

# Principal's Sabbatical Report

Collette Sandilands  
Grantlea Downs Timaru  
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## Student Wellbeing

*How can schools support and develop student wellbeing to optimise their success?*

*"... Our understanding of wellbeing needs to be contemporary and forward focused. An individual's wellbeing is constantly changing. How students feel about themselves and their own wellbeing changes over time, in different situations and circumstances and in response to community and environmental factors. Wellbeing, or the lack of it, can affect a student's engagement and success in learning. Educators need to understand the potential wellbeing has to bring about positive change, what is required to foster wellbeing, and how it can become a powerful force in the students' learning and development." (NSW Government 2015)*

## Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the Board of Trustees of Grantlea Downs School for their support of my sabbatical. A very special thanks goes to Mike de Joux for stepping in as Acting Principal and to the rest of the staff for their support in keeping things ticking over in my absence. I look forward to sharing this report and the many other related ideas about our curriculum I have gained while being away from school.

I wish to acknowledge the Ministry of Education and NZEI for making principal sabbaticals possible. The opportunity to step outside the day to day running of the school, after almost 10 years as a principal, and have some uninterrupted time to truly reflect on what is happening in our school and where to next, the time to focus on and do some research on a key area, along with the opportunity to have a period of refreshment, has been invaluable and I am truly grateful.

## Executive summary

This report brings together current research on the wellbeing of children and young people.

1. It draws on the extensive research conducted in the UK through the Foresight *Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project* (2008) and the subsequent research study *Ways to Wellbeing* (2014) conducted by the NEF (New Economic Foundation) and The Children's Society.

The Foresight Project, as it is commonly referred, considered how to improve everyone's mental capital and mental wellbeing through life. One of the key outcomes of project, was to summarise the evidence on links between people's wellbeing and the activities that they did. The evidence reviewed came from neuroscience, surveys and longitudinal studies. *Evidence suggests that a small improvement in wellbeing can help to decrease some mental health problems and also help people to flourish.* (2008)

*A key message is that if we are to prosper and thrive in our changing society and in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world, both our mental and material resources will be vital. Encouraging and enabling everyone to realise*

*their potential throughout their lives will be crucial for our future prosperity and wellbeing (2008).*

From this project came the framework *Five Ways to Wellbeing: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give*. The research on which this framework is based, relates mainly to adults and the actions needed to improve personal wellbeing.

The Children's Society was keen to explore whether or not the framework was relevant to children and young people and engaged in a project with NEF called *Ways to Wellbeing – Exploring the links between children's activities and their subjective wellbeing*.

2. It looks at the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* Framework that has subsequently been adopted by a number of other countries around the world. The Mental Health Foundation introduced it to New Zealand in 2009 as part of the Mental Health Awareness Week and has been promoting these concepts ever since. *NEF conducted a review of the most up-to-date evidence and found that building five actions into day to day lives is important for the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and organisations.* (NZMHF 2012)
3. It looks at the Education Review Office's (ERO) recent publications on student wellbeing. These publications were designed to help schools evaluate and improve student wellbeing. They highlight the importance of schools promoting the wellbeing of all students as well as the need for systems, people and initiatives to respond to wellbeing concerns for students who need additional support.
4. It compares Australia's Queensland and New South Wales Governments approaches to Wellbeing in their respective states schools and the frameworks that they use to see if they could be useful for our school to use when we are redeveloping our curriculum and to help inform our self-review of student health and wellbeing.
5. And finally this paper looks at the Scottish Government's interagency approach to children and young people's wellbeing by exploring their 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) plans. This part of my research looks at the wellbeing from the perspective of how all the different agencies, involved with children who are at risk/vulnerable, can work together for a positive and cohesive/collaborative approach.

## **Purpose**

My sabbatical research has arisen from my growing concern, about student wellbeing and the impact of this on their ability to learn and have success not only across the school curriculum but within their lives. This paper is aimed at trying to develop a greater understanding of what constitutes effective student wellbeing and looking at our current practice to see where we are and recommendations/suggested next steps of where we need to be.

Trying to narrow down the scope of my research, so it was focussed and manageable within the time frame of my sabbatical, was somewhat problematic because the more I read the more I wanted to dig deeper and grow my understanding of the myriad of factors and complexities that surround child wellbeing. My sabbatical therefore attempts to bring together some key research from England, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand that highlights what each is doing to address the wellbeing needs of children and young people.

I thought it was also important that as part of my sabbatical I would gather some baseline data around how our students in our school felt about our school and their wellbeing to use at a later date when undertaking a school wide self-review. The main focus however was for me to look beyond our school gate and learn from what others are doing and a review of their practice and how it could improve ours.

## **Rationale and Background information**

Research tells us that 'students learn best when their wellbeing is improved,' so how then can we enhance learning outcomes through a focus on student wellbeing?

Firstly how do we define wellbeing as it can be defined in many different ways? I found the quotation from UNICEF to be useful;

*The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it treats its children - their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialisation, and the sense of being loved, valued and being included in the families and societies into which they are born. (UNICEF 2007, p.4)*

In the broadest sense wellbeing in essence can be described as the quality of a person's life.

I believe that the New Zealand Curriculum's Vision (2007) for our young people to be – Confident, Connected, Actively Involved, Life-Long Learners under-pins student wellbeing.

Wellbeing is integrated through the curriculum and in particular the Health & PE learning area. "In Health & PE, the focus is on the wellbeing of the students themselves, of other people and of society ..." (NZC pg22.) There are four concepts that underpin this learning area – Hauora, attitudes and values, socio-ecological perspective and health promotion.

Hauora – A Māori philosophy of wellbeing that includes the dimensions of taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing), taha tinana (physical wellbeing), taha whanau (social wellbeing). (Adapted M Durie 1994)

*"We want students to actively think about their wellbeing by explicitly teaching them and we want them to contribute to the wellbeing of others so that they can actively and positively contribute to society now in to the future."* (NSW Government 2015)

This sabbatical has afforded me the opportunity and time to review our current school systems and practice around student wellbeing and how our curriculum develops and supports student wellbeing for greater success now and into their future.

## **Activities Undertaken (Methodology)**

Undertaking an extensive literature review has been a large part of my research. I have listed many of the readings and educational websites that I used in a bibliography at the end of this report. The following key resources are the ones that are referred to throughout my report and that I have found most helpful in shaping my current thinking and approaches to wellbeing.

Key resources that I have used are:

### **England**

- Government Office for Science – *Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project*.
- The Children's Society – *Ways to Wellbeing*.
- The Children's Society – *How to Support your Child's Wellbeing*.

## **New Zealand**

- Mental Health Foundation – *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.
- ERO's - *Wellbeing for Success: A Resource for Schools*.
- ERO's - *Wellbeing for Children's Success at Primary School*.
- ERO's - *Wellbeing for Success: Effective Practice*.

## **Australia**

- Queensland Government's – *Learning and Wellbeing Framework*.
- New South Wales Government's – *The Wellbeing Framework for Schools*.

## **Scotland**

- Government Inter Agency – *Getting It Right For Every Child*.

I also attended the NZPF Trans-Tasman Conference in Auckland, a local workshop on *Five Ways to Wellbeing "Tools for Learning"* run by the SCDHB. Information from these have also contributed to my opinions and ideas.

I also took the opportunity while on sabbatical of gathering some baseline data for our self-review which will form part of our strategic planning later in the year. I used the Wellbeing@School surveys with students and teachers within our school to see how they felt about our school's culture of care and student wellbeing.

## Findings

### England

I'll start with a condensed version of the summary of *the Improving the wellbeing of children and young people: Evidence from the Children's Society and NEF study (2014)*. The Children's Society is a UK charity focused on improving the lives of disadvantaged children.

Although the society has an in depth understanding of what helps to make children and teenagers happy, they stated that their knowledge about the subjective wellbeing of children was limited. They wanted to know how children and young people see their own wellbeing. They teamed up with New Economic Foundation (NEF) and set up a research project to ask the children about their perspective on wellbeing. They used the *Five Ways to Wellbeing Framework* as a starting point for understanding the things that adults did or can do to improve their wellbeing. They were keen to see if the types of activities that children considered important to improving their own wellbeing were similar or different to those of the adults.

Their research consisted of two main components:

1. A quantitative survey, where they asked 1,500 children aged 10 to 15 about both their levels of subjective wellbeing and the time they spend on various activities related to the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* activities that NEF had produced for adults (Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice and Give).
2. Qualitative research in the form of eleven focus groups, where they spoke to about 90 children about activities which might be linked to a sense of wellbeing, and about how they felt about different activities. The purpose of this was two-fold: to check they had not missed anything that was important to children and young people through open-ended questions, and to understand how the activities contributed to the children's wellbeing in particular.

One of the most interesting things to come out of the research was that one of the most important ways to wellbeing for children and young people was an entirely new and different category than to adults. For children, being creative and playing was really important. They told the researchers that using their imagination and having time to simply play and have fun made a huge difference to their everyday.

Children also talked about the importance of 'giving' in a different way to adults. Whilst for adults, giving may be quite formal, for instance through volunteering, for children it's the small gestures that count. Giving a picture they have drawn to a

family member or teaching others how to dance were examples of things that made them feel happy.

Apart from these two findings, they found that overall, the things that children and young people do that correlate with higher levels of wellbeing (learning, leisure activities, friendships, helping and being aware) broadly match the five ways to wellbeing proposed by NEF – although how children see these areas can differ.

Based on this research, they published their 'Ways to Wellbeing' Report, which discusses these findings in great detail. They have also created online postcards for children and young people of the things that might help them increase their wellbeing, and a parenting guide - *How to Support Your Child's Wellbeing*. They are hoping that this will enable children to know what they themselves can do to improve their wellbeing, and enable parents, guardians and carers to support them in this.

In conclusion, they noted that there are many other factors that influence the wellbeing of children and young people – and that their research findings around ways to wellbeing relate closely to other things we already know about the wellbeing of children and young people, such as the importance of autonomy, or the decline of wellbeing as children and young people get older – and they'll continue working on a better understanding of the wellbeing of children and young people. But for now, the 'Ways to wellbeing' with NEF is a good starting point to support children and young people across the country. (The Society for Children 2014)

## **New Zealand**

The New Zealand Health Foundation's *Five Ways to Wellbeing* were created as a result of the New Economics Foundation's (NEF) *Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing* research report (2008). They took the key findings from the project and built on this and adapted it to the needs of New Zealanders. The *Five Ways* key activities remain unchanged but have been adapted to reflect our bi-cultural heritage within our multi-cultural society.

- Connect, - *Me Whakawhanaunga*
- Give - *Tukua*
- Take Notice - *Me aro tonu*
- Keep Learning - *Me ako tonu*
- Be Active - *Me kori tonu*

The NZ Mental Health Foundation have also developed a *Five Ways to Wellbeing – A best practice guide* and their own set of posters, postcards and bookmarks that are available in English and Maori as well as other languages. They have also developed a 'Wellbeing' link on their website which gives details and practical tips on how to use them. Like the original UK *Five Ways to Wellbeing* these are designed for adults but like the findings of The Children's Society (2014) research report, they can be adapted for children and young people.

The Education Review Office (ERO) have been looking at student wellbeing over the last few years as part of their contribution to Youth Mental Health Project (2012) and have produced a number of publications: *Wellbeing for Success: Draft Evaluation Indicators for Student Wellbeing*. (2013), *Wellbeing for Children's Success at Primary School*. (2015) *Wellbeing for Success: A Resource for Schools*. (2016)

The following are some of the key findings from ERO's National Report Summary. *Wellbeing for Children's Success: Primary Schools*. (February 2015)

All young people want the same things. Things like been included, learning, taking risks and experiencing success, having friends who value and accept them, and feeling competent and confident. They want teachers to be interested in them, to care for them and be trustworthy.

Likewise, parents want similar things for their children.

In the schools with a cohesive approach, wellbeing was woven through all actions. An agreed set of goals that emphasise student wellbeing guided all actions, reviews and improvements.

The school curriculum promoted wellbeing and reflected the intent of The New Zealand Curriculum to use local contexts to encourage and model its values and to develop its key competencies. Leaders, with teachers, actively monitored student wellbeing and reviewed the effectiveness of the approaches taken.

Perspectives on the well-being that were explored were: Belonging and connection, Achieving, Resilient, Socially and emotionally competent, Strong sense of identity, Active, Nurtured and cared for, Safe and secure and Included.

## **Australia**

Both the Queensland *Learning and Wellbeing Framework* (2012) and New South Wales *the Wellbeing Framework for Schools* (2015) provided the author with some very valuable research information on wellbeing in schools. Queensland, took an overall systems approach by looking at the following four domains:

- Learning Environment,
- Curriculum and Pedagogy,
- Policies and Procedures and
- Partnerships

Within each of these domains there are guidelines as to how schools can go about doing this and links and ideas to support them.

New South Wales, had a more specific focus on wellbeing itself, which included schools having strategies in place to support the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of students. It's framework for schools came under the headings Connect, Succeed, Thrive and Enable. Within this framework it broke it down into 6 key elements;

- Teaching and Learning
- Behaviour, Discipline and Character Education
- Learning and Support
- Professional Practice
- Effective Leadership
- School Planning

## **Scotland**

When looking at the wellbeing of all children it was also important to the author that I looked at what factors influence children whose wellbeing is at risk (vulnerable children). During my research/literature review one of the countries that resonated well with me was that of Scotland and the extensive work they have done around improving the wellbeing of children and young people in their country. The collaboration between the National Health, Education, Police and the Scottish Government and their 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) has wellbeing at its very core.

The Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 focuses on improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland. The Act includes key parts of

GIRFEC. *“Wellbeing sits at the heart of GIRFEC approach & reflects the need to tailor the support & help, children, young people and their parents are offered to support their wellbeing.” (Scottish Government 2016)*

*“A child or young person’s wellbeing is influenced by everything around them and the different experiences and needs they have at different times in their lives.” (Scottish Government 2016)*

Scotland has developed a set of eight indicators as a common understating of what wellbeing means. **Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included**, commonly referred to by their initial letters (SHANARRI). They believe that these indicators are key to promoting the best start in life and ready to succeed. These indicators are designed to help make sure everyone – children, young people, parents and the services that support them - had a common understanding of what wellbeing means.

I see that these indicators have the potential for us to use as a model to work with other agencies to identify and support children whose wellbeing is at risk. If we all have a clear understanding of what wellbeing looks like for all children then we can identify and put in place the right targeted support to help that child and their family/whanau. *“all services working with children and young people and those who care for them, must play their part to promote, support and safeguard children and young people’s wellbeing.” (Scottish Government 2016)*

The Scottish Government is currently putting in place (is planned to be available nationally from 31 August 2016) a framework called the *Child’s Plan*. This plan is part of the GIRFEC approach to promote, support and safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people. This plan will be available for children and young people who need extra support that is not generally available to address a child or young person’s needs and improve their wellbeing (2016).

This author suggests that the Scottish Governments *Child’s Plan* could be useful to us at a local and national level to promote a better and stronger interagency approach to ensuring that the wellbeing of our most vulnerable children is paramount and no child ends up ‘slipping between the cracks’ through a lack of a co-ordinated approach. I would envisage that our own plan would need to have a strong support structure and level of accountability around it.

## Conclusions

The more we understand about the factors that contribute to student wellbeing, and the more we are prepared to change with the challenges that are presented to children, then the greater chance we will have of helping students to work towards reaching their full potential. Schools need to be bold and be prepared to try new ways of preparing our students for their future.

There is a growing amount of evidence over the years that highlights the close links wellbeing has with learning. This evidence can and should inform educators about how important this relationship is as they work with students on their educational journey through early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary schooling, then on into adulthood.

*“Learning and wellbeing are inextricably linked – students learn best when their wellbeing is optimised, and they develop a strong sense of wellbeing when they experience success in learning.”* (Queensland Government 2015)

I see student wellbeing as twofold i.e.: 1) what we need to be doing to grow and develop the wellbeing of children through our school curriculum and the opportunities we provide and 2) the part that schools play in working with families and other agencies to support our most vulnerable children, whose wellbeing and their ability to reach their potential and flourish is at risk.

*Everyone enters the world with potential. Our experiences develop our abilities and shape our expectations, which in turn colour our perceptions of the world in which we live. When individuals are empowered to have control over lived experiences, they build their own resilience and in turn contribute positively to collective wellbeing and an inclusive community.* (NSW Government 2015)

We live in a world where change is a constant and we need to be able to respond and adapt to these changes. We need to prepare our young people for a future by providing them with an education that sets them up for success. Students that are – Confident, Connected, Actively Involved, Life-Long Learners (NZC 2007) are on the path to success.

*“There are strong links between school excellence and wellbeing. Schools should consider teaching and learning in the development of wellbeing as parallel, integrated, complimentary processes.”* (NSW Government 2015)

Parents have the greatest influence and make the most significant impact on a child's wellbeing and therefore it is imperative for schools to actively encourage and support parents to be actively involved in their child's schooling. Children with high levels of wellbeing generally engage more with school, demonstrate better academic, social and emotional functioning. The Children's Society (2015) *Parenting Guide - How to Support Your Child's Wellbeing*, is a useful resource to support parents.

## Next Steps

- Look further into student wellbeing at our school by setting up a self-review team from across our school community to help us explore key aspects of student wellbeing and our current practice. The ERO indicators and publications, along with the Australia frameworks will be useful resources to support this.
- Evaluating our current systems and curriculum to see how well they serve our students now and into the future and what changes we need to see happen.
- Explore how we could incorporate *The Five Ways to Wellbeing - Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Take Notice and Give* along with *Be Creative and Play* into our curriculum.
- Continue to implement the new strategies and programmes around student wellbeing we have set up in 2016 and review the effectiveness of these. i.e.: Values initiatives, Pastoral Care Register, Pastoral Care Team, Key Competencies Groups and specific targeted student behaviour programmes and strategies,

*"Children and young people have different needs at different times of their lives. Understanding how this affects their wellbeing, and providing the right support when they need it, helps them grow and develop and reach their full potential."*  
(Scottish Government 2016)

- Finally, students are and should be at the heart of all our decisions. A holistic approach to how students learn and develop is integral to their overall wellbeing. Their wellbeing will significantly affect their life's journey and is vitally important for the healthy functioning of families, communities and society.

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