnerships with families and the wider community.** Doing so can create a culturally responsive environment for students from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds.
- **Affirm diversity and prioritise identity-based safety for LGBTQIA+ students.** This is important as this cohort experiences high rates of bullying, exclusion and school disengagement. For example, the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ perspectives in novel or text discussions can build identity, safety and visibility for LGBTQIA+ students.
- **Explicitly teach behaviour to support a safe and inclusive learning environment.** High expectations for behaviour set standards that encourage positive conduct among students. Clearly articulate, model and explicitly teach expectations for behaviour, such as being on time, lining up quietly before entering the classroom, raising hands to ask questions, putting away equipment and following the teacher’s instructions during transitions. It is important for all teachers to consistently uphold these expectations in every classroom to create a unified approach across the school (AERO 2024).

Further examples:

- Some students with disability and additional needs may react differently to sensory experiences such as noise, lighting, temperature and smells. These differences can make certain stimuli distracting or uncomfortable for them. Teachers can be attuned to these external factors that could impact students’ learning and make some modifications accordingly. For example, teachers can turn down the lighting, change the room temperature or manage noise where possible, such as by using a calm voice to model what an ‘inside voice’ sounds like.
- For students with disability, particularly in the primary school setting, provide access to individual tools like noise-reducing headphones, fidget items or movement passes for students with sensory processing needs, and ensure all classmates understand these supports as normal parts of classroom life.
- Newly arrived migrant students and students from refugee backgrounds may need extra support in understanding unspoken classroom rules or behaviour expectations. This could be due to students coming from different educational systems where classroom norms or expectations can significantly vary. Some migrant students and students from refugee backgrounds may also face language barriers which may hinder their ability to engage in conversations about classroom behaviour. Visual behaviour charts and explicit explanations of routines can help reduce anxiety and promote participation.

## Teach healthy coping practices, resilience and self-regulation

- **Model healthy coping practices in the classroom to teach students how to manage their wellbeing and deal with stressful situations.** This can include narrating positive self-talk (for example, “This is tricky, but I can keep trying – I’ll work it out step by step” or “Okay, that didn’t go to plan, but I’ve learned something”) and modelling calm, flexible responses when things go wrong (for example, technical issues or timetable changes). Modelling these behaviours normalises problem-solving, emotional regulation and resilience. Additionally, explicitly teach, rehearse and reinforce healthy responses to challenges, including how to seek help or support others. These skills can be embedded across key learning areas (KLAs), such as through scripts or role-plays in English or guided reflections in PDHPE. Normalising help-seeking increases confidence and reduces stigma (Allen et al. 2024). Teachers can reinforce positive coping by acknowledging students when they manage strong emotions or use a healthy strategy.
- **Integrate wellbeing instruction across the curriculum.** In PDHPE, focus areas such as identity, health and wellbeing (Kindergarten to Year 6) and respectful relationships (Years 7 to 10) provide a structured and developmentally appropriate approach to teaching resilience, self-regulation, stress management, time management and help-seeking. Teachers can use the PDHPE syllabus as a guide to ensure these skills are introduced, revisited and extended over time. These strategies should not only be taught in standalone lessons but embedded across school settings and revisited during emotionally significant periods (for example, exam time and transitions). In English, students can explore how characters respond to adversity. In history, students can examine emotional responses to major events. In visual arts, students might represent feelings through abstract colour or form (Allen et al. 2024).

Further examples:

- For students with autism or ADHD, provide visual emotion scales and predictable movement breaks throughout the day. Explicitly teach when and how to use these tools as part of a self-regulation routine.
- High potential and gifted students can experience additional stressors due to social challenges, external pressures and tendencies for perfectionism (Haberlin 2015). Interventions for stress reduction – such as mindfulness and explicitly teaching wellbeing strategies during class time (for example, how to build resilience and manage feelings of anxiety) – may help these students.
- LGBTQIA+ students may benefit from access to quiet spaces where they can pause and regulate during times of social stress, especially following challenging peer interactions.

- **Support the development of self-regulation skills, such as naming and understanding emotions.** One way this can be done is by explicitly teaching about emotions by using age-appropriate emotion check-ins at the beginning of the day where students identify how they are feeling, or by scaffolding class discussions about the emotions of book characters.

For older students, emotions can be taught through strategies such as naming and describing the emotions associated with historical events. Teachers can implement proactive and preventative regulating activities, such as quick movement breaks when students are feeling nervous, to assist with the physical regulation of the stress response (NSW Department of Education 2024a). Students can also be taught how to de-escalate emotional responses and maintain focus through self-regulation and self-calming strategies such as mindful breathing. These strategies may be particularly relevant in stressful situations such as during the exam period.

Further, students can be taught to manage their reactions to triggers and challenges by using tools such as social scripts, social skills programs or modelling. When modelling, it is important to show students how and when to use a regulation strategy. Co-regulation may be required for some students, such as younger students, students who have experienced trauma or students with disability. Co-regulation is where a calmer person, like a teacher, helps students manage their emotions and behaviour. By providing calm guidance and being emotionally present, teachers give students cues and strategies to regain control (AERO 2025b). The more students gain awareness of their own feelings, the better they become at regulating their emotions and behaviours, understanding others and building and sustaining positive relationships (Allen et al. 2024).

- **Establish formal or informal mentoring programs within the school's timetable to build on students' strengths, resilience and social confidence.** For example, in secondary schools, Year 7 students can be paired with older peers for mentoring through activities such as touring the school, or teachers can meet with small groups of Year 11 and 12 students regularly for 15 minutes to review progress and set HSC goals. Sessions can be tailored to students' needs and may cover topics like exam tips and study strategies. Primary school students can be paired with older peers for mentoring through activities like role-playing healthy conflict resolution when playing on the equipment and other appropriate playground behaviour. Older students may also support younger peers with simple literacy and numeracy activities, working alongside teachers in an informal peer-tutoring system. Students and teachers can work together to build practices that foster resilience and self-regulation and create a supportive network of people students can talk to, including year advisors or SLSOs. Peer mentoring in different forms can facilitate informal peer relationships and provide opportunities for students to practise respectful communication and supportive behaviours (Hoare et al. 2025). Likewise, prosocial behaviour can be fostered by engaging students in helping activities such as peer tutoring, classroom tasks and teacher assistance (NSW Department of Education 2025b).

## Tailor support for different phases of student development and for students who may need additional wellbeing support and/or resources

- **Recognise early signs of student disengagement or changes in demeanour and be proactive in supporting students' wellbeing.** For example, teachers or SLSOs can pay attention to any noticeable changes in a student's behaviour, such as decreased engagement in class or altered interactions with peers, and respond to these changes as appropriate. Some groups – particularly girls in secondary schools – are at risk of decreased wellbeing through quiet disengagement, which can be overlooked. Noting small changes also allows teachers to find patterns of disengagement that may indicate underlying issues affecting a student's wellbeing, such as stress, anxiety or a change in their home circumstances. In secondary schools, teachers can communicate concerns about students' disengagement or their wellbeing to designated staff (for example, year advisors, deputy principals or the school counselling service) to make sure that relevant staff at school are aware. Early recognition of disengagement can build the foundation for students' development, wellbeing and active learning in the classroom (Allen et al. 2024).

Further examples:

- For both primary and secondary schools, observing students' attendance and punctuality patterns may provide insights into their engagement and wellbeing. A sudden drop in attendance or frequent lateness may need to be followed up with families.
  - For students with disability, co-developing their learning and support plan with input from both the student and their family helps to ensure that the plan reflects lived experience and honours student agency.
- **Collaborate with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and families to design and implement personalised learning pathways (PLPs) or learning and support plans (🔒 staff only) where appropriate, ensuring students feel safe, supported and engaged in class and school activities.** These can help students identify short-term and/or long-term goals, which are then regularly reviewed and celebrated before new goals are set.
  - **Collect information about students from refugee backgrounds – such as their background, interests and learning needs – to plan appropriate and personalised support via their learning and support plans.** Details such as English language proficiency, literacy and numeracy levels and past schooling can guide adjustments to routines, teaching practices and learning programs. This process can also help identify any professional learning teachers may need to better support students from refugee backgrounds and effectively tailor learning.

- **Where relevant, develop learning and support plans for students with additional learning and support needs.** Learning and support plans help identify a student's current skills and needs (for example, reading and numeracy skills, language and communication skills, school attendance and health care needs). Learning and support plans should consider students' strengths, interests and areas of need, and develop personalised strategies for support. They should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain current and effective in supporting student learning and wellbeing. Schools can implement learning and support plans by recording students' academic and cultural goals and aspirations. These plans can enhance engagement by aligning learning to each student's strengths, needs, interests, progress and goals (NSW Department of Education 2025c).
- **Ensure students have access to health and physical wellbeing supports.** For example, this could include access to a school breakfast club and/or spare school supplies and uniforms.

## Collaborate with colleagues, families and other agencies as required, to support the wellbeing of students

- **Share information about student wellbeing appropriately with relevant staff using a centralised and confidential whole-school system.** In primary school settings, this might involve assistant principals, classroom teachers and the school counselling service. For secondary schools, the centralised system might also be accessed by head teachers and year advisors. Likewise, communicate with families about students' wellbeing matters. This can be done in multiple ways, such as through student communication notebooks that teachers can fill in about how the school day went for students (especially for younger students or students with disability), dedicated communication apps or face-to-face meetings. This information sharing facilitates 2-way dialogue about students' wellbeing and encourages early communication about any wellbeing concerns that may arise. To support families who do not speak English well, the school can draw on the department's interpreting and translation service (AITSL 2024). It is important to record concerns, actions taken, referrals made and follow-up steps when sharing information to ensure accountability, consistency and continuity of care. Where possible, periodically review the effectiveness, security and consistency of wellbeing information systems and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

- **Promote respect and positive relationships to help prevent bullying in the classroom and across the school and create a broader positive school culture.**

Strategies for individual students include empowering and supporting students to tell adults when bullying occurs and reducing potential barriers to them reporting this behaviour. At the school level, prioritise implementing strategies that promote respect and positive peer culture, safe learning environments and relationship-based pedagogy. Strategies can include the explicit teaching of social and emotional skills (such as empathy) and how positive bystander behaviour can empower students to intervene. Encourage ongoing, whole-school efforts to prevent cyberbullying by regularly and contextually teaching digital citizenship and online safety (Sae-Koew et al., 2025). Additionally, school leaders and teachers can review technology access at school and introduce and review programs to increase its responsible use.

- **Consult, where appropriate, the department's student wellbeing external programs catalogue (🔒 staff only) for a list of approved suppliers of wellbeing and anti-bullying programs.** Teachers can develop rules in collaboration with students and colleagues to set a whole-school climate of respect and responsibility against bullying. The [School behaviour support and management plan \(SBSMP\)](#) should be explicitly referred to and applied where appropriate. These anti-bullying strategies promote positive relationships and an inclusive school environment (NSW Department of Education 2025d).

- **Celebrate students' progress in their learning or personal development goals.**

This could include special whole-school assemblies with families invited, or classroom 'shout-outs' where teachers can highlight students' achievements. Many students may not feel comfortable with public recognition due to embarrassment or anxiety. However, these students can be recognised personally by their teacher or the principal sharing a quiet word with them to reiterate the student's success with a goal. This ensures that all students feel known, valued and cared for by the school community. Schools can also celebrate the achievements and successes of students in fields outside the classroom, such as their co-curricular activities or passion projects. It is often the same high-achieving students who are selected for recognition. By being mindful of this and ensuring that recognition is shared more broadly – whether publicly or privately – schools can help strengthen engagement and sense of belonging.

Further examples:

- For students in Stages 2 and 3, teachers can provide a learning journal to each student in the class in which they can document their learning progress for specific KLAs – for example, a sample of their writing during English lessons each month. At the end of each term, students can select their favourite journal entries and share them with teachers, peers and families. Similarly, for students in secondary schools, teachers may ask students to keep portfolios for KLAs such as visual arts so students can see their progress over the year.

- **Demonstrate responsiveness in communication with families and the broader school community.** This involves schools having culturally responsive and accessible communication with families. Examples include sharing positive aspects of a student’s school experiences, building partnerships based on trust and respect, and ensuring that communication flows both ways to all sources of support (for example, school staff, specialist staff and families). School staff can initiate communication with families by sharing positive news in phone calls or notes home. Specialist staff can support student wellbeing by regularly meeting with families to discuss their child’s progress, highlight areas of growth and explore additional ways to foster their wellbeing. Demonstrating responsiveness in communications with families can support students’ wellbeing both at school and at home (NSW Department of Education 2023).

## School leaders play an important role in promoting and facilitating wellbeing in schools

### Creating the conditions for consistent and sustainable practice

School leaders are key to developing and implementing school-wide policies, programs and practices that support student wellbeing. One of the main ways in which they can do this is by facilitating students’ sense of belonging – that is, the extent to which students feel that their personal and cultural values are accepted, respected, included and supported by others at school. Using the [Student code of conduct](#) as a starting point, school leaders can facilitate a sense of belonging at the school level by reinforcing this shared set of values, which are consistently referred to by students and staff. Related to this strategy is creating a strong identity so students feel proud to belong at the school. This sense of unity can be supported by collaborating with students to design school uniforms or sports jerseys, painting a mural in the playground representing the school and investing in the physical upkeep of the school grounds so that students feel a sense of pride in belonging to the school community.

School leaders can also help ensure consistent and sustainable practice for wellbeing by supporting positive teacher–student and student–student relationships. They can work with teachers to identify and facilitate opportunities for students and teachers to come together outside the classroom – for example, by establishing lunchtime clubs where students and teachers with similar interests can come together to share and learn, or by teachers coaching students during timetabled sports classes. School leaders can also create safe and welcoming spaces in the playground or indoors for students to come together who have shared interests, as well as for students who may prefer to sit quietly with their peers during break times, away from the noise and activity of the playground.

School leaders can also foster positive relationships with families and the community to build a collaborative culture that supports student wellbeing. For example, they can ensure that the school has culturally responsive and accessible communication with families that is based on trust and respect. This could include translated newsletters and permission forms. They can also facilitate connection with families by being present at the school gates during peak entry and exit times to greet students and families as they arrive and leave, and can display their photos in the front office and on the school website, together with their names and positions, to assist families to recognise and connect with them. School leaders can also facilitate connections with other local schools, organisations and support groups to support student wellbeing. This could involve connecting with:

- the local high school or partner primary school to encourage dialogue and exchange information about effective student wellbeing programs and transition strategies
- the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) to create connections and access programs for students and teachers
- learning partners such as TAFE, local businesses and distance education schools
- settlement support services (for example, Settlement Services International and the Australian Red Cross) to support students and families from refugee backgrounds
- faith and community leaders to support religious diversity in their schools.

## Providing professional learning opportunities

School leaders can support the development of strong cultural identity for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in professional learning and building and maintaining their own and their staff's cultural competencies. For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, wellbeing encompasses their sense of belonging, including the recognition of their culture, autonomy and connection to Country. School leaders can engage with the local community (including the local AECG) and draw on resources such as the [Guiding Principles in Leading Aboriginal Education](#) and reconciliation action plans to create a school environment that is physically and socially welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, staff, families and communities. Refer to CESE's (2022) [Strong strides together](#) for more information about ways school leaders can support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students' positive sense of cultural self-identity.

School leaders can also support the cultural identities of students from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse backgrounds, including students from refugee backgrounds. In addition to providing professional learning that enables staff to effectively teach and support students from diverse backgrounds, school leaders can support these students by having consistent, fair and high expectations for all students and families, and delivering programs for all students that promote intercultural understanding and challenge bias, stereotyping and racism (NSW Department of Education 2024b).

When considering professional learning opportunities, it is important for school leaders to take into account their school's context and needs. For example, teachers in regional, rural and remote locations may have additional barriers to accessing professional learning in person due to challenges with class coverage, resourcing and geographical distance. School leaders may consider tailoring professional learning to teachers in these geographical locations, especially for early-career teachers who may need additional support. For example, the professional learning content might focus on skills for teaching composite classes or connecting curriculum to the local community and context (NSW Department of Education 2025e). Refer to [Delivering professional learning in region](#) (🔒 staff only) for more information about ways school leaders can increase their understanding of planning, delivering and evaluating professional learning in regional, rural and remote settings.<sup>2</sup>

## Facilitating whole-school planning

School leaders can facilitate whole-school planning of positive student wellbeing by dedicating time for developing and establishing clear and consistent procedures, processes and systems that model, explicitly teach, recognise and reinforce positive student behaviour and ensure equity across the school and over time. Consistent whole-school messaging helps students to understand appropriate behaviours in different situations and ensures that rules and expectations are implemented consistently and fairly. This should be reflected in the School behaviour support and management plan (SBSMP) and published on the school website.

As part of the care continuum, whole-school proactive and preventive approaches focus on creating and maintaining safe and respectful learning environments for all students. These approaches involve explicitly teaching the expected behaviours and should be applied in various settings, including classrooms, playgrounds, online spaces and other school-sanctioned events. By promoting prosocial behaviour, these interventions support effective teaching and help reduce minor behavioural issues when implemented consistently (NSW Department of Education 2025f).

It is also important for school leaders to work together with teachers to access, analyse and interpret the school's wellbeing data to identify areas for improvement. Data on student wellbeing can be obtained from a variety of sources, including attendance data, student-reported experiences of bullying, teacher observations and records of student behaviour in the classroom and playground, formal caution and suspension data and departmental student surveys. The data should be as detailed as possible, and can be used to highlight patterns for individual students or across classes or cohorts that require additional support, as well as particular locations in the school or times of day where behavioural issues are more likely to arise. Schools can then trial practices and programs to address any underlying issues or influencing factors, monitor them over time, and adapt or replace them if required as new data is received.

<sup>2</sup> While this resource has been designed for Education support teams, school leaders may also find the contents useful for the development of professional learning.

## Other What Works Best 2025 resources on wellbeing

- [Evidence guide – Chapter 7: Wellbeing](#)
- [Illustration of practice – Wellbeing at Temora Public School](#)

## Additional resources

- Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (2024) [What Works Best to increase students' sense of belonging](#)
- CESE (2022) [Everyday resilience – What Works Best in practice](#)
- CESE (2022) [Strong strides together – meeting the educational goals for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students](#)
- CESE (2020) [Supporting advocacy at school](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Aboriginal education in NSW public schools](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Achieving school excellence in wellbeing and inclusion](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Anti-bullying strategies for educators](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Multicultural education](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Strengthening planning for students](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Tailoring health and wellbeing approaches at your school](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Working with parents and the community](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Multicultural education policy](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Multicultural education procedures](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Wellbeing framework for schools](#)
- NSW Department of Education (2024) [Student wellbeing external programs catalogue](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (2020) [Why student voice matters](#)
- NSW Department of Education (n.d) Disability inclusion resources on the [Universal Resources Hub](#) (🔒 staff only)
- NSW Department of Education (n.d) [Student wellbeing](#)
- Australian Education Research Organisation (2023) [Student wellbeing data and measurement in Australia](#)
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2022) [Wellbeing in Australian schools](#)

## Reflection questions

### Teachers

- How well do I model healthy coping strategies and encourage students to self-regulate?
- How do I support the emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual and physical wellbeing of my students?
- How do I interact with each student in my class to get to know them?
- How do I provide opportunities for all students to develop and express their voice during lessons?
- What strategies can I use to enhance students' engagement? How do I provide a culturally responsive classroom that is appropriate for my students? Which school or community leaders could I consult with in relation to this?

### School leaders

- What is our whole-school approach to student wellbeing? How does it support the emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual and physical wellbeing of our students?
- What opportunities does our school provide to support the development of students' self-regulation skills?
- What strategies are in place to support student advocacy at our school?
- How does our school create a culturally responsive environment for all students? Which community groups could I consult with to help create a culturally responsive environment for all students?
- How does our school provide opportunities for students and families to express their voice, including students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and their families?
- How does our school create an inclusive environment for students with disability and/or other additional needs?
- How does our school collaborate internally between staff members, and externally with the wider school community, to support students' wellbeing?
- Are there any practices or processes in place in our school that could potentially undermine wellbeing?
- How can teachers at our school be aware of and respond to students who may be quietly disengaged?
- Where and how is wellbeing being explicitly taught in our school?

## References

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High expectations

Explicit teaching

Effective feedback

Using data to inform practice

Assessment

Classroom management

Wellbeing

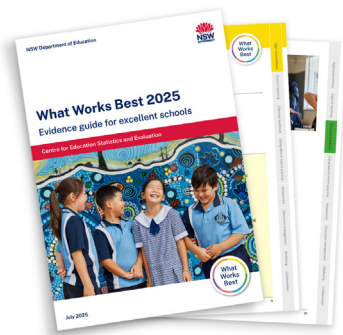
Collaboration

# Access the full suite of What Works Best resources

What Works Best 2025 is a suite of resources for teachers and school leaders that outlines 8 effective practices that are known to improve student learning and wellbeing:

- high expectations
- explicit teaching
- effective feedback
- using data to inform practice
- assessment
- classroom management
- wellbeing
- collaboration.

The resources can be used individually or in conjunction with one another to implement evidence-based, quality teaching and learning practices and inform school excellence planning.



The What Works Best 2025 – Evidence guide for excellent schools provides an overview of the evidence that underpins each of the 8 themes.



The What Works Best practical guides translate evidence into practice by providing teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing each of the themes in their classrooms and schools. The guides unpack not only ‘what’ should be done to successfully implement a theme, but also the ‘how’ and ‘why’.



The What Works Best illustrations of practice provide teachers and school leaders with examples of how some of our great schools from across NSW have implemented the themes.

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