



CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
MELBOURNE

eXcel:  
Wellbeing  
for learning



Wellbeing for learning  
in Catholic school communities

**First published May 2018**

Catholic Education Melbourne  
228 Victoria Parade  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

© Catholic Education Melbourne 2018

**Correspondence to:**

The Executive Director  
Catholic Education Melbourne  
PO Box 3  
East Melbourne VIC 8002  
T: +61 3 9267 0228  
E: [execdirector@cem.edu.au](mailto:execdirector@cem.edu.au)

[www.cem.edu.au](http://www.cem.edu.au)



Licensed under NEALS

The NEALS Licence permits Australian schools and educational bodies to copy digital and print materials for educational use in schools free of charge.



## Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities

# Contents

Foreword	2
Our commitment to wellbeing: Inspired and sustained by the gospel	4
eXcel: The core dimensions	5
Wellbeing in Catholic school communities	6
eXcel: In action	8
eXcel: At a glance	10
Enable	12
Connect	14
Engage	16
Learn	18
eXcel: In summary	20
Endnotes	22

# Foreword

Children and young people are at the heart of all our endeavours in Catholic education. As unique environments in which *'faith, culture and life are brought into harmony'* <sup>[1]</sup>, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne promote wellbeing and human flourishing by nurturing the whole person – their spiritual, cognitive, physical, emotional and social selves <sup>[2]</sup>. This is a journey in hope and towards hope <sup>[3]</sup> undertaken in partnership with parents, who are the first educators of their children.

In Catholic schools, wellbeing encompasses all dimensions of life. As a central outcome of schooling, wellbeing is integral to learning excellence, good health and life success <sup>[4]</sup>. A positive sense of wellbeing can foster higher levels of engagement, school connectedness, emotional vitality, psychosocial functioning and academic performance. It is a key factor in enabling children and young people to contribute to society and enjoy meaningful and spiritually enriched lives.

Catholic Education Melbourne has developed *eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* as an explicit, practical guide to inform pedagogical practice, curriculum design and policies to strengthen children and young people's wellbeing and learning outcomes. Presented as four intersecting dimensions of **e**nable, **c**onnect, **e**ngage and **l**earn, the first letter of each has been combined to form the overarching concept of *'eXcel'*. The articulation of these four foundational elements for optimal wellbeing is the result of extensive dialogue and consultation gathering the collective wisdom of school leaders, student wellbeing staff in schools, Catholic Education Melbourne staff, research, experts in the field and critical friends.

*eXcel* encapsulates the spirit of 'being the best we can be' with God's grace. It embraces the belief that children and young people have the capacity to achieve their full potential when their wellbeing is nurtured in faith-filled learning environments that are safe, inclusive and respectful.



*eXcel* builds on Catholic Education Melbourne's *Horizons of Hope* <sup>[5]</sup> education framework, and its Wellbeing Foundation Statement <sup>[6]</sup>, to explore in detail the nature and importance of wellbeing and how it is enacted in Catholic schools. Through the dimensions of **enable**, **connect**, **engage** and **learn**, *eXcel* highlights the integral link between wellbeing, engagement and lifelong achievement. It provides Catholic schools with a broad, coherent platform to:

- identify key factors contributing to children and young people's sense of safety, connectedness and resilience
- develop authentic engagement with families, parishes and communities to promote children and young people's social and emotional learning and academic success
- evaluate and renew wellbeing strategies to facilitate innovation and sustain continuous improvement.

A Literature Review <sup>[7]</sup> developed in partnership with the University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre provides a detailed analysis of the supporting research and evidence base.

In today's complex and interconnected world, *eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* acknowledges the importance of empowering all children and young people with the knowledge and skills to nurture their own wellbeing and contribute to that of others. It affirms Catholic Education Melbourne's ongoing commitment to supporting 'rich, deep and varied learning experiences' <sup>[8]</sup> for our students, so that they may develop as optimistic, resilient young people of faith, ready to be effective members of community, contributing to and enriching the world around them.



**Stephen Elder**  
Executive Director

# Our commitment to wellbeing: Inspired and sustained by the gospel

*'It is in relationship with God and others in the school community that young people are enabled to discover who they are, where they come from and what their destiny can be'.*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, p. 4

*eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* is inspired and sustained by the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life and teachings show all people 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14: 6), providing the roadmap for fostering positive life attitudes, aspirations and service. Through the gospel, Jesus illuminates for us how we are called to live out our mission, approach our work and conduct our relationships with love, hope, dignity, compassion and forgiveness.

In Catholic schools the Good News of Jesus Christ is carried in people's hearts, embedded in narratives, nurtured in relationships, demonstrated through actions and encountered in the teaching and learning cycle. Foundational in promoting authentic partnerships, communal obligations and a commitment to social justice, the gospel affirms that, in God's love, every person is sacred.

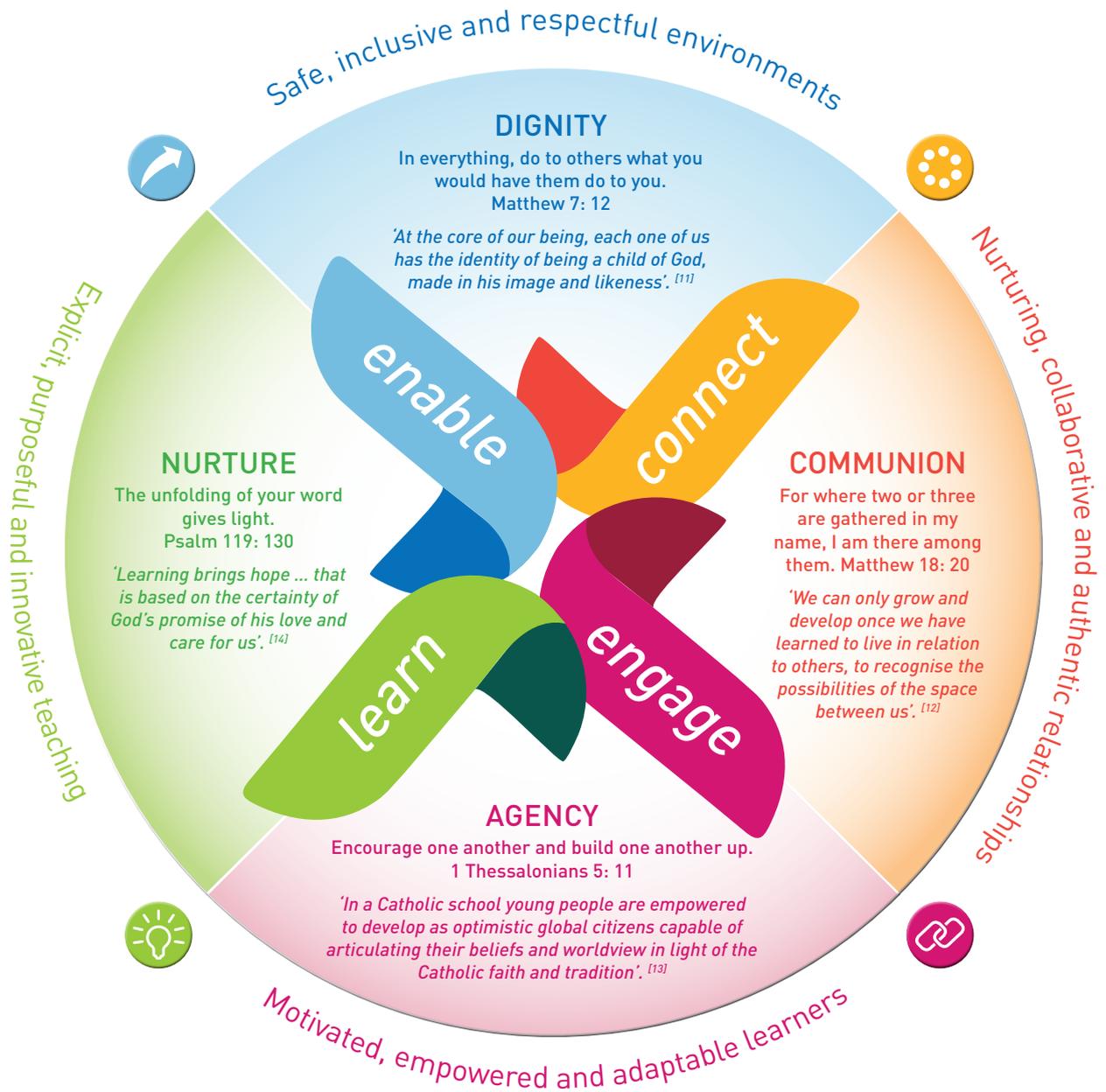
Valuing the unique giftedness and temperament of each person in all their richness and complexity, *eXcel* has the child as its central focus. It is informed by a holistic understanding of wellbeing that promotes the development of children and young people in relation to self, others, their faith and the environment.

*eXcel* acknowledges that wellbeing is enabled in purposeful, life-giving learning environments that are distinctively Catholic in context and tradition. Every dimension of being within a Catholic school community is focused on creating a vision in which all may have life in abundance (John 10: 10).

Cultivated in **communion** with God and in relationship with others, wellbeing is nourished through the actions, interactions and attitudes of all community members.<sup>[9]</sup> In Catholic schools, human flourishing is supported by appreciating and celebrating the innate **dignity** and immeasurable worth of each person, who is made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1: 27).

Recognising that 'each human life is of unique value, loved by God, with his or her own gifts'<sup>[10]</sup>, *eXcel* integrates faith with life and the world in which children and young people live. Through authentic partnerships where school leaders, staff, students, families, parishes and communities collaborate as active, connected and empowered **agents**, wellbeing is **nurtured**, social capital is generated and common purpose is built.

# eXcel: The core dimensions



# Wellbeing in Catholic school communities

*'The mission, and privilege, of the Catholic school is to build a community where authentic relationships based on love provide the means and the support for all students to flourish and grow into the fullness of life'.*

Archbishop Denis Hart 2015, *To Serve and Lead: Catholic Education Melbourne Strategic Plan 2015–2019*, p. 1

Wellbeing is critical to children and young people's learning and life outcomes. It is embedded in all facets of life within a Catholic school community and is lived in the everyday as a reflection of the Christian faith. Wellbeing is enacted through the school's vision and mission and its policies, practices and procedures, which are grounded in Catholic teaching and tradition. Underpinning pedagogical practice and curriculum design, wellbeing is brought to life through the actions, interactions and attitudes of all school community members.

School leaders, teachers and families are pivotal in fostering the wellbeing of children and young people. Together they strengthen the students' ability to navigate the breadth of experiences they will face in their environment and relationships.

As a complex and multidimensional construct, wellbeing comprises and is influenced by a range of interrelated factors. It encompasses our sense of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life and positive relations with others and the environment. Learning to identify the connections between people, ideas and their surrounds enables children and young people to better understand how to regulate emotions and behaviour from within.<sup>[15], [16]</sup>

*When children learn to self-regulate they have stronger friendships and relationships with others, are more able to pay attention and learn new things and deal better with the normal stresses and disappointments of daily life.<sup>[17]</sup>*

In Catholic school settings, 'wellbeing' is understood to be '*realising one's unique potential through physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development*'.<sup>[18]</sup> Wellbeing incorporates '*the degree to which a student is functioning effectively*'<sup>[19]</sup> and their capacity to cope, learn and thrive.

Within **eXcel**, wellbeing and learning are inextricably linked. Supported by an extensive evidence base, **eXcel** asserts that children and young people who have a '*sustainable state of positive mood, attitude, resilience and satisfaction with self*'<sup>[20]</sup> are more engaged and successful learners.<sup>[21]</sup>

Teaching wellbeing in schools **enables** safe and respectful school communities; **connects** children, young people, families and staff through collaborative and caring relationships; **engages** students through experiences that motivate, empower, and inspire; and reframes the **learning** of wellbeing as an integral component of broader academic learning.



# eXcel: In action

Social connectedness, academic engagement and achievement, physical wellness and spiritual growth are interdependent. This holistic view recognises that wellbeing is both central to learning and an outcome of learning; neither wellbeing nor learning can be viewed separately from the other.

*eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* demonstrates that wellbeing and learning evolve through a series of dynamic, complex and interconnected processes where the *'relationship between the home, school and community present endless possibilities and opportunities for the co-construction and transfer of skills and knowledge'*.<sup>[22]</sup>

Through the four intersecting dimensions of enable, connect, engage and learn, wellbeing is enacted and enriched. Activity in one *eXcel* dimension enhances activity in each of the other dimensions. For example, **enabling** child-safe and child-friendly environments, characterised by a commitment to inclusion and respect for diversity, enhances **connectedness**. A sense of connectedness and belonging fosters positive relationships, communication and partnerships. In turn, this promotes **engagement** and experiences

that contribute to building self-esteem and rapport, developing resilience, empowering voice and strengthening school, home and community networks beyond the classroom. Engagement enables children and young people to connect in-school **learning** with the 'real world' of their lives.

When children and young people have increased agency over what, how, when and where they learn, they experience 'flow' – positive energy, enhanced motivation, higher levels of awareness, greater resourcefulness, feelings of competence, stronger relationships with their peers and teachers, higher academic performance and satisfaction with schooling.<sup>[23], [24]</sup>

Promoting a whole-school approach, *eXcel* affirms that children and young people's ability to grow and pursue a meaningful life occurs within the larger social, cultural, political and economic contexts of which they are a part. Embracing the view that *'who we are as individuals is not simply located in us but around us, in our relationships with others and in our experiences of those relationships'*<sup>[25]</sup>, Catholic schools work in partnership with their communities to promote a strong sense of wellbeing, belonging and security.





# eXcel: at a glance

---



## Enable

Safe, inclusive and respectful environments

### Goal

Environments for learners and their communities are safe, inclusive and respectful.

### Essential Elements

- The school community promotes inclusivity and reflects a culture of hope, faith and belonging for students, staff, families and the broader community.
- Students feel, and are, valued, safe, affirmed and enabled to participate in school and life.
- Leaders, staff and families work collaboratively to create and strengthen safe, child-friendly environments for learning.
- Justice, equity and respect are actively promoted and evident in school policy and practice.



## Connect

Nurturing, collaborative and authentic relationships

### Goal

Relationships between people, and partnerships within communities, encourage students to connect, grow and flourish.

### Essential Elements

- Members of the school community have a strong sense of connection and belonging. They know that the school community is their community.
- Relationships across the school community are authentic, respectful and trusting.
- Relationships with families are actively fostered and sustained to support students to thrive in learning and life.
- A culture of collaboration and partnership is evident within and beyond the school.



## Engage

Motivated, empowered and adaptable learners

### Goal

Engaged and resilient learners have a strong sense of self, purpose and integrity.

### Essential Elements

- Students have a positive learning disposition. They are motivated, confident and engaged learners, able to effectively contribute and adapt to their world.
- Students have an authentic voice and are active agents in their learning and wellbeing.
- Families and teachers are mentors and partners in their children's learning journey.
- Students, along with all members of the school community, act with integrity. They take personal responsibility for actions and demonstrate respect for self and others by acting with honesty, courtesy and fairness.



## Learn

Explicit, purposeful and innovative teaching

### Goal

Explicit teaching and learning experiences promote holistic development for lifelong success.

### Essential Elements

- Teachers purposefully use a variety of innovative strategies and tools to understand student needs, facilitate active learning and develop their creative potential to make sense of self, others, the world, and their place within it.
- Teachers build on the knowledge of the learner. They know their students and respond to their learning needs through focused self-reflection and evaluation.
- Families, teachers and other significant adults play complementary roles that contribute to the spiritual, emotional, social and cognitive development of the whole child.
- Teachers create communities of learning that support students to be self-motivated and curious as they explore the what, how and why of the world around them. Students develop the knowledge, skills, confidence and resilience to succeed as lifelong learners in school, family, friendship and work.



# enable

## Safe, inclusive and respectful environments

*'Every individual has a personal narrative, a story of experiences that colours what they question, the answers they seek, the possibilities they see, and the ways they come to know truth'.*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2016, *Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context*, p. 12

### Optimal wellbeing and learning are **enabled** in school environments that are safe, inclusive and respectful.

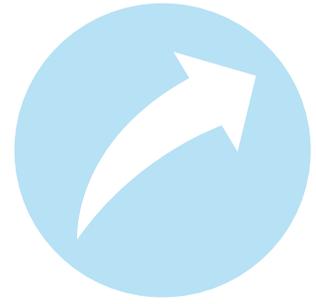
Vibrant, life-giving communities responsive to the creative presence of God in all dimensions of life provide an environment which enables and encourages the unique potential, gifts and innate qualities of each child and young person to unfold.

Characterised by an open, friendly atmosphere with a strong sense of hope, welcome and belonging, enabling school communities invest energy into growing and sustaining positive relationships. They act *'in the best interests of the child'*<sup>[26]</sup> and the community of which she/he is a member. Respect and kindness are clear expectations and it is every person's right to be free from bullying, harassment or intimidation. Members of the community show their care and compassion for others through their behaviours, actions and words.

Fairness, equality and a deep sense of justice are embedded in the culture of an enabling school community. Diversity is embraced and celebrated and the sacred dignity and worth of all persons is honoured and affirmed. In enabling schools, *'encounters between different cultures, religions and language are seen as a source of mutual enrichment'*.<sup>[27]</sup>

As communities where children and young people's wellbeing and learning can flourish, enabling school environments are child-safe and child-friendly. They are places where clear individual and collective responsibilities for ensuring the protection of children and young people are embedded in standards of behaviour and work practices.<sup>[28]</sup> In enabling school environments, child safety is paramount. It is approached with vigilance and an ongoing commitment to continuous assessment, action, reflection and improvement.

In safe, inclusive and respectful learning environments school leaders and staff purposefully collaborate with students, families and their communities to co-create an explicit wellbeing agenda and commitment. This includes identifying strategies and resources that empower school leaders and staff to nurture their own wellbeing and flourish in their roles. When consistent expectations are communicated and enacted through policies, practices and pedagogy, the health and safety of all members of the school community are enhanced and their capacity to engage in learning is strengthened.



## Enabling schools:

### Essential elements

#### Culture and environment

- cultivate safe physical, emotional, social and online environments that are positive, predictable, structured and familiar, through school policies, practices and pedagogy
- embed an organisational culture of safeguarding children and young people in their community to ensure risk is rigorously assessed and relevant policies and strategies are in place to create a 'zero tolerance'<sup>[29]</sup> of all forms of abuse
- promote consistent expectations of behaviour based on a set of agreed policies and structures that are known and understood by all members of the school community

#### Relationships and partnerships

- encourage a continuity of goals and expectations between the school, the home and the community by supporting the development of authentic partnerships with families

#### Inclusive voice, agency and participation

- encourage inclusion, model collaboration and empower the voice of students, families and staff in the decision-making process
- apply the principles of procedural fairness, equity and justice to all situations, giving opportunity for all voices to be heard with respect
- provide differentiated support to meet children and young people's diverse needs and capabilities

#### Learning and achievement

- foster choice, prioritise participation and develop a range of supportive pathways to suit the physical, social, emotional and educational needs of all children and young people
- acknowledge and celebrate children and young people's progress and achievements

#### Professional practice and growth

- support staff to build their professional practice to strengthen school community wellbeing and safety
- nurture and support staff wellbeing by cultivating mentally and physically safe workplaces that provide opportunities and resources to build self-efficacy and promote individual and professional growth

*Practical tools exploring this dimension may be accessed via the CEVN website, under Curriculum & Student Support / Student Wellbeing / eXcel: Wellbeing for Learning.*



# connect

## Nurturing, collaborative and authentic relationships

*'It is this feeling of being known, valued and understood that provides the foundation for learning and success'.*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2016, *Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context*, p. 12

### Authentic human flourishing occurs in communion and connection with others.

In Catholic schools, connectedness is lived and expressed within communities and between communities through fellowship, participation and communion in faith. *'Inspired by a God who reaches out to us in love, the Catholic school is called into community where interconnectedness and quality relationships shape and affirm the identity of each person'.*<sup>[30]</sup>

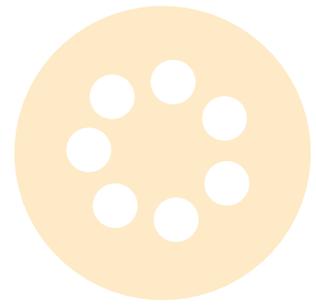
Connectedness generates a sense of belonging, solidarity and sharing – a feeling that you matter and that your contributions are valued. It is strengthened through nurturing, collaborative and authentic relationships. As a powerful protective factor in promoting resilience, self-esteem, mental and emotional health and positive behaviour, connectedness contributes to enhanced individual and school community wellbeing, social capital, and mutual trust.<sup>[31]</sup>

Within the school environment, *'connectedness is realised and promoted in the quality of the relationships between students and their teachers, between students and the school, between students and other students, and between schools and the local community, including parents'.*<sup>[32]</sup>

Children and young people who experience school connection believe education matters and

that their teachers know, understand and care about them and their learning.<sup>[33]</sup> They are more motivated, have better educational outcomes, demonstrate higher levels of engagement and participation in extracurricular activities, and are more likely to complete their schooling and activate help-seeking strategies when required.<sup>[34]</sup> Connected children and young people are less likely to feel isolated and engage in compromising risk-taking behaviours.

Significantly, connected Catholic school communities recognise the interdependence of educators, families, students, the parish and the wider community in fulfilling their educational mission. They continually seek opportunities to tap into a diverse range of resources, expertise and innovation within and beyond the school community to strengthen stakeholder engagement in their everyday work, thereby further supporting the social, emotional and academic growth of children and young people. In creating such 'outward-facing' cultures, school leaders embrace opportunities to develop networks between schools, across sectors and with parents, business and the community to support wellbeing and learning outcomes.



## Connected schools: Essential elements

### Culture and environment

- develop a culture in which all members of the school community experience a sense of welcome, belonging and attachment through caring, nurturing and trusting relationships

### Relationships and partnerships

- cultivate emotionally and physically safe school environments where supportive teacher–student relationships and clearly defined expectations contribute to positive behaviours, higher levels of engagement and enhanced safety and wellbeing <sup>[35], [36]</sup>
- invest in building quality partnerships to strengthen family and community engagement for wellbeing, learning and growth

### Inclusive voice, agency and participation

- engage in deep listening through formal and informal dialogue to gauge the 'temperature of the community' and develop an appreciation of their expectations, interests, reactions and realities <sup>[37]</sup>
- develop structures and policies that reflect Catholic teaching and the values of democracy and inclusiveness to ensure multiple voices are empowered and different perspectives are represented
- promote the active engagement and participation of all members of the school community as essential partners in enriching the formation of children and young people

### Learning and achievement

- draw on family cultures and community resources to design curricula and educational opportunities, accommodating diverse student interests and capabilities
- connect children and young people with real-world contexts, contemporary issues and diverse community resources to create fulfilling learning and life opportunities

### Professional practice and growth

- build the professional capacity of staff to establish and nurture strong learning relationships with students and families

*Practical tools exploring this dimension may be accessed via the CEVN website, under Curriculum & Student Support / Student Wellbeing / eXcel: Wellbeing for Learning.*



## Motivated, empowered and adaptable learners

*Catholic schools 'support students to grow in virtue and to embrace a view of themselves and the world that leads to peace, justice, and the prospering of the whole of creation'.*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2016, *Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context*, p. 5

## Families and communities aspire for their children to succeed as engaged learners and citizens.

Positive engagement with schooling enhances children and young people's academic and wellbeing outcomes, as well as their capacity to contribute to their community and make meaningful decisions about a range of issues that affect them and their world.

In Catholic schools, **spiritual engagement** permeates all dimensions of life and learning. Children and young people are invited to engage with the story of Jesus Christ and deepen their encounter with God, shaping their identity and making meaning in their lives. In dialogue with the Catholic faith, all children and young people are encouraged to engage their 'head, heart and hands' in Christian ministry and service to strengthen their encounter with God and develop a sense of the Spirit at work.

More broadly, 'engagement' refers to students' psychological investment, motivation and effort directed towards their learning. This type of engagement occurs at behavioural, emotional and cognitive levels.<sup>[38]</sup>

**Behavioural engagement** refers to students' disposition and participation in education, including academic, social and extracurricular activities. **Emotional engagement** encompasses students' attachment to school, their attitudes, interests and desire for competence and understanding. It is strongly aligned to their sense of belonging and connectedness to their learning environment, peers, staff members and family.<sup>[39]</sup> **Cognitive engagement** measures students' investment in learning, and their intrinsic motivation,

commitment, capacity to work with others and ability to self-regulate and function productively.<sup>[40]</sup>

Learning environments that provide opportunities for children and young people to co-construct knowledge and cultivate curiosity, creativity, imagination, inquiry, experimentation and investigation are more likely to engage and motivate them to invest in their learning. This autonomy empowers children and young people to see themselves as competent, capable learners and valued citizens within the classroom and beyond. Practices that encourage active participation and authentic 'student voice' in decisions that impact on their safety, wellbeing and learning are more likely to enhance students' sense of self-worth, esteem and confidence.<sup>[41]</sup> These feelings of greater competence contribute to improved resilience, satisfaction and success.<sup>[42]</sup>

Socially, engagement with schooling can develop leadership qualities, foster positive relationships and respect for others, improve communication skills and encourage a greater sense of responsibility.<sup>[43], [44]</sup> At a civic level, engagement builds children and young people's awareness and understanding of the skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that will enable them to effectively participate and remain engaged in their community. In Catholic schools, engagement through a call to service and 'reaching out' beyond self for the common good enables students to promote justice, inclusion and equity.<sup>[45]</sup>



## Engaging schools:

### Essential elements

#### Culture and environment

- establish clear classroom structures with consistent expectations for teachers and students regarding participation, behaviour, performance and feedback

#### Relationships and partnerships

- build strong and productive relationships with students, parents, teachers and the broader community through collaboration and a shared sense of purpose

#### Inclusive voice, agency and participation

- develop children and young people's leadership skills, civic awareness, environmental stewardship, ethical responsibility and sense of hope, agency and optimism that, through their contribution, a better world is possible <sup>[46]</sup>
- invest in a range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to complement students' interests, goals and learning profiles

#### Learning and achievement

- co-create and personalise deep learning experiences to enable children and young people to design the 'what, how, when and where' of knowledge construction
- encourage active citizenship and create opportunities for children and young people to participate in community-based outreach, service learning and social justice initiatives
- integrate knowledge and experiences from school, home and the community to enrich learning and motivate interest
- create inclusive and empowering environments that value and encourage educational achievement and excellence for all

#### Professional practice and growth

- develop the capacity of leaders and teachers to identify and understand the links between student wellbeing, growth and learning outcomes

*Practical tools exploring this dimension may be accessed via the CEVN website, under Curriculum & Student Support / Student Wellbeing / eXcel: Wellbeing for Learning.*



# learn

## Explicit, purposeful and innovative teaching

*'Catholic educators see learning as a journey of endless possibilities, where students are energised to seek meaning and explore questions about the world around them'.*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2016, *Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context*, p. 5

## Explicit teaching and **learning experiences** that support wellbeing promote holistic development for lifelong success.

In school communities where leaders, staff, students and families consistently model emotional literacy, relationships, climate and culture are more positive.

Individual, interpersonal and societal wellbeing requires children and young people to develop competencies that build resilience, a positive sense of identity, self-worth and empathy. Learning how to cooperate, negotiate and make informed and responsible decisions builds essential lifelong skills that contribute to wellness and success.<sup>[47]</sup> This requires innovative teaching which explicitly draws out the learning dispositions and strengths of students, creatively engaging them in a wide variety of enriching, personalised learning experiences.

All members of the school community have a role to play in nurturing the development of the whole child. Inspired by faith, Catholic school communities promote the full flourishing of each child and young person. They create opportunities for children and young people to engage in deep learning experiences whereby they master the skills required to develop 'a sense of who I am and how I can be in the world'.<sup>[48]</sup>

*Beyond preparing children to become 'well-educated' citizens ... education must also cultivate in young people spirituality, reverence for the natural environment, and a sense of social justice. Education must inspire children's creativity, imagination, compassion, self-knowledge, social skills, and emotional health ... to [help them] live more consciously within their communities and natural ecosystems.<sup>[49]</sup>*

Schools equip children and young people with a range of competencies that weave together aspects of managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing.<sup>[50]</sup> These competencies include self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness and relationship skills.<sup>[51]</sup> Together these competencies assist children and young people to understand, manage and communicate their emotions; feel and demonstrate empathy for others; establish and sustain positive relationships; identify and work towards their goals; draw on a host of positive self-regulation and coping strategies; solve problems; and think critically about how their choices may be influenced by others and their environment and what the consequences of these choices may be.<sup>[52], [53]</sup>

Adopting a school-wide approach that focuses on explicitly teaching social and emotional competencies, that is, *'the process through which children enhance their ability to integrate thinking, feeling and behaving to achieve important life tasks'*<sup>[54]</sup>, can enhance resilience, personal wellbeing and mental health.<sup>[55]</sup> Learning and applying social and emotional competencies can translate into improved engagement and connectedness to school, enhanced peer and teacher relationships, and safer, more inclusive and respectful school environments.<sup>[56]</sup>

Social and emotional competencies are essential life skills required to succeed in school, family, friendship and work.<sup>[57]</sup> Children and young people need social and emotional skills, and academic skills, to thrive.



## Learning schools:

### Essential elements

#### Culture and environment

- develop an integrated, whole-school, strengths-based vision and approach to teaching social and emotional literacy that complement innovative teaching practice
- model effective social and emotional interactions among all members of the school community

#### Relationships and partnerships

- partner with parents and families to build children and young people's resilience and assist them to develop characteristics that promote a positive sense of self, and a belief in their potential to flourish

#### Inclusive voice, agency and participation

- provide opportunities for children and young people to strengthen their decision-making and goal-setting skills in the classroom, the school, at home and in the community
- use a range of cooperative and inquiry-based learning strategies to pose questions, problems and scenarios that enable children and young people to deepen their understanding of knowledge and behaviours that support them to work and relate well with others<sup>[58]</sup>

#### Learning and achievement

- equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to understand and manage themselves and their relationships now and throughout their lives

#### Professional practice and growth

- invest time, resources and professional learning into raising awareness and understanding of the theory and pedagogy of social and emotional learning with staff, students and families

*Practical tools exploring this dimension may be accessed via the CEVN website, under Curriculum & Student Support / Student Wellbeing / eXcel: Wellbeing for Learning.*

# eXcel: In summary

*eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* articulates the importance of wellbeing to children and young people's spiritual, cognitive, physical, emotional and social growth. It is not prescriptive. Rather, the four dimensions of **enable**, **connect**, **engage** and **learn (eXcel)** are designed to:

- promote common understanding
- enable consistent approaches
- develop shared commitment
- inspire rigorous conversation
- encourage deep reflection
- inform innovative action.

*eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities* supports the development of **school-wide practices and cultures** that enable children and young people to:

- deeply connect 'who they are' and 'how they can be' in the world to the Catholic faith
- reach their potential
- build positive and connected relationships

- develop skills and attitudes that promote wellbeing and resilience
- deepen their appreciation of learning, their perseverance and their stamina
- lead optimistic, graced and hope-filled lives of impact.

Enhancing school community wellbeing is an ongoing and complex endeavour that requires explicit strategy, commitment, energy and continuous effort over time to sustain. It is a shared responsibility illuminated by the Good News and founded in Jesus' message of God's love for all. It is enriched through purposeful collaboration and dialogue between school leaders, staff, students, families, the parish and local communities.

Wellbeing and the full flourishing of the person cannot be separated from learning: they are inextricably linked and must be positioned at the heart of school life.



*'A positive sense of wellbeing  
supports a base for rich  
learning that enables young  
people to flourish.'*

Catholic Education Melbourne 2017, *Horizons of Hope:  
Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, p. 3

# Endnotes

- 1 Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, n. 11, accessed 10 March 2017 [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_27041998\\_school2000\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html)
- 2 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2016, *Horizons of Hope: Vision and Context*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 5, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-vision-context.pdf>
- 3 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2015, *To Serve and Lead: Strategic Plan 2015–2019*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 4, accessed 25 January 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/About-Us/2015–2019-Strategic-Plan.aspx>
- 4 Ministerial Council of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 2008, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, MCEETYA, accessed 8 August 2016 [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)
- 5 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2016, *Horizons of Hope: An Education Framework for the Archdiocese of Melbourne*, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/Our-Schools/Curriculum-Learning-Programs/Horizons-of-Hope.aspx>
- 6 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Wellbeing.pdf>
- 7 Cahill, H, Smith, C & Crofts, J 2017, *Enhancing Student Wellbeing: A review of research for Catholic Education Melbourne*, produced by the Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, for Catholic Education Melbourne, accessed 20 February 2018 <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Curriculum.aspx?id=2966>
- 8 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2015, *To Serve and Lead: Strategic Plan 2015–2019*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 4, accessed 25 January 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/About-Us/2015–2019-Strategic-Plan.aspx>
- 9 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Wellbeing.pdf>
- 10 Hart, D 2016, *Archbishop's Message*, Catholic Education Melbourne, accessed 25 January 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/About-Us/Archbishops-Message.aspx>
- 11 Dolan, Cardinal Timothy Michael 2014, 'Made in God's image and likeness', *Our Sunday Visitor*, 11 December, Accessed 6 February 2018 <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/the-human-person/made-in-god-s-image-and-likeness.html>
- 12 Buber, M 1958, *I and Thou*, trans. RG Smith, Scribner, New York, p. 47.
- 13 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Wellbeing in a Catholic School*, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Wellbeing.pdf>
- 14 Hart, D 2016, *Learning is a Discovery that Brings Hope, A Pastoral Letter on the Catholic Church in Education*, Catholic Education Melbourne, Melbourne, p. 3, accessed 25 January 2018 [http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/About-Us/Documentation/Archbishop\\_pastoral-letter.pdf](http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/About-Us/Documentation/Archbishop_pastoral-letter.pdf)
- 15 Brunzell, T, Stokes, H & Waters, L 2016, 'Trauma-informed positive education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students', *Contemporary School Psychology*, 20, 63–83.
- 16 Brunzell, T, Stokes, H & Waters, L 2016, 'Trauma-informed flexible learning: Classrooms that strengthen regulatory abilities', *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 7 (2), 218–239.
- 17 KidsMatter 2017, *Explaining Self-regulation*, accessed 8 August 2017 <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/social-and-emotional-learning/anger/explaining-self-regulation>
- 18 Kickbusch, I, Gordon, J, Kropf, D & O'Toole, L 2011, *Learning for Wellbeing: A policy priority for children and youth in Europe. A Process for Change*, p. 137, accessed 3 March 2017 <http://www.ecswe.org/downloads/publications/QOC-V3/Chapter-6.pdf>
- 19 Fraillon, J 2004, *Measuring Student Well-being in the Context of Australian Schooling: Discussion paper*, commissioned by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services as an agent of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), p. 6.

- 20 Noble, T & Wyatt, T 2008, *Scoping Study into Approaches to Student Wellbeing: Literature review*, Australian Catholic University and Erebus International, Sydney, p. 7.
- 21 Social Policy Research Centre 2010, *Conceptualisation of Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Children and Young People, and Policy Implications*, a research report prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Sydney.
- 22 Di Paolo, L 2016, *Connecting and Relating: The experiences of a 'Schools as Core Social Centres' (SACSC) cluster in building, school family and community engagement*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Melbourne, p. 366.
- 23 Wang, M & Eccles, J 2013, 'School context, achievement motivation, and academic engagement: A longitudinal study of school engagement using a multidimensional perspective', *Learning and Instruction*, 28, 12–23.
- 24 NESTA 2013, *By Us, For Us: The power of co-design and co-delivery*, accessed 18 January 2017 [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_power\\_of\\_co-design\\_and\\_co-delivery.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_power_of_co-design_and_co-delivery.pdf)
- 25 Luoma, J 2007, 'Systems thinking in complex responsive processes and systems intelligence', in R Hamalainen & E Saarinen (Eds) 2007, *Systems Intelligence in Leadership and Everyday Life*, Helsinki University of Technology: Systems Analysis Laboratory, Helsinki, p. 287.
- 26 UNICEF 2017, *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language*, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, accessed 23 March 2017 <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>
- 27 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Learning Diversity in a Catholic School*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 3, <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Learning-Diversity.pdf>
- 28 Moore, T, McArthur, M, Noble-Carr, D & Harcourt, D 2015, *Taking Us Seriously: Children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.
- 29 Victorian Government Gazette 2016, 7 January, *Ministerial Order 870: Child safe standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools*, accessed 15 March 2017 <http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2016/GG2016S002.pdf>
- 30 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Religious Dimension of a Catholic School*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 9, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Religious-Dimension.pdf>
- 31 Roffey, S 2011, 'Enhancing connectedness in Australian children and young people', *Asian Journal of Counselling*, 18 (1 & 2), 15–39.
- 32 Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2015, *Student Wellbeing: Literature Review*, New South Wales Government: Education & Communities, p. 5, accessed 18 January 2017 <https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications-filter/student-wellbeing-literature-review>
- 33 Leather, N 2009, 'Risk-taking behaviour in adolescence: A literature review' *Journal of Child Health Care*, 13 (3), 295–304.
- 34 Eliot, M, Cornell, D, Gregory, A & Fan, X 2010, 'Supportive school climate and student willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence', *Journal of School Psychology*, 48, 533–553.
- 35 Roorda, D, Koomen, H, Spilt, J & Oort, F 2011, 'The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach', *Review of Educational Research*, 81 (4), 493–529.
- 36 Suldo, S, Gelley, C, Roth, R & Bateman, L 2015, 'Influence of peer social experiences on positive and negative indicators of mental health among high school students', *Psychology in the Schools*, 52 (5), 431–446.
- 37 Di Paolo, L 2016, *Connecting and Relating: The experiences of a 'Schools as Core Social Centres' (SACSC) cluster in building, school family and community engagement*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Melbourne.
- 38 Finn, J & Zimmer, K 2012, 'Student engagement: What is it? Why does it matter?', in S Christenson, A Reschly & C Wylie (Eds), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, Springer, New York, 97–132.

# Endnotes

- 39 Lawson, M & Lawson, H 2013, 'New conceptual framework for student engagement research, policy, and practice', *Review of Educational Research*, 83 (3), 432–479.
- 40 Willms, J 2011, *Student Engagement in Alberta Schools*, Alberta Education, Canada.
- 41 Grover, S 2005, 'Advocacy by children as a causal factor in promoting resilience', *A Global Journal of Child Research*, 12 (4), 527–538.
- 42 Sullivan, A, Johnson, B, Owens, L & Conway, R 2014, 'Punish them or engage them?: Teachers' views of unproductive student behaviours in the classroom', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 39 (6), 43–56.
- 43 Percy-Smith, B & Thomas, N (Eds) 2010, *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Perspectives from theory and practice*, Routledge, London.
- 44 Holdsworth, R, Cahill, H & Smith, G 2003, *Student Action Teams: Phase 2 – 2001–2002: An evaluation of implementation and impact*, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, Parkville.
- 45 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Religious Dimension of the Catholic School*, CEM, East Melbourne, p. 10, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Religious-Dimension.pdf>
- 46 McKay-Jackson, C 2014, 'A critical approach to social emotional learning instruction through community-based service learning', *Journal of Transformative Education*, 12 (3), 292–312.
- 47 Roffey, S 2011, 'Enhancing connectedness in Australian children and young people', *Asian Journal of Counselling*, 18 (1 & 2), 15–39.
- 48 Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) 2017, *Horizons of Hope: Religious Dimension of the Catholic School*, CEM, East Melbourne, p.6, accessed 2 February 2018 <http://www.cem.edu.au/CatholicEducationMelbourne/media/Documentation/Documents/HoH-Religious-Dimension.pdf>
- 49 Kochhar-Bryant, C & Heishman, A 2010, *Effective Collaboration for Educating the Whole Child*, Sage, London, & Corwin Press, California, p. 6.
- 50 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2017, *Personal and Social Capability*, accessed 18 January 2017 <http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/personal-and-social-capability/introduction/rationale-and-aims>
- 51 Payton, J, Weissberg, R, Durlak, J, Dymnicki, A, Taylor, R, Schellinger, K & Pachan, M 2008, *The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for Kindergarten to Eighth-grade Students: Findings from three scientific reviews*, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Chicago.
- 52 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2015, *Skills for Social Progress: The power of social and emotional skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- 53 Espelage, D, Rose, C & Polanin, J 2016, 'Social-emotional learning program to promote prosocial and academic skills among middle school students with disabilities', *Remedial and Special Education*, 37 (6), 323–332.
- 54 Zins, JE, Bloodworth, M, Weissberg, R & Walberg, H 2007, 'The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success', *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 17 (2/3), p. 194.
- 55 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) 2008, *Social and emotional learning (SEL) and student benefits: Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students core elements*, CASEL, Chicago.
- 56 Durlak, J, Weissberg, R, Dymnicki, A, Taylor, R & Schellinger, K 2011, 'The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions', *Child Development*, 82 (1), 405–432.
- 57 Ashdown, D & Bernard, M 2012, 'Can explicit instruction in social and emotional learning skills benefit the social-emotional development, well-being and academic achievement of young children?', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 397–405.
- 58 Róiste, A, Kelly, C, Molcho, M, Gavin, A & Gabhainn, S 2012, 'Is school participation good for children?: Associations with health and wellbeing', *Health Education*, 112 (2), 88–104.

*Wellbeing for learning  
and growth*



**CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
MELBOURNE**

Catholic Education Melbourne  
228 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne VIC 3002  
T: +61 3 9267 0228 W: [www.cem.edu.au](http://www.cem.edu.au)