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Best paths identified to school wellbeing and academic outcomes

A review of different wellbeing approaches over the past decade has identified the most effective ways to support student wellbeing in schools.

The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), as the representative body for almost 500 non-government schools, recently commissioned the Telethon Kids Institute in WA to review a decade's worth of wellbeing literature – the first review of its kind – to identify the evidence-based approaches that best supported whole-school wellbeing.

"It demonstrates for the first time what effective whole-school wellbeing looks like and how schools can implement evidence-based strategies to support their students' wellbeing and academic achievement," AISNSW Chief Executive Dr Geoff Newcombe AM said.

"Student wellbeing is about a sense of belonging and connectedness, and the skills to make positive and healthy choices to support learning and achievement, delivered in a safe and accepting school climate"

"It's important that schools promote wellbeing, safety and positive relationships because these are essential for students to reach their social and emotional capabilities, wellbeing and academic outcomes."

The review's purpose was to assist schools to identify and implement evidence-based, whole-school proactive wellbeing approaches that foster safe, supportive and respectful environments. It highlighted six key factors which support student wellbeing:

1. Adopting a whole-school approach
2. Focusing on interventions with evidence of effectiveness
3. Establishing a dedicated team to drive implementation
4. Preparing the school for implementation
5. Providing meaningful engagement and support with families
6. Creating meaningful opportunities for student voice and engagement.

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"These factors align with AISNSW's recommended whole-school wellbeing approaches which use research and evidence-based planning tools, take a strengths-based approach, embed social and emotional learning pedagogy, link to curriculum and strengthen family partnerships," Dr Newcombe said.

"It was clear from the review that wellbeing among students was enhanced when schools explicitly taught social and emotional skills.

"It also highlighted how integral the school executive and wellbeing leadership teams are to effective wellbeing interventions and approaches."

Led by the Institute's Development and Education Program Head, Professor Donna Cross, the reviewers asked two questions:

1. How effective are whole-school student wellbeing approaches in improving student wellbeing outcomes and academic performance?
2. What are the implementable elements and/or characteristics of effective whole-school approaches to student wellbeing?

"The review affirms the support AISNSW has been providing the independent sector for many years and will continue to inform and support our whole-school wellbeing approaches into the future," Dr Newcombe said.

He said the findings will be made publicly available, nationally and internationally, to assist all schools.

See the full AISNSW Wellbeing Literature Review.

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