

Trauma-informed practice in an educational context

Current landscape of NSW public schools

Background

We recognise the importance of trauma-informed practice for improving student outcomes and experience.

The Disability Strategy aims to improve educational outcomes for children, young people and their families including by strengthening support to teachers and other support staff. The Strategy is committed to building on existing professional development in evidence-based approaches to support all students.

The Disability Strategy Implementation team undertook an exercise in August and September 2019 to understand the current landscape of trauma-informed practice across NSW public schools. Many schools are already doing great work in this area across the state.



Trauma-informed practice is supporting teachers, school-based staff and leaders to improve their knowledge of complex and developmental trauma. This helps staff understand student behaviours and how to respond. Staff can then better meet students' needs so they can reach their full potential.

Who we spoke to

We spoke to school leaders and other staff who gave rich insights into their current practice and knowledge of trauma-informed practice.

An online survey was sent to 500 schools who had done trauma-informed professional development. We received an overwhelming 442 responses.

A subset of schools was selected based on geographical location and educational setting and we held 52 in-depth interviews across 30 schools.

Why we're doing this:

Children and young people exposed to trauma are at increased risk of:

- Spending more time out of class.
- Scoring lower on achievement assessments.
- Higher rates of suspension, expulsion and referrals to professional services.



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Trauma-informed practice in an educational context:

Key insights that are informing our work:

- The vast majority of participants (**85.29%**) believed an understanding of trauma-informed practice is extremely relevant in their role.
- Nearly half (**48.87%**) said they have a good understanding of the area and an additional **10.63%** said they have an excellent understanding.
- **23.3%** of staff felt very confident to communicate effectively with students affected by trauma.
- **92.53%** would like to participate in further professional development in this area.

Participants reported a connection between trauma-informed practice and:

- Students being more engaged in learning
- Increased academic achievement
- Increased student language capacity, specifically in social and emotional language
- Increased understanding of children's behaviour as a means of communication.
- Lower staff turnover
- Decrease in negative incidents and suspensions
- Increased schools' attendance

What we heard about the challenges:

- Getting staff onboard
- Contextual factors of the school mean some have higher numbers of students who have experienced trauma
- Competing demands and priorities.
- It is not embedded into pre-service teacher qualifications

Next steps

These valuable insights are informing the content of a new trauma-informed course, a key commitment under the Disability Strategy. This pilot will commence in November 2019 with modules 1 and 2, and finish in term 1, 2020 with modules 3 and 4. The results of this pilot will inform how this professional development is taken forward.

"The training has also helped me to acknowledge how important it is to develop trust and positive relationships in the classroom."

"[It] transformed the way in which our staff understand student behaviour, which in turn has led to a number of strategies to support students from traumatic backgrounds."



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