MHiPS
Mental Health in Primary Schools

Shaping the future of mental health and wellbeing in Australia's primary schools

MHiPS impact summary 2024

Mental Health in Primary Schools, or MHiPS, is a partnership between the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Government

murdoch children's research institute

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Education

Mental Health in Primary Schools – MHiPS – is a capacity and capability building initiative that supports primary schools to recognise and respond to student mental health and wellbeing needs.

The success of the initiative in Victoria has attracted the attention of other jurisdictions, with a new Queensland pilot site commencing MHiPS in 2025.

Our impact to date

Since its conceptualisation in 2019, the MHiPS initiative has made remarkable progress in advancing student mental health and wellbeing support in schools.

MHiPS was launched as a pilot in 10 schools in 2020 with support from the Victorian Government and The Ian Potter Foundation. In 2022, following two further expansions of the pilot and positive evaluation results, the Victorian Government made a $200 million investment into a statewide expansion of MHiPS, which has been enabled through a partnership with the Victorian Department of Education. MHiPS will reach all 1800+ Victorian government and low-fee non-government primary schools by 2026.

A comprehensive theory of change and associated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework underpin the MHiPS expansion in Victoria. Evaluation results consistently demonstrate the overwhelmingly positive impact MHiPS is having in Victorian schools.

Sustained impact

Comparisons between MHiPS schools and non-MHiPS schools show the following early impacts are **sustained over time**:

For teachers and other staff

- Improved knowledge of child mental health
- Increased self-efficacy to support student mental health and wellbeing
- Greater support to manage student mental health and wellbeing

Source:
Staff-report survey data, N=7,477, MHiPS 2024 evaluation

School leadership support for MHiPS increases over time and is associated with greater protected time for the MHWL, which in turn is linked to enhanced school and staff outcomes.

Growing impact

Comparisons between 'established' MHiPS schools (2+ years implementation) and 'new' MHiPS schools (<1 year implementation) show the following impacts **increase over time**:

For schools, teachers and other staff

- Enhanced school capacity to support student mental health and wellbeing
- Stronger school prioritisation of mental health and wellbeing
- Greater availability of in-school support to meet mental health needs in the classroom
- Increased use of consistent, positive language around mental health
- Improved knowledge of and relationships with external service providers
- Improved access to mental health services
- More curriculum-embedded teaching of mental health and wellbeing

For families

- Reduced mental health stigma
- Improved parent knowledge of child mental health

For students

- Greater improvement in student mental health and wellbeing, including enhanced emotional literacy and stronger school connectedness

Source:
Staff-report survey data, N=7,477, MHiPS 2024 evaluation
Parent report survey data, N=3,805, MHiPS 2024 evaluation

MHiPS Case Study

School overview

Year levels: Prep to Year 6 (150–200 students)

Area/School type: Regional, Catholic

MHWL: 0.6 FTE, appointed 2022

ICSEA: 1050–1100 range

CALD: 5–10% language other than English at home

Participants: MHWL, Principal, Teacher.

Students' mental health and wellbeing (MHWB) needs

Anxiety, school refusal, suicidal ideation, and challenging behaviours.

'We also have other more complex issues that are arising and I think that, whilst they may have previously been managed as behavioural concerns, with the increased understanding of mental health issues, we are now understanding that, in fact, these are mental health related situations.'

Principal, 2023.

School impact

1. Increased engagement with MHWB by staff and students

- All interviewed staff described a shift in how students and fellow staff talked about and related to mental health and wellbeing, with increased use of a shared language helping to reduce stigma and support self-awareness among students:

'Because [the MHWL and students are] using all this language all the time, [the MHWL is] taking away that stigma... the kids will sit there and go, 'Oh my, that's my brain! My brain functions like that.' **Teacher 1, 2023.**

- Principal observed a cultural change away from more punitive behavioural approaches and towards a wellbeing-informed approach to behaviour.

2. Reduced mental health stigma, increased understanding of neurodiversity and disability pride

- A teacher described significant change in MHWB language use among students, particularly in how students with mental health diagnoses and/or disabilities described themselves:

'They use that [neuroaffirming] language all the time, and they're very proud of it. I know that these students, there's a lot of neurodivergent children in here, and before they wouldn't talk about what they were diagnosed with or what they were feeling, and now they're naming it. They feel very proud of who they are, and they're not ashamed anymore to say this is what I'm going through. It's been a big shift, from kids who I've been teaching for a few years, who didn't want anyone to know, but now they're extremely proud to be who they are.' **Teacher 1, 2023.**

3. More positive engagement from parents on MHWB

- A teacher described improved engagement with parents on wellbeing matters, and described parents using resources provided to them by the MHWL to support their child:

'It's been well taken on, and parents have been very grateful.' **Teacher, 2023.**

- MHWL described there still being some challenges with stigma or misunderstanding about student wellbeing issues as simply *'being naughty'*, however they noted that the process of cultural change had begun *'filtering out a little better'* throughout the school community. MHWL saw this process of change as being about reducing stigma and shame, and increasing practical support.

'We have more structures or tools in our kit for students who are still refusing [to come in] in the morning or come into school not quite ready to learn. We have more tools for de-escalation. So it's definitely the tool kit that the MHiPS program has built.'

Principal, 2023.

Contact us

For more information on the Mental Health in Primary Schools initiative, please contact:

Frank Oberklaid
Founding Director, Mental Health in Primary Schools

E frank.oberklaid@mcri.edu.au
T +61 419 555 256

Simone Darling
Senior Program Manager, Mental Health in Primary Schools

E simone.darling@mcri.edu.au
T +61 434 642 259

Department of Education, Victoria
Student Mental Health Branch,
Wellbeing Health and Engagement Division

E mentalhealth@education.vic.gov.au