

MENTAL HEALTH IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS (MHIPS)

Sunbury Heights Primary School

Our Whole-School Approach to Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Sunbury, Victoria • Hume Region

School Context

Who we are, and where MHiPS fits into our school's journey



LOCATION

Sunbury, VIC

Hume region, north-west of Melbourne



SCHOOL SIZE

Just under 500

students enrolled, Prep to Year 6



MHiPS PILOT YEAR

2022

First year implementing the MHiPS framework

A growing school community

Sunbury Heights Primary School is a government primary school located in Sunbury, in Melbourne's north-west, within the Hume region.

A close-knit community of just under 500 students across Prep to Year 6.

In 2022, the school began implementing the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) framework — its pilot year of the initiative — introducing a dedicated Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader (MHWL) to lead a whole-school approach to student wellbeing.



The Challenges

Developing pathway of change and implementation



No systematic approach to mental health support

Wellbeing support relied on individual responses rather than a consistent, whole-school framework for identifying and supporting students.



No clear communication channels for parents

Clear lines of communication was established to ensure clarity and supports in place for their child's mental health and wellbeing



KEY FOCUS FOR ADDRESSING THESE CHALLENGES

Building teacher capacity to identify and support student mental health and wellbeing & building partnerships with external services and providers

Equipping classroom teachers with the knowledge and confidence to recognise early signs of difficulty and respond effectively is the foundation of our MHiPS implementation by strengthening Tier 1 universal supports and building positive climates for learning and whole school predictable and consistent school wide routines.



Sunbury Heights Primary School | MHiPS Whole-School Approach



Actions by the MHWL

Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader responds to the challenges



Professional development for teachers

Developed and delivered PD to build teacher capacity in identifying and supporting student mental health.



Clear wellbeing referral systems

Designed and implemented a clear wellbeing referral pathway so staff and families know how to raise and escalate concerns.



Data-informed tiered supports

Analysed wellbeing data — attendance, wellbeing, behavioural and ATOSS — and implemented active, tiered supports based on need.



Targeted use of Mental Health funding

Utilised the Mental Health Fund to amplify the mental health and wellbeing supports available to students.

Tier 2 Intervention: Wellbeing Small Groups

Weekly, timetabled Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) groups



Drumbeat

Rhythm-based group program building self-regulation, teamwork and emotional expression through drumming.



Lego Therapy

Structured, collaborative building sessions that develop social communication, turn-taking and problem-solving.



Cooking Classes

Hands-on cooking sessions, funded through OzHarvest grants, building life skills and social connection.



Friendology

Explicit friendship-skills program helping students navigate peer relationships and social challenges.



Wellbeing Group

General small-group support building emotional regulation, coping strategies and confidence.



Expanded Allied Health Support

On-site allied health now available to Sunbury Heights students



Occupational Therapist

3 days / week

Supports students' sensory, self-regulation and daily functioning needs on-site each week.



Psychologist

2 days / week

Provided via the Psychs in Schools Program, delivering direct clinical support to identified students.



Art Therapist

Interval sessions

Offers creative, expressive-arts based therapy as an additional pathway for student mental health and wellbeing support.



Strong links with external service providers

The MHWL maintains active referral pathways to external mental health and allied health providers, GPs and community services — ensuring students needing support beyond the school's team are connected quickly to the right care.

Biggest Benefits

The impact of MHiPS so far at Sunbury Heights Primary School

The little things? The little moments? They aren't little.

— Jon Kabat-Zinn —



Family & Community Partnerships

Strengthened partnerships between the school, families and the wider community.



Teacher Capacity

Built teacher confidence and skill in identifying and supporting student mental health.



Consistent Routines

School-wide, predictable and consistent routines for students and staff.



Stronger Tier 1 Practices

A consistent whole-school approach building a positive climate for learning.



Emotional Literacy

Growth in students' self-awareness, emotional vocabulary and regulation skills.



Proactive, Not Reactive

A shift from reactive responses to proactive, preventative support. Timely connections with school supports.