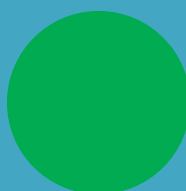


Research Discoveries from Geelong Grammar School:

Our contributions and
discoveries to date

2009 – 2019



INSTITUTE OF
**POSITIVE
EDUCATION**
GEELONG GRAMMAR SCHOOL®

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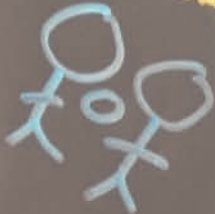


TRUSTABLE AWESOME

TRUSTABLE RESPECT

WISDOM

TEAMWORK



KINDNESS

TRUSTABLE RESPECT

TRUSTABLE RESPECT

HUMOUR

LEADERSHIP



Executive Summary

Throughout 2018, Geelong Grammar School (GGS) celebrated a decade of Positive Education. We saw this as an opportunity to reflect on and recognise our successes and the impact we have had in supporting our community to flourish. We believe our discoveries have been influential in shaping our school's journey of Positive Education while contributing to the field of Positive Education at large.

We have conducted a number of studies that include large-scale independent evaluations, postgraduate student projects focusing on Positive Education delivery, action research for continuous improvement and other initiatives in how to best support individual and community flourishing.

CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- The GGS Model for Positive Education (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013) outlines six inter-related positive domains of student and staff wellbeing: Health, Purpose, Accomplishment, Engagement, Relationships and Emotions, all of which are underpinned by Character Strengths. The Model for Positive Education has been supported by empirical, longitudinal findings with the broader population (O'Connor, Sanson, Toumbourou, Norrish, & Olsson, 2017; O'Connor et al., 2016).
- The Applied Model for Positive Education (Hoare, Bott, & Robinson, 2017) provides the key processes involved in implementing Positive Education – **Learn it, Live it, Teach it and Embed it.**
- We have a growing interest in whole-school implementation processes and key issues in this area. The Positive Education Roadmap provides a comprehensive outline of activities that schools may be engaging in to increase the quality, impact and sustainability of their whole-school implementation.
- Taken together, these models and publications provide a systematic structure for implementing Positive Education. The validity and efficacy of these models in different contexts is an important area of future research. We expect that refinements and improvements will be made as a result of ongoing empirical research and feedback from practitioners.



PRACTICE-BASED FINDINGS

Students

- **Student wellbeing measurement** results have been positive to-date indicating that GGS students report higher levels of wellbeing compared to normative data of Australian school students. In recent years, wellbeing measurement has become more sophisticated for school-aged children and adolescents; and we have continued to invest in monitoring the wellbeing of our students to inform the continuous improvement of programmes, practices, policies and curriculum.
- **An independent study of Adolescent Wellbeing** led by researchers at the University of Melbourne indicates that in 2013, wellbeing among GGS Year 9 students improved over the school year, stabilised in Year 10, and declined somewhat in Year 11 (Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, & Chin, August 2014). The wellbeing improvements during Year 9 were significant and extensive, spanning broad mental health and wellbeing measures, Character Strengths and the six domains of the GGS Model for Positive Education. No improvements were observed in the control group which included students attending best matched comparison schools.
- The findings of this initial study served as a pilot for a larger, and more comprehensive Australian Research Council funded project that ran from 2014 to 2017 and included two independent schools as comparison schools and was later extended to include the evaluation of Positive Education in public schools (Vella-Brodrick, et al., 2017; Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, Hattie, Cross, & Chin, November 2015). For the independent school evaluation, 162 Year 10 GGS students were followed and compared to 83 control students in comparison schools. GGS students reported higher levels of wellbeing compared to comparison schools at the first measurement (baseline) and reported higher levels of student life satisfaction at all four time points over the two years. GGS students reported significantly higher ratings with regard to social relationships compared to comparison schools. Relative to the comparison schools, GGS students reported improvements over time in mental wellbeing and mindfulness. Similar to comparison schools, GGS students did not report any decrease in depression and anxiety symptoms or anti-social behaviours like bullying.
- The study also examined the effect of an adapted **Positive Education curriculum in two public schools**. Four out of a possible 16 lessons were delivered to a group of students. Those who received the four lessons were compared to control students attending the same school who did not receive the lessons. Significant improvements over the two-year period with respect to psychological wellbeing and psychological ill-health were observed compared to the control group.
- A postgraduate student project led the evaluation of **Positive Education for School-leavers** and found promising results with past GGS students reporting the use of Positive Education strategies such as putting things in perspective and being optimistic in the face of challenges post-school (Stevanovic, Hoare, McKenzie, & O'Connor, 2017).
- The 2017 '**Giving for a Better World**' (GFBW) project was an important collaboration between GGS and the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development (SEED) at Deakin University. The project explored whether voluntary prosocial action would be associated with eudaimonic wellbeing. Eudaimonic wellbeing has a deliberate focus on developing virtuous character development, emotional health and the outcome of voluntary or prosocial activities. The project invited Year 10 students to mentor Year 8 students in a prosocial project. Students who volunteered to participate demonstrated greater eudaimonic wellbeing than those who did not volunteer. The project demonstrated that prosocial student volunteering is associated with eudaimonic wellbeing. Interviews showed students matured in their understandings of care for others, while enjoying the challenges and rewards of doing their own project. The outcomes of the 2017 GFBW project have provided stimulating insights into the nature of student wellbeing and rich experiences for students involved. The GFBW project continued as part of the non-research-based school curriculum in 2018 and 2019.
- A current project led by the University of Melbourne aims to explore **the effects of Positive Education during the critical post-school transition** and to codesign with a group of 'youth coaches', a wellbeing programme to help young people manage challenges once they leave school. Several graduating students of GGS participated as youth coaches, and some former GGS students will be invited to participate in a wellbeing survey later in 2019.

Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

- An independent graduate student study explored **factors that build staff engagement and identified opportunities to further enhance staff experiences** by interviewing a small sample of participants (teaching and non-teaching staff members). Themes related to increased engagement were: feeling a sense of competence, as well as strong relationships and autonomy to make decisions. Three themes which characterised participants' responses to engagement barriers were: demands of work exceeding their personal resources, inconsistent commitment to Positive Education from leaders and unfairness in accessing opportunities (Clancy, 2014).
- The impact of a **Positive Education booster session ('PosEd4U') for GGS Staff** was examined in an independent graduate student project. Teaching and non-teaching staff rated the session acceptability as high, however quantitative measures did not show predicted improvements in wellbeing, attitudes and engagement over three time points. (Smalley, 2016; Tran Thi Thanh Quy, 2016)
- **The Positive Institution Project** was developed and led by the GGS Positive Psychology Project Manager, Dr Paige Williams, from 2009 to 2013 as part of a University of Melbourne PhD (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2015). Over a fifteen-month period, the longitudinal study followed 432 teaching and non-teaching staff and measured their levels of Positive Psychological Capital (hope, optimism, resilience and confidence); Organisational Virtuousness (forgiveness, optimism, trust, integrity and compassion); and Work Happiness (job satisfaction, work engagement, and organisational commitment). The research found that both Psychological Capital and Organisational Virtuousness predicted Work Happiness over time. Staff members with higher levels of Psychological Capital and Work Happiness were likely to perceive more Organisation Virtuousness in the school culture. These findings suggest that a dynamic approach to supporting whole-school wellbeing is required, with efforts focusing on support to develop staff Psychological Capital at an individual level (bottom-up) and developing a positive culture across the school (top-down).
- The effect of **Positive Education training for teachers outside GGS** was explored through an independent graduate student project (Field, 2016). One hundred and forty staff participated in the first phase of the study, which asked them to complete a survey about why they were undertaking the training and what they hoped to achieve. Unfortunately, only 18 participants completed the follow up measure, so there was a significant decline in participation within the study, leading to difficulties in interpreting the data. Key themes from participants' responses about why they were doing the training included: implementing Positive Education across the whole school, personal development and growth and enhancing the wellbeing of the school community. In the follow-up survey post-training, participants highlighted an increased sense of competency in coping mechanisms, navigating challenging situations in both work and home contexts, and stronger relationships with students. We continue to investigate Positive Education training and the influence our courses have on teacher wellbeing.

Parents

- An independent graduate student project evaluated **the impact of a three-day intensive residential Positive Education programme for GGS parents**. Twenty-four participants completed the programme and 16 participants formed the wait-list control group. Measures were taken pre-intervention, post-intervention, and two months following the programme via online surveys. Results revealed significant increases in parent wellbeing and parent-school connection among participants that completed the programme compared to the wait-list control group.

Action research

- Action research emphasises continuous improvement that is adaptive to context. In 2014, the School conducted a local evaluation to determine whether keeping a blessings journal before bedtime would improve sleep and gratitude, within the boarding context. Most students that formed the intervention group of this study wrote in their journal either every night or at least four times per week. Some increases in gratitude and positive perceptions were observed, but these benefits were not maintained three months later. This may be because most students chose not to keep a blessings journal beyond the initial five weeks.
- Current and future action research projects include responding to student wellbeing data through curriculum, the impact of an equine-assisted learning programme at Timbertop, and student wellbeing outcomes of a Year 11 Resilience Retreat.

Future directions

- The impact of our research is strengthened by **collaboration with others**, both within GGS and also with external organisations such as schools, universities and councils.
- As a school we aim **to improve Positive Education** and continuously innovate through tailoring programmes and practices to student and staff strengths and needs. In applying a whole-school approach, we aim to capture multiple perspectives and sources of information about wellbeing across the school system to inform improvement. By using systems theory, we are better able to describe and explain the complexities of school systems.
- **Significant gaps in the literature** remain about the efficacy of Positive Education for certain groups and the most appropriate adaptations required to increase efficacy for these groups (e.g. the impact of Positive Education whole-school interventions for early childhood, middle childhood and early adolescence, as well as parents). Our research programme aims to address these gaps in coming years.
- The impact of our research is strengthened by **collaboration with others**. Collaborative research projects within GGS aim to focus on how to best encourage meaningful participation from staff, students and parents. Partnerships with schools and universities allow the Institute of Positive Education to test out conceptual models and explore how Positive Education is best adapted to different contexts.



This Report

This report aims to outline the successes of research investigating Positive Education at Geelong Grammar School (GGS) over the last 10 years. Since first implementing Positive Education, GGS has served as a case study for other schools through its openness to learning about what works, and what is in need of development and improvement in the delivery of Positive Education. Our research programme has made many conceptual, practical and empirical contributions. These achievements are not limited to the research project themselves, rather they extend to the dissemination of our learning through continuous improvement within the school, peer-review publications, knowledge translation activities such as training other schools, and resource development.

Research underscores and informs Positive Education at GGS. In the past 10 years, the Australian Research Council, GGS and associated philanthropists have invested significant amounts of funding into research initiatives. Through these investments, the research programme has contributed to the current understanding of best-practice methods for promoting wellbeing across whole-school communities.

Our approach to research has been collaborative. Partnering with universities, school practitioners and external organisations has been a vital part of ensuring our research programme is rigorous and remains aligned with current research and practice developments within the field at large. Research projects and activities have included the initial development and publication of the GGS Model for Positive Education, the investigation of wellbeing among students, staff, parents and the organisation as a whole, and local evaluations of teacher-led initiatives to support individual wellbeing and continuous improvement.

This report serves as a collection of findings to date, a discussion of their implications and impact, and a guide to future directions of the research programme at GGS. In valuing accountability and the wide dissemination of findings, the report provides interested parties with further details of the conceptual and practical contributions that research at GGS has made.



Justin Robinson
Director, Institute of Positive Education
Geelong Grammar School



Background

Schools are ideal spaces for teaching and supporting young people's wellbeing. A significant part of this work involves giving students, teaching and non-teaching staff as well as parents, the opportunity to learn key skills and competencies which contribute to their wellbeing over the course of life. Positive Education at GGS is the implementation of scientific research and effective educational practice to enhance wellbeing, build resilience and optimise engagement and performance.

GGS formally embarked on its Positive Education journey in 2008, following a commitment to better support young people's wellbeing in the school community and the wider community. As a first step, we invited Professor Martin Seligman, one of the founders of Positive Psychology, to stay on campus for six months to train staff and support the initial implementation of Positive Education. It was during this time, that the term Positive Education was first

Positive Education at GGS is the implementation of scientific research and effective educational practice to enhance wellbeing, build resilience and optimise engagement and performance.

coined to describe the application of Positive Psychology in education. Seligman's visit was fundamental in helping GGS to understand the significance of research evidence and how empirical evidence was needed to underpin Positive Education at the school. After Seligman's visit, the focus was on introducing Positive Education training and programming across the whole-school.

Since then, GGS has dedicated resources to developing and trialling curriculum for Positive Education across all four campuses, setting up systems to train and teach all staff the necessary skills for wellbeing, and reviewing

and revising the school's policies and practices aligning with Positive Education principles. As other schools around the world became aware and grew interest in Positive Education, they began to approach GGS with questions. In response to this interest, we began offering open-days and training opportunities for schools wanting to learn more about Positive Education at GGS.

In 2014, the school established the Institute of Positive Education to:

- Further develop and strengthen Positive Education in the school
- Provide training, consultation and resources aimed at sharing knowledge with other schools
- Support the science of wellbeing in educational contexts

The **PHILOSOPHY**

that underpins the Institute's provision of **exceptional Positive Education** services and products is manifest in our Purpose, Focus, Spirit, Character and Beliefs.



The Role of Research

Since the commencement of Positive Education at GGS, our understanding of how to best support people's wellbeing has significantly grown. A key role of research within the school and Institute of Positive Education, has been to keep up to date with such developments and ensure Positive Education programming and training is evidence-based. Alongside this, research efforts aim to contribute to the practical and conceptual development of the field.

Prior to establishing the Institute, processes were put in place across the school to help understand the impact of Positive Education on staff and students including the collection of anecdotal evidence and stories, feedback from students and staff, and comparing wellbeing data to the overall Australian population. Efforts were made to ensure teaching and training programmes were evidence-based, yet relevant to context, for example, adapting the well-

The objective is for the research to be rigorous and robust, informed by practice wisdom, and relevant to the practical implementation and conceptual development of Positive Education.

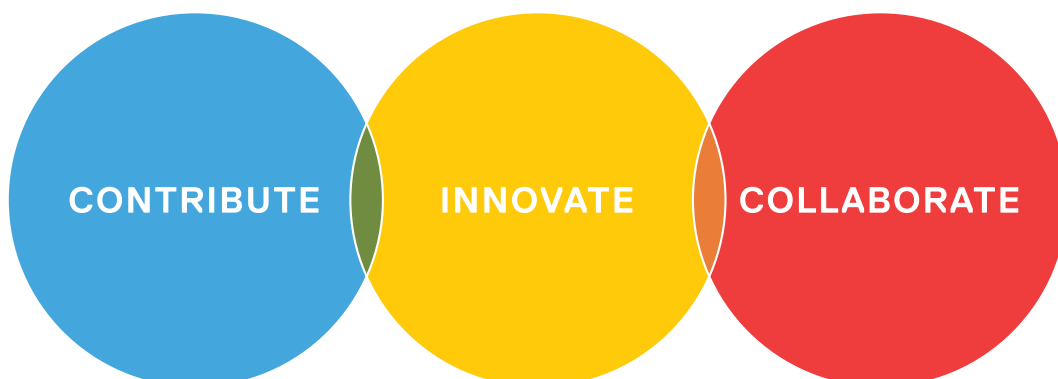
validated Positive Psychology programme used at the University of Pennsylvania to the specific needs of our Year 9 students at Timbertop.

During this time, the school collaborated with leading academics to establish a conceptual model for Positive Education which defined wellbeing and its six domains in the educational context. Literature reviews were conducted to assess the current evidence-base in each domain and made freely available to other schools to guide their curriculum development. In addition, practice examples of Positive Education at GGS corresponding to

the domains of the Model were collected for the book *Positive Education: The Geelong Grammar School Journey* by Dr Jacolyn Norrish (2015).

With the establishment of the Institute, research activities became more formalised and strategic. The research team of the Institute aims to nurture the growth of Positive Education through applied research in the field. The objective is for the research to be rigorous and robust, informed by practice wisdom, and relevant to the practical implementation and conceptual development of Positive Education. At present, our research programme aims to:

- **Contribute to the field**
Our unique position as a pioneering Positive Education school directs us in facilitating translational research aimed at strengthening the evidence-base and scalability of Positive Education to all schools. This is brought about through internal and independent research projects, dissemination through training and resources and peer-reviewed publications.
- **Improve and Innovate**
We continue to improve and innovate Positive Education at GGS through reflection and evaluation of practices, policies and programmes, so that other schools might benefit from our learnings. This is achieved through action research initiatives, theory-based publications, development of resources and training, and systematic integration with other departments within the school.
- **Collaborate**
We collaborate with professional associations, universities, non-profit organisations, philanthropic funders and schools to research recognised priority areas within the field of Positive Education. This involves participation in committees and networks, student internship/projects, formal partnerships and grant submissions.



Research Findings

The following section summarises key research findings emerging from the school's Positive Education programme, combining both the Institute's research activities and the wider school initiatives. The findings are organised into conceptual and practice-based contributions. The authors of the respective studies are acknowledged for their individual section and are named as contributors. Insights from teacher-led action research projects at GGS are also described.



CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

What? How? Where
and With whom?



PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Staff. Students.
Parents.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Conceptual Contributions

Conceptual contributions refer to the models we have proposed for defining what wellbeing is in educational settings (The GGS Model for Positive Education), how Positive Education is best applied across the whole-school (**Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it** processes), and a framework to support the implementation of Positive Education (The Positive Education Roadmap).

THE GGS MODEL FOR POSITIVE EDUCATION

As Positive Education progressed at GGS, the need arose for a structured, scientifically informed conceptual model of wellbeing. Such a model was needed to guide what aspects of an individual's life Positive Education aimed to improve. In describing the multiple domains of individual wellbeing and flourishing, the school developed the GGS Model for Positive Education. The Model is consistent with Professor Martin Seligman's PERMA model of wellbeing and has been extended to include Positive Health as an additional component. The Model aims to promote flourishing across the school community through six inter-related domains; Positive Relationships, Positive Emotions, Positive Health, Positive Engagement, Positive Accomplishment, and Positive Purpose (see overleaf). Positive Health was added to the model because of known interconnections between physical and mental health and wellbeing. Importantly, Character Strengths underpin the Model, as research supports the notion that wellbeing domains are strengthened through recognising and harnessing morally valued strengths of character. In basic terms, flourishing is defined as '*feeling good and doing good*'.

The Model for Positive Education has been developed over the first five years of Positive Education in the school (2008-2012) through a collaboration between school community leaders and experts in the field. Development included a thorough review process which synthesised feedback from national and international experts. In 2013, the Model for Positive Education was published as a peer-reviewed article entitled 'An applied framework for Positive Education' in the *International Journal of Wellbeing* (Norrish, Williams, O'Connor, & Robinson, 2013). The Model was published to provide a structured pathway for implementing Positive Education in schools, a framework to guide evaluation and research, and a basis for future theoretical development. In addition to providing a clear rationale for Positive Education, the article outlines teaching examples and methods as well as school-wide practices which target the development and promotion of Character Strengths and the six domains of wellbeing described above. Evidence for the Model for Positive Education has been further strengthened with research led by former GGS Institute Research Fellow, Dr Meredith O'Connor, who examined whether positive mental health in adolescence predicted a successful transition to young adulthood (O'Connor, Sanson, Toumbourou, Norrish, & Olsson, 2017; O'Connor, et al., 2016). Data was drawn from the Australian Temperament Project, a large scale longitudinal study which has tracked individuals from birth into adulthood to better understand factors which promote healthy development. The research tested the structure of the Model by analysing over 1,000 Australian adolescents aged 15-16 years to determine whether positive mental health (indicated by Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Purpose, Accomplishment and Health) predicted healthy adjustment as a young adult.

Findings indicated that positive mental health during the adolescent period was a measurable concept that predicted stronger engagement with two domains of young adult development; successfully establishing a career (educational attainment and perceived competence) and taking on responsibilities of citizenship (volunteering and civic activities). This study demonstrated that intervening to support the identified domains of wellbeing (closely corresponding to the GGS Model for Positive Education) may be a fruitful way of promoting healthy developmental pathways into young adulthood.

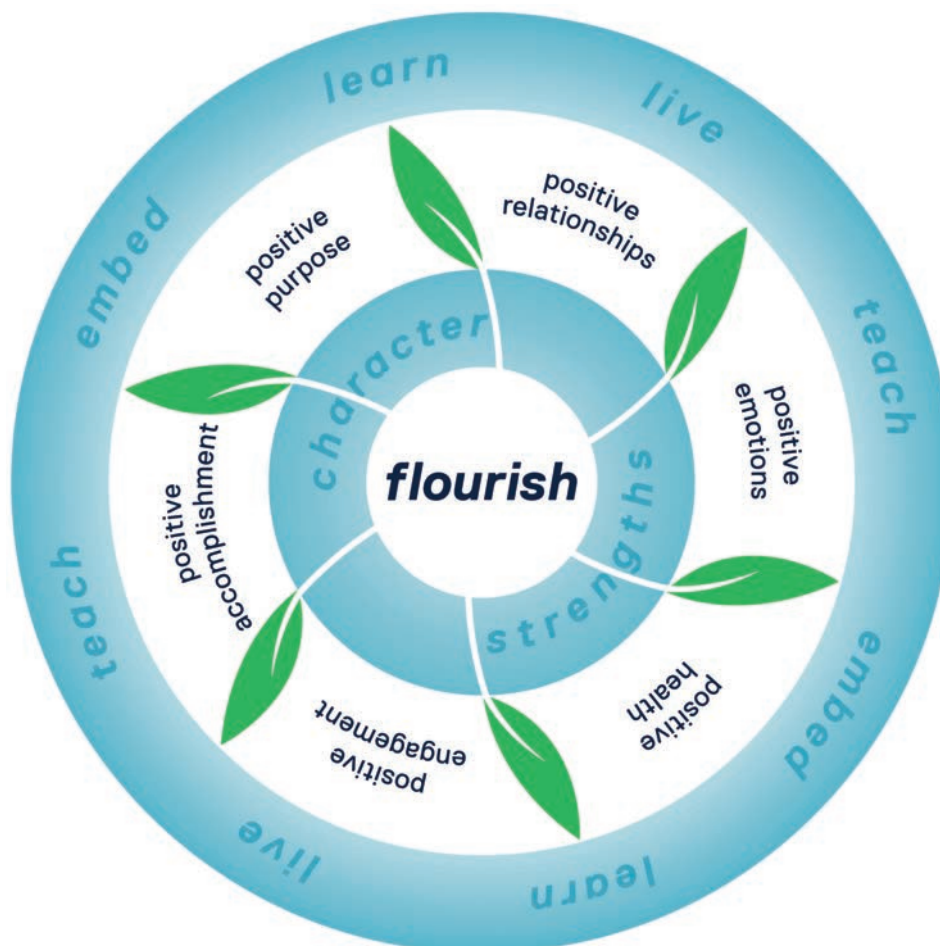
The development of the Model has been pivotal in the research trajectory of the school. Within the broader research literature there are multiple ways of defining wellbeing. The Model has been a strong guide for best-practice, helping school practitioners understand what to include and exclude within the scope of wellbeing. Being the first of its kind, the Model has helped move the field of Positive Education forward by providing a clear and contestable concept of wellbeing and flourishing for researchers and practitioners. Consistent with the dominant approach to wellbeing (Seligman's PERMA), the popularity of the Model helps to establish a shared understanding in the emerging field of Positive Education. The development of valid measures of wellbeing has been closely connected to conceptual understandings of wellbeing which are aligned to the Model. The longitudinal evaluation of the Model for Positive Education provides a strong rationale for preventive interventions aimed at enhancing domains of positive mental health in adolescence.

THE APPLIED MODEL FOR POSITIVE EDUCATION: LEARN IT, LIVE IT, TEACH IT, EMBED IT

It is well known that interventions aimed at enhancing wellbeing and preventing illbeing for students are most effective when the whole-school system is working together towards these aims. Isolated wellbeing programmes which target one year level or class, are often found to be less impactful and less sustainable if their messages are not consistent with the overall school culture. Whole-school approaches involve multiple components which target different individuals and groups within the school system such as students, staff and parents.

GGS has continued to develop its approach to implementing Positive Education across the whole-school. Consistent with other fields of research such as Social and Emotional Learning and health promotion, the school has developed a method for implementation which involves four, cyclical, interconnecting processes: **Learn it, Live it, Teach it and Embed it**. In short, **Learn it** refers to the adults within the school community (staff and parents) understanding key skills and knowledge from the six domains of Positive Education through professional learning opportunities, partnerships, presentations and resources. **Live it** involves the deliberate role modelling and experiencing the benefits of the learned skills and knowledge of Positive Education. This is not to be misunderstood as forced compliance, but rather an expectation that individuals within the school community endeavour to live by their learning. **Teach it** describes how key skills and knowledge are taught, translated and communicated to students. Teaching Positive Education is considered broader than the explicit delivery of content lessons (e.g. teaching students to write a gratitude letter), and includes threading wellbeing messages and knowledge through other subject areas and teaching practices. Lastly, **Embed it** involves integrating the principles of Positive Education across every day school practices and policies to ensure consistency while building upon a common language.

The Applied Model for Positive Education has been published as a peer-reviewed article entitled '*Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it: Implementing a whole-school approach to foster positive mental health and wellbeing*' in the *International Journal of Wellbeing* (Hoare, Bott, & Robinson, 2017). In combination with our work promoting this method as a whole-school approach to Positive Education through training, the publication of the **Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it** facilitates the growth of Positive Education as a field. Rather than seeing Positive Education as the collection of diverse methods aimed at enhancing wellbeing, researchers and practitioners alike are able to understand how Positive Education can be both systemic and systematic in its application.



THE POSITIVE EDUCATION EVALUATION TOOL AND ROADMAP

As the research programme at GGS has evolved, particular issues and themes have become obvious. With the increasing popularity of Positive Education around the globe, there has been speculation that Positive Education is just another passing fad. Within the training division of the Institute, there is increasing interest from external schools across the globe wanting more detailed information on how to begin and sustain Positive Education within their schools. In response to these concerns, the Institute has begun to investigate sustainable implementation success factors of Positive Education best-practice. Indeed research evaluating whole-school approaches to promoting wellbeing has found the quality of implementation has an impact on positive outcomes for students.

Over the last few years, the Institute has dedicated time and effort into discussing and documenting processes of implementation. As part of an invited chapter in the book *Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (O'Connor & Cameron, 2017), we synthesised our view on the importance of implementation through proposing an implementation approach, summarising results from ongoing evaluations at GGS and raising key practice issues. This work was developed further through collaboration and feedback from experts and school practitioners

Designed to support quality implementation for schools, the Tool outlines specific activities and processes which a school might choose to engage in to promote sustainable outcomes

from inside and outside the school. The Positive Education Evaluation Tool and Roadmap is the product of these discussions.

The Positive Education Evaluation Tool and Roadmap is based primarily on the *The Applied Model for Positive Education: Learn it, Live it, Teach it, Embed it*. The Tool's development involved combining practice wisdom with current evidence from implementation science and Positive Education fields. Designed to support quality implementation for schools, the Tool outlines specific activities and processes which a school might choose to

engage in to promote sustainable outcomes, for example, training staff, reviewing policies, etc. In evaluating which action they might like to take, schools can map actions according to whether they are in *Introducing, Consolidating or Sustaining* phases.

The development of the Evaluation Tool and Roadmap has significant implications for the field as it provides a basis for learning about the most active ingredients in increasing the effectiveness of Positive Education across the whole-school. For example, the tools could help articulate and test questions like, is it more important to focus on staff or parents when introducing Positive Education? Most importantly, its development and dissemination signifies how the field is maturing and questions of sustainability and quality implementation are being addressed.

SUMMARY

On their own, each of these conceptual Models contribute to understanding Positive Education as a whole-school approach to enhancing wellbeing. Taken together, these Models provide a systematic structure for implementing Positive Education. The validity and efficacy of these Models in different contexts is an important area of future research. It is expected that refinements and improvements are made as a result of ongoing empirical investigations and feedback from practitioners.

Five ways
to wellbeing

Connect...

Connect with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active...

Go for a walk or run. Swim or cycle. Play a game. Garden. Do some yoga. Try something new! Find a hobby. Do any physical activity you enjoy and like to do with your friend or family.

Take notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Enjoy the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or resting in the park. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Five ways
to wellbeing

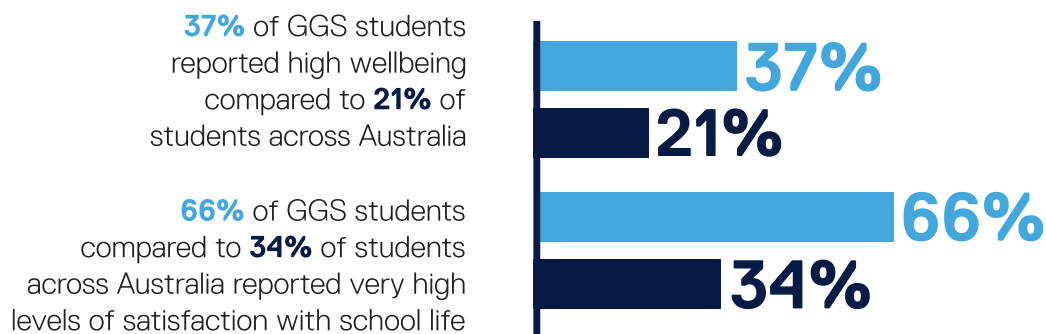
Practice-based Findings

Practice-based findings are summarised according to the key group involved: students, staff and parents. Action research initiatives are summarised separately as their research aims and methods differ significantly to the rigor and objective nature of other findings. Action research aims to improve practice through collaborative and progressive problem-solving. In contrast, other findings described follow a more traditional structure of investigating hypotheses or research questions through the collection and analysis of data and were completed in partnership with universities.

STUDENTS

The students at GGS are at the heart of the Positive Education programme. We aim to educate the whole child and prepare them for life's inevitable ups and downs. Ultimately, we hope to support students to flourish and prevent the incidence of mental health issues during their time at school and beyond. Large scale longitudinal studies, pilot student projects, and other research investigations have been completed with the generous participation of GGS students to assist in our understanding of how to best promote flourishing.

Wellbeing measures with Years 7, 9 and 11 (2011)



Wellbeing of Years 9 to 11 (2013-2016)



2014  **2016**

GGS students reported **improved** mental wellbeing between 2014 – 2016



Wellbeing measurement

Prior to beginning Positive Education, the school did not collect baseline measures of wellbeing. In hindsight, this might have been wise to do, however Positive Education was in its forming stages at the time and it is unclear whether the available measures would have been able to capture the full extent of the change that had taken place. As already mentioned, the first few years involved a great deal of conceptual development for both the school and the field of Positive Education. As Positive Education progressed and matured at GGS, it became increasingly evident that monitoring students' wellbeing would assist with the continuous development and improvement of the programme. At the same time, researchers began to develop more sophisticated measures to assess student wellbeing which aligned with current conceptual understandings of wellbeing for young people.

2011

In 2011, we asked students from Years 7, 9 and 11 to complete the Australian Council for Educational Research Social-Emotional Wellbeing Survey. The survey is well validated and designed to assess factors considered critical to young people's wellbeing. Comparing GGS students' scores to the average scores of students across Australia provides a simple measure of how GGS students are faring in relation to the norm. However, it should be noted that such

comparisons are limited, and should be interpreted with caution as they do not account for the complex and large number of factors influencing student wellbeing.

Overall results showed that 37% of GGS students reported high social emotional wellbeing, compared to an average 21% of students across Australia.

Overall results showed that 37% of GGS students reported high social emotional wellbeing, compared to an average 21% of students across Australia. Findings indicated that social and emotional wellbeing among Year 9 students at Timbertop was significantly higher than the national average of students the same age. Sixty-six percent of Year 9 GGS students compared to the Year 9 Australian average of 34% reported very high

levels of satisfaction with school life. School life referred to students' perceptions of their teachers providing an interesting school programme, and the extent to which they felt cared for.

Further results indicated that 71% of GGS students scored in the highest category for home life, compared to 53% national average. Home life referred to parental support, interest and care. The proportion of GGS students who reported high rating for community life was 60% compared to 44% national average.

It is imprudent to relate these findings directly to Positive Education at GGS as results are likely to be caused by many factors which were not controlled for. However, these findings are promising in that wellbeing is significantly higher than the national average.

2015

In 2015, more comprehensive wellbeing measures became available, which motivated us to undertake a review of measures to choose the most appropriate measure for GGS based on the following criteria:

- Valid and reliable for Australian children and adolescents
- Aligned with the GGS Model for Positive Education, which includes Emotions, Engagement, Accomplishment, Purpose, Relationships, and Health
- Detailed enough that we can identify needs and evaluate strategies within specific domains of Positive Education
- Easy comparisons of data over time, allowing us to track the impact of different programmes and strategies
- Australian norms are desirable but less critical, because the best comparison point is to explore GGS student data over time rather than comparing to external norms

The review and subsequent discussions highlighted the University of Melbourne, Wellbeing Profiler survey, as the measure of choice for the School's specific requirements and student population.

2016 & 2017

In 2016 and 2017, we invited students from Years 8 and 11 to complete the Wellbeing Profiler survey, developed by the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne. The survey assesses wellbeing across six different domains; Psychological, Cognitive, Emotional, Social, Physical and Economic. At this time, the Profiler did not have Australian norms for comparison. Results from 2016 and 2017 indicate GGS students report high levels of Cognitive Wellbeing (life satisfaction, accomplishment, mindfulness, goal-striving), Positive Emotions and Strengths (happiness, strength-use, resilience), Economic Wellbeing (financial stability at home), Social Wellbeing (connectedness to peers, teachers, school, community) and Psychological Wellbeing (autonomy, perseverance, self-esteem). An area of relative weakness compared to other aspects of wellbeing was Physical Health (diet, exercise, sleep), however students still scored above the midpoint of the scale in these areas. Stress and anxiety, and related strategies of rumination and suppression of thoughts, were also areas of relative weakness, particularly for older students.

As a result of these findings, there has been a greater focus on evidence-based interventions shown to reduce stress and anxiety and how these can be incorporated into existing programmes and curriculum. Another area of development has been Positive Education in the older years, with a push for more explicit teaching of wellbeing strategies targeted at reducing anxiety and stress in the form of a Year 11 Resilience Retreat, House-based programmes and curriculum for pastoral classes.

Independent evaluation of Positive Education for secondary school students

Since 2013, GGS have been a part of one of Australia's largest, most comprehensive longitudinal studies of the impact of Positive Education on secondary school students. The three-year study began assessing the wellbeing outcomes of students in Years 9, 10 and 11 in 2013. The study was led by Professor Dianne Vella-Brodrick and her team of researchers at the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne. A range of wellbeing and mental health indicators were assessed with online surveys at the beginning and end of the school year, during which students participated in substantial Positive Education curricula. Comparison schools best-matched to GGS according to likeness and sociodemographic factors, were given the same measures in the same school year.



2013

Preliminary findings from 2013 indicated that wellbeing among GGS Year 9 students improved over the school year, was stable in Year 10, and decreased somewhat in Year 11 (Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, & Chin, August 2014). The wellbeing improvements during Year 9 were significant and extensive, spanning broad mental health and wellbeing measures when implementing Character Strengths and the six domains of the GGS Model for Positive Education. These improvements were not observed in the control student group attending comparison schools. Observed differences between GGS students and control students supported the conclusion that the Timbertop programme has potential to promote student wellbeing. Qualitative data from focus groups also supported the beneficial effects of

The wellbeing improvements during Year 9 were significant and extensive, spanning broad mental health and wellbeing measures when implementing Character Strengths and the six domains of the GGS Model for Positive Education.

the Timbertop program, with students providing insights into how the experiences of this programme supported each domain of wellbeing.

A subset of 50 students were provided with mobile devices at several time points throughout Year 9 and 10, which beeped with reminders across the day asking them to rate their current emotional state and the psychological strategies they were using. Strategies were rated as positive or negative. Positive strategies included savouring the moment, keeping everything

in perspective, trying to relax, and using reappraisal and problem-solving in moments of stress. Negative strategies included avoiding the situation and taking negative feelings out on others. A significant decrease in the use of negative strategies in response to challenging events was observed. Students whose life satisfaction increased over the year showed a significant increase in the use of positive strategies in response to positive events in their life. These findings suggested the Positive Education skills taught at Timbertop were being translated into everyday life and having a positive effect on students' personal wellbeing.

Year 11 GGS students reported higher mental health and wellbeing compared to comparison students the same age. There was a trend for this relationship among Year 10 students although not statistically significant. Overall, there was a decrease in wellbeing and increase in stress among Year 11 students, and whilst a concern, this decline was consistent with those observed in comparison group students suggesting it may be associated with the increasing demands of adolescents and senior level school work.

These preliminary results went on to inform a number of areas within the Positive Education programme. In response to the increasing stress and ill-being observed across Year 11, specific programmes were put in place such as the Year 11 Resilience Retreat, which focused on teaching specific strategies to students to manage stress and anxiety. Feedback from students about the way in which Positive Education was taught was incorporated into lesson plans to make them more interactive and practical. In addition to practical implications, the results of the study have provided some interesting insights into the multidimensional nature of wellbeing and mental health, as well as the design of preventive interventions. Students may report high wellbeing levels overall, yet still experience symptoms of mental illness such as anxiety and stress.



2014-2017

The findings of this initial study served as a pilot for a larger, and more comprehensive Australian Research Council funded project that ran from 2014 to 2017 and included two independent schools as comparison schools (Vella-Brodrick, et al., 2017; Vella-Brodrick, Rickard, Hattie, Cross, & Chin, November 2015). The project utilised the same data measures as the 2013 study but extended its data collection with two additional schools and longer study duration. In addition, the larger study explored potential biomarkers for variability in mental health and wellbeing through heart-rate variability and measuring the stress hormone cortisol in saliva swabs.

One hundred and sixty-two Year 10 GGS students were followed and compared to 83 students in comparison schools which all taught some form of wellbeing programme. Notably, GGS students reported higher levels of wellbeing compared to comparison schools at the first measurement (baseline) and higher levels of student life satisfaction at all four timepoints over the two years. GGS students reported significantly higher ratings with regard to social relationships relative to the comparison group. GGS students also reported more favourable improvements over time in mental wellbeing and mindfulness. Similar to comparison schools, GGS students did not report any decrease in depression and anxiety symptoms or anti-social behaviours like bullying.

Analyses of the smaller subset of students provided with mobile devices whose wellbeing improved across Year 10 indicated that four strategies were consistently used: making the most out of a good situation, changing thoughts or

The wellbeing improvements during Year 9 were significant and extensive, spanning broad mental health and wellbeing measures, Character Strengths and the six domains of the GGS Positive Education model.

attitudes, approaching others, and showing kindness and compassion. Feedback about specific programme components was sought from students through focus groups and surveys. Overall, students reported a high level of satisfaction with the Positive Education programme. Some of the most popular activities included visiting a local primary school as a volunteer, discussing their character strength profiles in houses and juggling as part of a neuroplasticity project. The topics students found were most helpful included learning about expressing gratitude, positive health and managing relationships in difficult times. Areas of improvement

noted by students were designing lessons which allowed for more group work, being clearer about the aims and objectives of particular activities, and making the content more relevant to their daily life through teachers sharing stories and real life examples. As with the 2013 report, these findings have continued to inform curriculum development and programming at GGS.

The study also examined the effect of an adapted Positive Education curriculum in two public schools. Four out of a possible 16 lessons were delivered to a class of students. Teachers trained by GGS staff prioritised lessons based on their students' needs and delivered, on average, four lessons. Students who received the Positive Education lessons were compared to control students attending the same school who did not receive the lessons. Significant improvements over the two year period with respect to improved psychological wellbeing and decreased psychological ill-health were observed compared to the control group. This finding is very important as it demonstrates that only a small number of sessions tailored to students' needs can have a significant impact on students' wellbeing in specific contexts.

The positive results for students in public schools has implications for the value and nature of Positive Education teacher training. It is encouraging that training staff in Positive Education lessons can have a direct impact on student wellbeing. The researchers note that public schools in the study chose lessons based on an analysis of the students' needs. Adapting Positive Education to each school's unique context appears to be an important aspect of successful implementation.

This study is the first of its kind to comprehensively examine the effects of Positive Education across the secondary school years. The results are promising in supporting the link between quality whole-school Positive Education programming and increased wellbeing for students. The researchers note that many significant positive effects observed at the end of Year 10 were not sustained at six and 12 month follow-ups. The study has also raised questions about how Positive Education curriculum can better address patterns of increasing mental ill health across the senior years of schooling. Further results and publications are expected in 2019.

Giving For A Better World Project

The 2017 'Giving for a Better World' (GFBW) project was an important collaboration between GGS and the Centre for Social and Early Emotional Development (SEED) at Deakin University. The project investigated whether voluntary student prosocial action would be associated with eudaimonic wellbeing. The project conceptualised eudaimonic wellbeing as the development of virtuous character and increased emotional health associated with acts of genuine caring activities. These emotions extended further than the positive feelings related to success and achievement. The project involved Year 10 students mentoring Year 8 students in a voluntary prosocial project. The project has since been included as a voluntary option in the school curriculum and has grown in popularity amongst students.

Students who volunteered to participate in the GFBW intervention demonstrated higher eudaimonic wellbeing compared to students who did not volunteer to participate.

Researchers, led by Dr Bill Hallam at Deakin University, successfully developed the first adolescent Eudaimonic Wellbeing Survey based on caring for others. The Eudaimonic Wellbeing Survey assesses character and emotional health development – using measures like kindness, self-control, trust, responsibility, volunteering and

autonomy. The GFBW study has also developed the first Eudaimonic Kindness Scale which measures the motivation for kind actions rather than the frequency of kind actions. Researchers conducted 'motivation for volunteering for prosocial action' interviews with students, to learn more about how students understand kindness and flourishing motivation and linking this to the GGS Applied Model for Positive Education.

Interview results revealed that students enjoyed their project, while developing a more mature understanding that caring for others can be difficult, challenging and yet a rewarding opportunity. Such outcomes may be consistent with character growth and emotional development – which were not the goal of prosocial caring actions, rather unsought wellbeing benefits. These interviews could indicate new ways in which character growth and student wellbeing may be associated with caring for others.

The study found that students who volunteered to participate in the GFBW intervention demonstrated higher eudaimonic wellbeing compared to students who did not volunteer to participate. Previous volunteering history for prosocial activities also indicated a significant association with eudaimonic wellbeing. Those who demonstrate caring activities for others may have emotional health and wellbeing. The students who did not volunteer were found to experience some declines in eudaimonic wellbeing, while the students who volunteered maintained their relatively high eudaimonic wellbeing scores.

At the conclusion of the project, students hosted a celebration evening where they presented their projects and key learnings to friends and family. The celebration evening highlighted the diverse range of projects and non-profit collaborations that the students engaged in, with themes ranging across animal welfare, homelessness, organ donation, food for disadvantaged, support for refugees and third world countries, disease prevention and treatment, sustainability and others.

The outcomes of the GFBW project have added value to the existing Positive Education programme at GGS. The GFBW project has provided GGS students a fantastic opportunity beyond the academic curriculum to volunteer and to mentor other students.

Positive Education for school-leavers

During 2015, Master of Educational Psychology postgraduate student Ms Nina Stevanovic investigated the benefits of Positive Education beyond schooling years (Stevanovic, Hoare, McKenzie, & O'Connor, 2017). The study investigated the extent to which GGS graduates, who engaged in at least four years of Positive Education, used skills acquired through



Positive Education to mitigate challenges encountered in early adulthood. Participants included 21 GGS graduates (9 male, 12 female, aged 18-19 years) who completed telephone interviews. The semi-structured interview focused on the types of challenges the participants encountered, skills they used to cope with challenges, and factors that affected their use of Positive Education skills.

Key challenges noted upon leaving school were changing friendships, academic expectations and reduced structure. The vast majority of participants reported using Positive Education skills to some extent, however most participants used the skills without explicitly connecting the skills to Positive Education classes. Most commonly mentioned skills included techniques present in the curriculum like putting things in perspective, optimism, avoiding thinking traps, changing mindsets, gratitude and mindfulness. The two most significant factors encouraging their use of Positive Education post-secondary school were their alignment with the values of Positive Education and teacher influence. Impeding factors were a lack of perceived relevance, external reinforcement and understanding of purpose, not valuing Positive Education and Positive Education being taught in an overly theoretical way.

There is limited knowledge of how students apply their learning from school wellbeing programmes in facing the challenges of early adulthood. This study provides valuable insights into how Positive Education is perceived and integrated within a young person's coping strategy repertoire. It has implications for GGS, in that past students involved in the study responded favourably to ongoing access to resources and communication with the school through online channels like social media. In addition, the study has served as a pilot study for a larger scale research project investigating the effects of Positive Education on school-leavers more broadly.

Positive Education Pathways for school-leavers

A team led by Professor Dianne Vella-Brodrick from the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne, is working on a research project that involves the participation of former secondary school students, including those from GGS. This 3-year project (2017-2019) is funded by the Australian Research Council and GGS, and includes Maroondah City Council and OELLEN as partners. The research team has worked with a group of 'youth coaches' (including several GGS graduates) to co-develop an innovative and practical wellbeing programme to help young people manage post-school challenges such as forming new relationships, becoming more independent and juggling multiple commitments. The programme will be delivered over a 10-week period in which participants receive a series of brief action-based messages via SMS which they will be encouraged to apply to their daily life. An interactive smartphone app will be used to collect data and provide useful feedback to participants about their mental health and wellbeing. To evaluate the programme effects, a comparison will be made between those who received the wellbeing programme and those who did not.

To explore the mental health effects of school based Positive Education on young people once they leave school, former students of GGS (and two other schools) who have previously participated in longitudinal research with the University of Melbourne while at school, will again be invited to participate in a short survey later in the year. This will allow researchers to match data over time and explore longer term changes as young people transition to life post-secondary school.

Summary

Students' generous contributions at GGS and other schools involved in the longitudinal study have provided rich knowledge to both researchers and practitioners. Taken together, the findings suggest that particular Positive Education programmes are highly effective in increasing student wellbeing (i.e. Timbertop year) and that explicit programming

Taken together, the findings suggest that particular Positive Education programmes are highly effective in increasing student wellbeing (i.e. Timbertop year) and that explicit programming helps sustain positive mental health and wellbeing for students.

helps sustain positive mental health and wellbeing for students. Greater attention needs to be paid to curbing experiences of mental ill health as students' study demands increase and explicit Positive Education programmes decrease in frequency. Different avenues of programming are currently under consideration, for example, peer support and peer education programmes to complement existing curriculum.

When students have a clear understanding of the purpose and relevance of Positive Education they are likely to benefit more from the skills taught. Future directions for research at GGS will explore how the

curriculum and programming can be more responsive to the needs of students through integrating different forms of data across the school. Greater understanding of the post-secondary transition will continue to inform preventive programme planning.

An exciting area of innovation has been the incorporation of peer educators within the GFBW and the Positive Pathways for School Leavers projects. Although we are still awaiting results from both projects, the projects' unique designs and focus on young people's meaningful involvement in Positive Education research are exciting and informative developments. In addition, the GFBW project has provided us with valuable insights into how peer education may support the development of eudaimonic wellbeing.

An obvious gap in our research with students is understanding the impact of Positive Education for students in the kindergarten, primary school and early secondary years. This gap is mirrored in the wider research field of Positive Education and most likely associated with difficulties obtaining accurate and valid measures of wellbeing for younger students. Current developments in the area of measurement will assist our research programme to address these questions more directly in coming years.

TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING STAFF

Staff play a critical role in contributing to the wellbeing of the school community. Teaching staff explicitly teach Positive Education in timetabled lessons, and all staff (teaching and non-teaching) act as role models in contributing to the school culture of wellbeing. Staff experiences of wellbeing are therefore expected to hold valuable insights into the implementation of a whole-school approach to Positive Education. The majority of studies described in this section and the parents section were led by postgraduate students, and co-supervised by our Research Fellow(s) at the Institute of Positive Education along with supervisors at their respective universities.

Facilitators and Barriers to GGS Staff Engagement with Positive Education

In 2014, Ms Elizabeth Clancy, a Master of Industrial and Organisational Psychology postgraduate student (co-supervised by Dr Arlene Walker and Dr Wendy Sutherland-Smith, Deakin University), investigated GGS staff experiences of Positive Education, relating to what has helped build staff engagement and identify opportunities to further enhance staff experiences (Clancy, 2014). This study was designed as an in-depth exploratory study with a small sample of participants to inform future larger-scale work.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with a mix of 21 teaching and non-teaching staff with topics relating to their experiences of Positive Education and its implementation, drivers of efficacy and engagement, and barriers to engagement and wellbeing. Questions focused on professional and personal applications of Positive Education, and times they had felt professionally effective or engaged and factors that had contributed to this. Lastly, participants were asked for suggestions to increase staff flourishing and wellbeing.

It's evident that a key aim of Positive Education is to support all members of the school community to flourish, which cannot be achieved by learning and training experiences alone.

Staff reported that experiences of Positive Education were generally positive including training, professional and personal applications. Themes related to increased engagement were: feeling a sense of competence, strong relationships and autonomy to make decisions. Three themes describing participants' responses to engagement barriers were: demands of work exceeding their personal resources, inconsistent commitment to Positive Education from leaders and unfairness in accessing opportunities.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of the **Live it and Embed it** processes within our Applied Model for

Positive Education. Where possible, leaders at all levels across the school must strive to uphold the principles of Positive Education through living it in their words and actions. It's evident that a key aim of Positive Education is to support all members of the school community to flourish, which cannot be achieved by learning and training experiences alone. It is necessary to pay close attention to the policies, practices and processes which affect staff perceptions of the organisation and their personal wellbeing. In response to this research, the Institute of Positive Education is currently developing a more systematic approach to the process of embedding (e.g. tools to review policies, evidence-based best work practices and conditions) which we hope will benefit staff at GGS and other schools we serve.

Positive Education Booster Sessions for GGS Staff

The whole-school approach to Positive Education supports staff wellbeing through initial training in Positive Education for all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) at the commencement of employment. Additional 'booster' Positive Education sessions are offered, to allow continual development of Positive Education skills, and to support the embedding of the programme in the school culture. The booster sessions, titled PosEd4U, are run once a term with the topic and duration of each session varying depending on staff needs and interests.

Research led by Master of Educational and Developmental Psychology postgraduate students Ms Megan Smalley and Ms Angela Tran (University of Melbourne) evaluated the impact of one booster session (PosEd4U) about fostering Positive Relationships, on staff wellbeing and their engagement with work over time (Smalley, 2016; Tran Thi Thanh Quy, 2016). The study used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative evaluations) to assess how staff wellbeing and staff engagement with work changed over three time points: before the PosEd4U session, up to one week after the PosEd4U session, and approximately six weeks after the PosEd4U session.

A total of 103 teaching staff from three campuses at GGS participated in the study. Teachers were asked to give ratings of the session acceptability, their attitude and use of PosEd4U skills in their professional and personal life, their wellbeing, work engagement, relationship with students and student engagement. A total of 87 non-teaching staff also participated in the study and were asked to give ratings of the session acceptability, their wellbeing and work engagement.

Teaching staff rated the session acceptability as high, specifically in terms of the session usefulness (the content) and timing and themes which were also echoed in qualitative data collected from open ended questions. Teachers were most interested in specific skills and classroom activities to apply to their own specific challenges. Teachers valued that presenters were able to interact authentically with the audience with warmth and humour. The use of interactive games as well as giving examples from real-life stories were reported to be effective in engaging staff. Teachers reported that they would like more opportunities in the sessions for discussion with other staff members to share practice and experiences.

The non-teaching staff were presented with an adapted format and session content compared to the teaching staff. Qualitative data associated with the non-teaching session showed that overall the staff had a relatively positive response to the PosEd4U session. Much of the general feedback focused on the technicalities of running the sessions, for example, the timing and length of the sessions. When commenting on the sessions, it was the enthusiasm and passion of the presenters themselves that was highly regarded.

Quantitative measures over the three points for both teaching and non-teaching staff did not show the predicted improvement in wellbeing, attitudes and engagement over time. Despite participants' expressed intentions to use the skills learned in the session, the use of skills over time remained constant. As expected, those teachers who rated their wellbeing as high tended to be highly engaged with work.

In interpreting these findings, Smalley (2016) suggested that the GGS staff reported quite a high level of wellbeing compared to the general teaching population. Since research suggests that the teaching profession tends to have high levels of stress, and increased prevalence of burnout, Smalley suggested that Positive Education in the GGS community is having the desired effect.

This study has significant implications for how we continue to develop and improve future PosEd4U sessions to ensure positive and sustainable impact for staff. Ideas for improvement include incorporating different areas of the school such as professional learning, learning and curriculum and human resources to better align sessions with staff needs and share common goals with the school at large. Consistent with much of the literature on behavior change programmes, obtaining sustained effects from a programme is complex, as the original programme's salience and relevance competes with the everyday stressors and strains of life. Greater attention needs to be paid to how the messages and skills of PosEd4U sessions can be sustained over time.



GGG Staff wellbeing and perceptions of the organisation

A major focus area for Positive Education journey has been how to best measure and evaluate the whole-school approach. As such, the Positive Institution Project was developed and led by Dr Paige Williams, Positive Psychology Project Manager from 2009 to 2013 as part of her PhD project (Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2015). The longitudinal study followed 432 teaching and non-teaching staff in relation to their reported levels of positive psychological capital (hope, optimism, resilience and confidence), perception of virtues in the organisation culture (forgiveness, optimism,

Having a bottom-up and top-down approach to supporting staff wellbeing is an integral aspect of the Applied Model for Positive Education (*Learn it, Live it, Teach it and Embed it*).

trust, integrity and compassion) and work happiness (job satisfaction, work engagement and organisational commitment) over a 15 month period.

The research found that both psychological capital and organisational virtuousness predicted work happiness over time. In other words, staff members with higher levels of psychological capital and work happiness were more likely to perceive more organisational virtues in the school culture. These findings suggest a dynamic approach to supporting whole-school wellbeing is required, where

efforts are focused on both bottom-up (support to develop staff psychological capital at an individual level) and top-down (developing a positive culture across the school).

The results of this study continue to inform the practice and theory of delivering Positive Education across a whole-school. Having a bottom-up and top-down approach to supporting staff wellbeing is an integral aspect of the Applied Model for Positive Education (*Learn it, Live it, Teach it and Embed it*).

The effect of Positive Education training for teachers outside GGS

An exploratory qualitative study led by Master of Organisational Psychology postgraduate student Ms Denushka Field, examined how staff from other schools attending our intensive Discovering Positive Education three day training course, apply the skills and strategies learnt (Field, 2016). One hundred and forty staff participated in the first phase of the study, which asked them to complete a survey at the beginning of the training course about why they were undertaking the training and what they hoped to achieve. Notably there was a significant decline in participation within the study, with only 18 staff completing the follow-up survey focusing on the learnt application of skills and strategies when confronted with a challenging event.

Key themes from participants' responses about why they did the training included: implementing Positive Education across whole-school, personal development and growth, along with enhancing the wellbeing of their school community. In relation to Positive Education skills and strategies, participants highlighted increased competency in coping mechanisms, navigating challenging situations and strengthening relationships with others. These positive changes were reported to occur in both personal and professional domains of their lives.

This pilot study provides preliminary support for the efficacy of intensive Positive Education training in supporting individuals' wellbeing and their ability to navigate the inevitable challenges associated with applying Positive Education. There is also evidence to suggest that Positive Education training may have wide-reaching effects beyond the school community and into the broader community, as participants mentioned using key learnings with their friends and families. The findings and methodology of this study have informed the design and development of a larger research project evaluating the impact of multiple Institute led Positive Education training courses over time, which recently begun recruiting participants in late 2018.

Summary

As described, staff at GGS have contributed generously to our knowledge of Positive Education across the whole-school. Reports from staff have tended to reflect positive attitudes towards Positive Education. Despite this enthusiasm for Positive Education, there are still areas of research that need to be focused on to advance the field of Positive Education. In relation to the process of **Learn it**, PosEd4U booster sessions have the potential to be more effective in supporting staff wellbeing and positive behavior change. Greater reinforcement of messages and more strategic alignment to the school's overarching goals may help to improve the sustainable impact of PosEd4U sessions.

Findings should be considered in light of context. After 10 years of the School implementing Positive Education, it is likely GGS staff are beginning at an already high level of wellbeing and knowledge of Positive Psychology; Positive Education is no longer a new and exciting initiative at GGS like it is for other schools, and staff may have habituated somewhat to the learning and messages. Responses to intensive Positive Education training experiences for staff external to GGS were positive suggesting this is a promising method of promoting whole-school change.

When considering **Live it**, research suggests that leaders' ability to be authentic in role-modelling Positive Education principles and messages has an impact on staff engagement and will likely influence staff perceptions of the virtuousness of the school and their work happiness. Training in positive leadership practices took place in 2016 at GGS demonstrating how we perceive leadership skills to be an important element of Positive Education. Although we have observed some positive effects as a result of participating in intensive Positive Education training, continued follow-up as well as booster PosEd4U sessions are required to assist staff to integrate positive changes into their daily lives.

Out of all the processes within the Applied Model for Positive Education, **Embed it** has the most room for growth. Research continues to highlight the importance of organisational culture, policies and practices. A more systematic approach is needed to help identify causes of staff stress and disengagement. In future years, staff will be invited to share de-identified information about their wellbeing with a valid staff wellbeing survey. We are hopeful that this data alongside other data from staff surveys and qualitative feedback can help inform the **Embed it** process of Positive Education.



PARENTS

Parents are highly influential in supporting the whole-school community to flourish. At GGS, all parents are invited to lectures presented by wellbeing experts from around the world. There are also opportunities for parents to participate in workshops throughout the year at the different campuses. An important initiative aimed at parents engaging in Positive Education is to provide them with the opportunity to attend intensive Positive Education training.

Research conducted by Master of Educational Psychology postgraduate student Ms Karina Dubroja (supervised by Dr Meredith O'Connor and Dr Vicki McKenzie) provided preliminary insights into the impact of a three day intensive residential Positive Education programme (Dubroja, O'Connor, & McKenzie, 2016). The programme aimed to increase parents' own understanding of wellbeing, providing them with skills to flourish. Both parents and the school developed consistent language around wellbeing, creating an opportunity to enhance parent-school relationships. The programme

While small-scale, this study provides valuable insights into how parents can be involved in Positive Education within the school setting, with promising wellbeing and parent-school engagement findings.

explores a range of Positive Psychology Interventions including an introduction to mindfulness, discussing effective methods of feedback focusing on effort rather than outcome, exploring Active Constructive Responding for meaningful relationships and the state of flow for optimal performance and enjoyment.

The study was quasi-experimental, meaning two groups were compared to each other, yet individuals were not randomly placed in groups so the study did not control for the bias of selection effects. Twenty-four participants received the programme and 16 participants formed the

wait-list control group. Outcomes included; overall mental health, Character Strengths, parent-school connection, and child outcomes. Measures were taken prior to the programme, just after the programme, and two months following the programme via online surveys.

Results revealed significant increases in parent wellbeing and parent-school connection among intervention participants compared to controls. Increased levels of wellbeing after completing the programme were sustained at the two-month follow-up. These parents also perceived a positive impact on their communication with their child. While small-scale, this study provides valuable insights into how parents can be involved in Positive Education within the school setting, with promising wellbeing and parent-school engagement findings. Future studies might track parents' responses to shorter Positive Education training experiences and resources to determine cost-effective and feasible interventions to support parental and family wellbeing.

ACTION RESEARCH

Although experimental research studies offer empirical evidence to inform practice, it can be unrealistic and difficult to implement large scale evaluations within school settings. Action research refers to studies of specific practices which aim to improve methods and the approach of those involved. There is continuous improvement across action research that is adaptive to context. As such, action research in the form of local evaluations of Positive Psychology and Positive Education interventions comprise an important component of the Positive Education research programme at GGS.

In 2014, we conducted a local evaluation to determine whether keeping a blessings journal before bedtime would improve sleep and gratitude, within the boarding context. The hypothesis was that students who completed a blessings journal

Recently, we have begun to promote action research of Positive Education initiatives and innovations through professional learning channels so that projects are driven by teachers, integrated with their performance review and align with the school's professional learning goals and strategic direction.

before bedtime over a five-week period would show increased gratitude and decreased daytime sleepiness, compared to students who did not complete this intervention. One boarding house completed a blessings journal each night before bed over a five-week period (intervention group), while a second boarding house experienced their bedtime routine as usual (control group).

The intervention group reported that during the five-week intervention, most students wrote in their journal either every night or at least four times per week. There was little indication that the blessings journal intervention improved daytime sleepiness for these students. There were some significant increases in gratitude and perceptions of the community as kind, but these benefits were not maintained three months

later, probably because most students did not choose to keep a blessings journal beyond the five weeks in which they were prompted to do so. Action points from this local evaluation included timing of the journal completion, regular prompts to assist with sustainable journal use over time and incorporating adult feedback to sustain motivation.

Our current and future local evaluations include the impact of an equine-assisted learning programme at Timbertop, trialling virtual reality technologies to assess their impact on learning and wellbeing, assessing the wellbeing outcomes of a Year 11 Resilience Retreat, evaluating engagement in team meetings and using the student wellbeing measurement results to encourage student and staff voice.

Action research allows findings to be rapidly incorporated into school initiatives, and builds the evidence-base of how to best promote flourishing in the school community. Recently, we have begun to promote action research of Positive Education initiatives and innovations through professional learning channels so that projects are driven by teachers, integrated with their performance review and align with the school's professional learning goals and strategic direction.

SUMMARY

GGS has made significant contributions to growing the evidence-base of Positive Education. The majority of findings reported have been published in peer-review articles, demonstrating the relevant and significant contribution these studies have made to the emerging Positive Education literature.

Research with our students has been promising, indicating that students have demonstrated measurable gains in wellbeing, high levels of engagement with the programme and continue to use these Positive Education skills post-school. Results suggest more work is needed to prevent mental health difficulties, particularly in the older years. There is more to learn about how we can best support students through significant transitions like leaving school. An understudied area within Positive Education and at GGS has been the wellbeing measurement of preschool and primary school age students' and the evaluation of Positive Education programmes across this age range.

Research with staff continues to emphasise the importance of using a concert of different and complementary approaches in supporting both individual wellbeing and positive workplace culture. Future practice and research directions might explore complementary modes of support and professional learning for staff (e.g. coaching) versus traditional training sessions.

Preliminary research with parents has yielded encouraging findings indicating that Positive Education learning experiences can have positive effects on parents at an individual level, as well as promote positive relationships with their children and the school. Yet there is still much to learn about how we can better facilitate parent learning and support parental and family wellbeing.



Future Directions

The research findings emerging from GGS are rich and promising. We should be incredibly proud of the achievements and contributions made over the last 10 years, particularly given the small size of our research programme, relative to universities and research institutions. Importantly, the research programme at GGS aims to contribute to, as opposed to determine or complete the field of Positive Education. We recognise that Positive Education is a broad and complex field which requires many diverse minds to bring about its ambitious aims. There are multiple factors which contribute to wellbeing. Education plays a significant role, yet not the only role, in supporting individuals and communities to flourish. Future directions are laid out according to the current aims of our Positive Education research programme.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE FIELD

A major component of contributing to the field is being a strong voice in the field of Positive Education. Being a strong voice involves communicating effectively about research findings to inform best practice. As the Institute matures, we feel more confident in sharing our unique perspective and insights into the implementation of Positive Education. Not only do we have wide-ranging and comprehensive research findings about our own school setting, we are beginning

to systematically collect information about the schools we work closely with to support their implementation of Positive Education.

A major component of contributing to the field is being a strong voice in the field of Positive Education.

Our voice might be represented in different channels such as peer-review publications, public forums, print articles, blog posts, books, media engagement, participation in multi-disciplinary committees dedicated to the growth of Positive Education, presentations at conferences and the delivery of training courses.

In acknowledgement of the limitations of our perspective, there should be a willingness to have open and critical dialogue as well as share findings with both researchers, practitioners and stakeholders. There are many opportunities for thought leadership with regard to sharing findings with openness and transparency about what works in practice and areas identified for improvement.

Another essential aspect of contributing to the development of Positive Education involves continuing to review current literature and identify gaps in knowledge, for example, understanding how to promote wellbeing in very young children. To capitalise on our unique position of driving research and practice across the whole-school, gaps should be identified based on the knowledge needs of both practitioners and researchers. Specific gaps with regard to GGS research and the field at large are identified in the next section.

INNOVATE

Given the significant contributions that staff, students, parents and independent funders have made to research activities at GGS, we have a responsibility to remain accountable to the findings through reporting processes, documenting action plans and their delivery, and feedback to the community.

A whole-school approach

A theme cutting across all areas of research is the inherent complexity of taking a whole-school approach. There is no one measure which can capture the effectiveness of Positive Education at GGS. Instead, multiple measures must be

As researchers expand measures to include these different facets of the system, we will be in a better position to gain a comprehensive understanding of the wellbeing of the whole-school community.

used to assess the effectiveness of programming for all stakeholders (students, staff, parents), at different levels (individual, organisation, community impact) and across different domains of wellbeing (e.g. positive emotions, positive purpose) and competence (e.g. coping strategies, social and emotional skills). Valid measures for these areas are still under development. As researchers expand measures to incorporate these different facets of the system, we will be in a better position to understand the wellbeing of the whole-school community.

As shown in this report, mixed methods studies which combine quantitative measures (e.g. surveys, biomarkers, etc.) with qualitative reports (e.g. interviews, focus groups) provide rich information about programme effectiveness whilst integrating the meaning students, staff and parents attach to wellbeing and Positive Education.

Systems theory

Given the multi-component whole-school approach taken, it is difficult to identify the active ingredients which are shaping individual and community wellbeing. Systems theory is about understanding how different aspects within a system interact with each other and act independently. For example, in relation to Positive Education, how does teachers learning particular topics like mindsets, gratitude and grit impact teaching methods? Applying systems theory to the implementation of Positive Education has the potential to provide us with insights into how positive change takes place and the conditions under which it takes place.

Systems theory also provides a framework for guiding and evaluating efforts to integrate Positive Education across the school. As mentioned in this report, a greater focus on the **Embed it** process of Positive Education is required. This process needs to be conceptualised in a more systematic way to ensure policies, practices and processes are consistent with Positive Education and work to support the wellbeing of school community members. There are opportunities to integrate different areas of the school more closely with the aims and goals of Positive Education, such as professional learning, learning and curriculum and human resources.

Wellbeing data

The collection of different types of wellbeing data relating to student and staff wellbeing will help to identify patterns over time and inform programming. Strategic planning will take place to ensure that data is being analysed so as to improve and innovate our existing Positive Education programmes. Such data can be used as a basis to review our progress on the Positive Education Evaluation Tool and Roadmap and to test the tools' validity. We see data being used by leadership to set visionary direction for the school. In addition, we hope to use action research to evaluate different aspects of delivery from a more in-depth practice-based perspective and encourage all staff to be innovative in their practice.

Gaps in knowledge

Significant gaps in the literature remain about the efficacy of Positive Education for certain groups and the most appropriate adaptations required to increase efficacy. As mentioned in this report, there has only been a small number of studies evaluating the effectiveness of Positive Education whole-school interventions for early childhood, middle childhood and early adolescence. Longitudinal evidence is required to better understand positive development and critical transitions across these developmental periods. Such evidence would help to inform best practices for sequencing Positive Education across development. Controlled experiments comparing schools as the main unit of analysis are required to test the impact of programmes for these age groups.

In addition to age, individual differences such as gender, learning styles, intelligence profiles, personality and cultural factors have not been examined in relation to students' and adults' engagement with Positive Education. Given the differences researchers have observed in the development of mental health problems and social emotional competencies across some of these areas, it is evident that this is an important area of inquiry to ensure the best fit between the person and interventions offered as part of Positive Education. For example, studies may indicate that students who are extroverted benefit more from programmes which emphasise social interaction, whereas introverts may show higher gains in wellbeing from solitary or reflective activities.

As we roll out our new Positive Education Enhanced Curriculum (PEEC), we intend to monitor its effectiveness through obtaining direct feedback from staff and students and incorporating student data from the student wellbeing measurement across year level cohorts and year levels. Hearing and Valuing student voice will be an important focus in adapting and developing programmes to meet the needs of students. Programming will not be limited to curriculum but rather consider different types of activities including setting up formal peer support, peer coaching and peer education opportunities for students.

There is much to learn about how Positive Education affects parental wellbeing, parenting and the extended family. There is minimal research into this area, and many opportunities exist to better understand the relationship between students, staff and parents in supporting each other's flourishing.

COLLABORATE

The potential contributions the Institute and GGS can make to the field of Positive Education are undoubtedly strengthened through our collaboration with others. The findings of this report demonstrate the richness of insights that come from applying multiple perspectives to complex areas of research and practice.

Within GGS

Research has a role to play in encouraging meaningful collaboration between GGS staff, students, parents and community members. The influence of student, staff and parent voice in the ongoing improvement and implementation of Positive Education is an understudied area. There are opportunities both to explore participation for

Research has a role to play in encouraging meaningful collaboration between GGS staff, students, parents and community members. The influence of student, staff and parent voice in the ongoing improvement and implementation of Positive Education is an understudied area.

these groups and encourage participation through cultivating a culture of action research. Action research can be promoted through professional learning channels, so that staff are offered opportunities to be autonomous, yet supported, in pursuing practice areas of interest which relate to promoting student wellbeing. At present, the school is setting up more formal systems of student representation and leadership for Positive Education to facilitate students' voices being heard and acted upon. More specifically, Year 11 Positive Education House Representatives have been appointed and Student Wellbeing Action Teams are running in our primary and secondary schools. There are also opportunities within how the pedagogy and curriculum are shaped to enhance student voice

and participation in Positive Education. Documenting and reporting on improvements and innovations in this area is important to ensure sustainable practices, as well as capturing valuable information which can be shared with other schools.

Working with other schools

Given the Institute's focus on the training and development of other schools, it is necessary to test the efficacy of our approach in different contexts. As found in the University of Melbourne longitudinal evaluation, students in public schools were observed to show positive and sustained programme effects in Year 10. We would like to explore the relationship between school context and the successful implementation of a whole-school approach to wellbeing at a more in-depth level. Plans for a longitudinal evaluation of Positive Education in state primary schools are currently underway. Such a project requires collaboration with individual schools and the Department of Education and Training, as well as local council and a university partner. This project would involve providing schools with the necessary training, tools, resources and support to implement Positive Education. It is hoped that individual school journeys can be evaluated through mixed methods aiming to capture mechanisms of positive change.

In addition to understanding Positive Education at the organisational level, we would like to understand how Positive Education impacts individual teachers' wellbeing and work practices in another project. In particular, we would like to know more about how training and follow-up efforts influence teachers over time. In this project, we are inviting all participants who attend our intensive three day training courses to provide information about their wellbeing and confidence when teaching and implementing Positive Education prior to training and post training. We will analyse this data to assess whether we are seeing significant and sustained positive change over time.

Partnerships with universities and organisations

We continue to deepen and broaden our partnerships with universities. In particular, we are interested in working with universities to test out ideas about how Positive Education philosophies and practices can be taken to scale and applied to different contexts. At present, we remain engaged with the Research Advisory Group we have set up, as well as both the University of Melbourne and Deakin University in planning future research projects and seeking expert advice.

Another area of focus for research is to support Positive Education hubs in the community through partnerships with local council, schools, services and government. By targeting particular regions or areas, we are better able to increase engagement and create sustainable momentum and networks. By researching models of community engagement, we are able to offer schools and regions insights into whole-school and whole-region change. In addition, if the localised hub model of community engagement proves to be successful, we have powerful exemplars to support policy and practice reform and improvement at higher levels.

Conclusions

Research at GGS is entering a new age of maturity. Over the past 10 years our focus has been on investigating the effects of Positive Education within our own school community, attempting to capture the perspectives of students, parents and staff. As summarised in this report, we have made some significant conceptual contributions through the proposal of applied models. Empirical findings have demonstrated successes with secondary level students showing significant gains in wellbeing over time compared to students in like-schools. Following up with students who have graduated from GGS suggests Positive Education strategies are being used to tackle issues after they leave school.

Research with staff has been promising indicating that staff have a general appreciation for the Schools focus on Positive Education and associated professional learning opportunities. In depth analysis of staff attitudes has shown the importance of the link between an individual's wellbeing and how virtuous they perceive the organisation to be. The one study analysing parent wellbeing after attending intensive wellbeing training offered by the Institute found that there were significant improvements to parent wellbeing and their sense of connection to the School.

Alongside these successes, research has revealed areas of improvement for GGS. In relation to students, an explicit focus on identifying and coping with mental health issues may assist with observed increases in stress and anxiety as students enter Years 11 and 12. Programming changes in Years 10, 11 and 12 may help to better sustain positive

Research at GGS now has a dual focus: first, to continue to understand and improve Positive Education at GGS, and second, to explore how Positive Education can be best applied in other settings and taken to scale.

wellbeing gains from previous years. Having a more accurate picture of student and staff wellbeing through the collection of survey and qualitative data will assist the school in considering how to best support individual and collective wellbeing through practice and policy.

All findings reported should be understood to have significant limitations. Experimental studies aim to control all factors which may influence the results. In the case of Positive Education programming and activities across a whole-school, it is impossible to control for all the other factors which may affect

student, staff and parent wellbeing. Further to this, a school is not a static population. Students and staff enter and leave at different times and the research to-date struggles to capture the moving picture of individual and organisational wellbeing over time. GGS is a unique school environment, comprising of four campuses, two of which are predominantly boarding. Any conclusions drawn from our research should be viewed in the context of this unique school environment.

As Positive Education matures as a field and becomes increasingly popular with schools around the world, there are opportunities to better understand how Positive Education is best applied to different contexts. Research at GGS now has a dual focus: first, to continue to understand and improve Positive Education at GGS, and second, to explore how Positive Education can be best applied in other settings and taken to scale. As we follow this dual-focus, we must remember to be accountable to research participants, ensuring the benefits of their participation continues to outweigh the costs.

Reflecting upon 10 years of Positive Education at GGS, we are proud of the contributions made to Positive Education through our research efforts. We hope these contributions directly support our own school community and other school communities in learning to flourish.

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If this Research Discoveries booklet has motivated you to do more for Positive Education, we are always grateful for philanthropic funding to fund our research. The majority of the projects could not have begun without the generous nature of the individuals within the community who have made these projects a reality. If you too would like to contribute towards flourishing students, not only at GGS, but for school students across the globe, please get in touch with us at institute@ggs.vic.edu.au



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