



Catholic Education
Diocese of Rockhampton

Student Wellbeing and Engagement Framework







Foreword

In Catholic Education, the holistic development of students is paramount. The Student Wellbeing and Engagement Framework has been designed to guide school communities to create and nurture an inclusive environment where every student feels valued, supported, and inspired to reach their full potential.

Within such an environment, the dignity of every student is prioritised and we provide the opportunity for students to flourish spiritually, culturally, academically, socially and emotionally.

This framework enables school communities to evaluate their current beliefs and practices that underpin quality student engagement in classrooms and in the wider school environment. This involves reflecting on the school's Vision and Mission Statements to ensure close alignment with evidence-based, student-centred practices across the school. To be the very best staff member in a Catholic School, this requires a growth mindset where neuro-affirming language and practices are evident. The Student Wellbeing and Engagement Framework provides a clear reference point for this to be achieved.

I urge every school community to explore the five elements and fifteen key practices contained within the document to ensure every effort is made to create a culture where quality, inclusive Catholic Education is a reality for every student.

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Defining Student Wellbeing and Engagement for Learning

The Catholic Education Diocese of Rockhampton (CEDR) Student Wellbeing and Engagement Framework is grounded in Catholic Christian beliefs and values.

“The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, para 9). The creation of a safe and supportive learning environment requires a culture where wellbeing, engagement, behaviour and learning integrate at a strategic and systems-level and are delivered through a whole-school, coordinated approach. All members of the school community have a responsibility for creating safe, inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments, nurturing respectful relationships, and providing essential support for students to develop behaviours that enable them to successfully engage in learning.

Education nurtures growth and development by empowering and enabling young people to understand the needs of others, to engage in genuine dialogue, and to experience solidarity and collaboration. Through a Catholic education, we contribute to the overall wellbeing and flourishing of individuals and communities, aligning with God’s mission of love, justice, and reconciliation (NCEC, 2024). Recognising each person’s inherent dignity, created in God’s image, the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ interaction with children inspire an appreciation for their unsurpassed and immeasurable value in the Catholic tradition. The Mystery of God’s love is revealed in children’s experience, even amidst life’s brokenness and limits

(CESA, 2015). The school community works together to know each child and to care deeply for them on their journey. For every child and young person in Catholic schools we “seek to draw out [their] gifts, address their challenges and enable them to experience fullness of life” (NCEC, 2024). The educational endeavour to foster children’s flourishing is an active expression of God’s grace (CESA, 2015).

The 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration sets out the shared commitment of Australian governments to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians. “The Declaration places students at the centre of their education by emphasising the importance of meeting the individual needs of all learners, and outlines education’s role in supporting the wellbeing, mental health and resilience of young people.” It further highlights the importance for all young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community (Education Council, 2019).

The Student Wellbeing and Engagement Framework affirms children’s rights to grow, learn and live a safe and healthy life with dignity and respect. It is aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which emphasises four core principles including non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and the views of the child (UNICEF Aust, 1989, 2024).

The World Health Organisation (2022) defines Mental Health as a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and wellbeing that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world in which we live. This Framework is based on evidence that demonstrates the strong association between safety, wellbeing, and learning. The wellbeing of children and young people is enhanced, and their learning outcomes optimised when they feel connected to others and experience safe and trusting relationships (Dept. of Education, 2023).

Engagement is crucial for achieving student goals. When students are actively involved in the classroom, their learning improves. Engagement is multifaceted and encompasses students' behavioural, affective, and cognitive motivations and competencies during learning activities (BSEM, 2019). Educators and school leaders can foster a strong culture of engagement by using evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally responsive teaching practices. Such environments allow teacher-student relationships, which are vital for maintaining student engagement, to grow and thrive (AERO, 2023).

Prioritising staff wellbeing is essential for effectively supporting students. Research has shown staff wellbeing, student wellbeing and relationships within the school are closely intertwined, and impact students' academic and emotional outcomes (Black Dog Institute, 2023, ISQ, 2021). Improved staff wellbeing fosters stronger connections with students, families and colleagues, boosts professional commitment, and leads to enhanced student learning outcomes (ISQ, 2021).

This framework recognises that children's behaviour is purposeful, happens in the context of their environment, and is learnt over time. Children and young people's behaviours span a continuum including prosocial behaviours, low level and developmentally appropriate transgressions, behaviours that challenge and raise concern, and complex and unsafe behaviours.

Behaviour should be viewed through a multi-tiered system of support - when capacity is lacking, additional supports are introduced to increase the likelihood of student mastery. Viewing concerning behaviours as a lack of skill and thus a learning opportunity, highlights the importance of explicitly teaching prosocial behaviours, placing them on the same level as academic learning (Lewis et al, 2016). To best support student behaviour, a consistent whole-school model which incorporates proactive, preventative, and reparative approaches is essential (E4L, 2023). These approaches are underpinned by values of unconditional positive regard, hope and equity.

Students who feel supported, safe, and connected are more likely to be active participants in their learning (CEDR Teaching and Learning Framework, 2025). Placing the child at the centre of our practice enables schools to foster a culture of meaningful participation, characterised by students having voice, influence, choice, and opportunities to work together with teachers and other students. Student participation aims to engage and motivate learners, enhance their wellbeing and strengthen school communities (Graham et al., 2019). It is important to create a holistic, inclusive, and universal approach to student development that focuses on consistency of language, intent and practice to increase access to learning opportunities, engagement, and wellbeing for all students. This approach is underpinned by our Catholic identity and ethos, strengthened through supportive systems and collaborative communities.

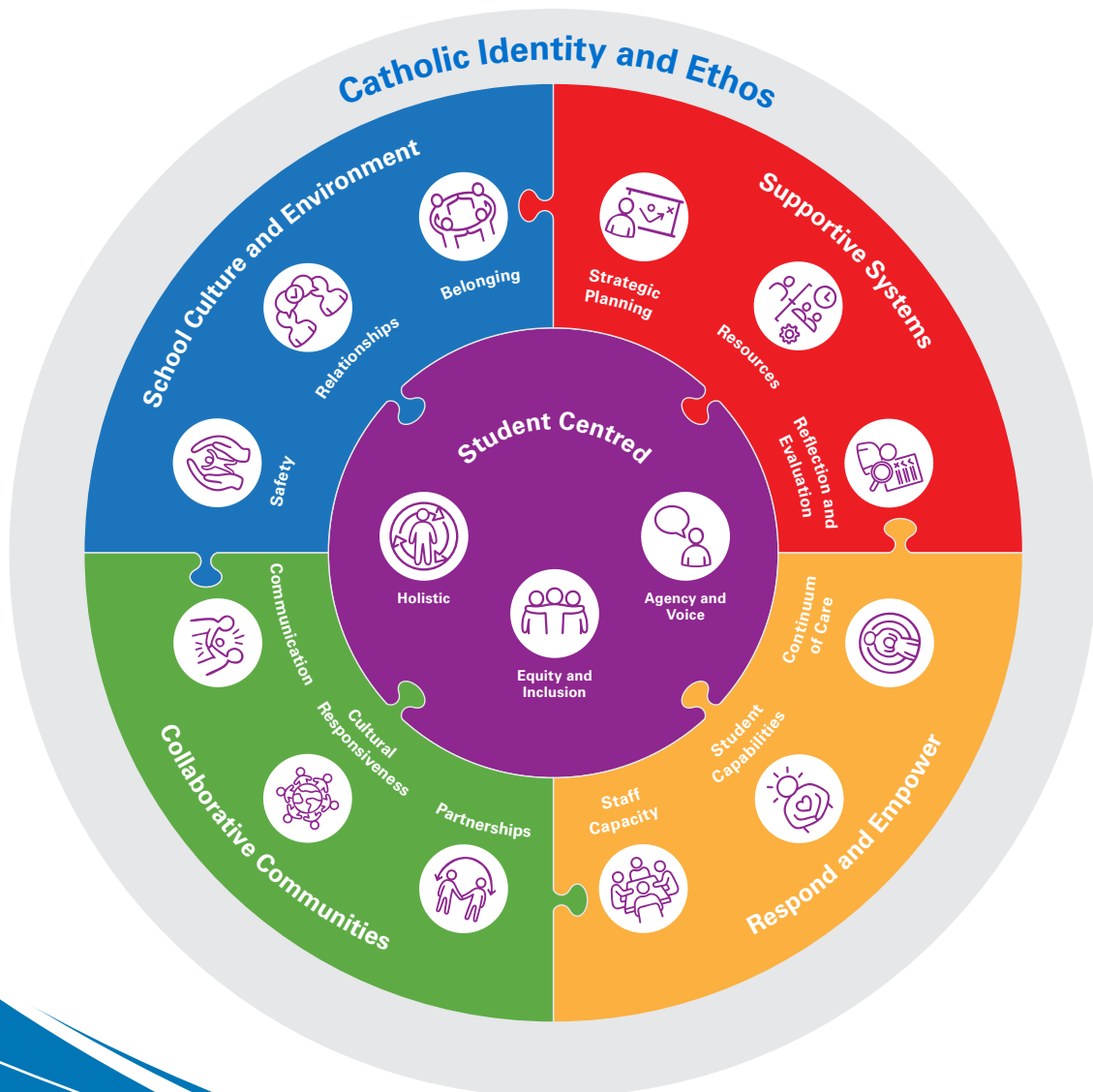
“How we treat our best students shows our aspirations; how we treat our most challenging students shows our values.”
(Mendler & Curwin, 2009, p.1)

Introducing the Framework

Derived from commonalities across contemporary frameworks and research, this Framework is designed to guide schools in adopting five elements and fifteen key practices to foster a culture of engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour support for learning.

The Framework resembles a puzzle placing students at the heart, with each element interlocking and connected, working together holistically to support this core. The absence of any single element would disrupt the overall balance and effectiveness of engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour support for learning. The elements of the Framework, underpinned by our Catholic Identity and Ethos, focus on Student

Centred approaches, School Culture and Environment, Supportive Systems, Responsive and Empowering strategies, and Collaborative Communities. For successful implementation, schools must consider all elements and key practices, recognising the importance of supporting all students by making engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour support visible, measurable, and improvable.



Catholic Identity and Ethos

“The Defining Features of Catholic Schools in the 21st Century communicate clearly what we believe is at the heart of Catholic education and give direction and guidance to those whose daily interactions with others bring to life the vision of an authentic Catholic school as living out the Gospel message. Catholic schools have a special and vital role in the Church’s mission in education; through providing a learning environment that is spiritually nurturing, intellectually challenging and emotionally caring” (CEDR, 2024). CEDR’s core beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviours and traditions assist in shaping the lives of students, teachers and parents. This shapes the Catholic Identity of schools and directs their authentic purpose in educating students. Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, affirming that all people are equal and unique. This opens each person to God’s love and grace. Catholic schools share in this Christian vision, focusing on the dignity and wellbeing of each individual (NCEC, 2024).

School Culture and Environment

In school environments that are consistently caring, safe, attuned to relationships, and inclusive, students’ learning and wellbeing will thrive. A safe and supportive school culture should reflect shared values and is characterised by positive relationships between teachers and students, genuine respect, and a sense of belonging for all. Students in positive school climates report lower levels of stress and anxiety, and higher levels of happiness and satisfaction (Lombardi et al., 2019)



Safety

Safety and trust should be the foundation of all decision-making, structures, and interactions as it helps to decrease feelings of fear and threat (Treisman, 2018). The principle of safety is multi-layered and consists of establishing physical, relational, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and academic safety (Treisman, 2018).



Relationships

Relationships are formed through deliberate steps taken by staff that establish trust, validation and safety, enhancing the wellbeing and learning outcomes of young people. For children and adolescents, relationships are crucial to healthy development. Research repeatedly identifies student-teacher relationships as a critically important element supporting effective teaching and learning and student wellbeing.



Belonging

Belonging is a fundamental human need, influenced by a complex set of relationships with peers, teachers, families and the broader community. A sense of belonging is subjective, and is usually described as being accepted, included, respected, and valued and fitting into a particular context or setting. The greater the sense of belonging and pride in the classroom and/or school, the greater the engagement, wellbeing, learning outcomes and behaviour.

Student Centred

CEDR fosters a holistic view recognising that each child brings their own interests, needs, background, circumstances and unique gifts, talents and abilities (ACT, 2018). This approach focuses on the individual learners' needs and puts the student at the centre of the learning process, giving them agency and voice. Providing an equitable, inclusive and meaningful foundation for learning creates pathways for children and young people to develop their interests, knowledge, and skills, enabling them to actively contribute to society and culture both in and out of school (ACT, 2018).



Holistic

A holistic approach to student support relates to the whole person and the interconnectedness of physical, cognitive, cultural, spiritual, social/emotional and psychological/personal dimensions. As complex human beings, children and young people are worthy of care and esteem, recognising that each student is unique and requires personalised support to thrive.



Equity and Inclusion

Equity ensures everyone is supported based on their personal needs and circumstances rather than treating everyone identically (ACT, 2018). Inclusive approaches recognise the diverse needs of all learners and are developmentally appropriate, trauma informed and culturally safe.



Agency and Voice

Agency gives students autonomy to make decisions about and take responsibility for their learning. This allows students to experience a sense of empowerment and mastery, creating independent and self-regulating learners. Voice allows students, parents and staff the opportunity to express, contribute and have their views listened to respectfully, and appropriately acted upon.

Supportive Systems

Systems that support schools, both internal and external, enable flexible approaches to meet the diverse needs of the community. Practices in this area include a commitment to a culture of wellbeing and engagement through leadership and governance actions, such as strategic planning, adequate resourcing and infrastructure, clear policies and guidelines, and utilising data systems for continued improvement (Human Rights Commission, 2018). Supportive systems ensure the school is connected and integrated through the creation of a shared vision.



Strategic Planning

Schools articulate an explicit focus for the continuous improvement of engagement, wellbeing and learning, responding to students' individual needs. Individual and aggregated engagement and wellbeing priorities and goals, and progress toward them, are monitored and regularly shared and discussed with staff, students, families and the wider school community.



Resources

Supportive systems require strategically allocated and coordinated resources, informed by data and evidence. Resourcing may include staff and school time, expertise and professional learning opportunities, funding, facilities, information technology and materials.



Reflection and Evaluation

Reflection and evaluation processes ensure systems are data-informed and evidence-based, allowing for continuous feedback loops between strategic planning and practice that create priorities for change. This aids in monitoring outcomes and achievements of practices to support children and families.

Respond and Empower

Respond and Empower focuses on the need to develop staff and student capabilities to ensure a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Providing practical support for staff to develop the necessary skills and tools for engaging with students, understanding their behaviour and responding appropriately, helps to strengthen relationships and enhance safety, wellbeing, and learning. Assisting students to develop personal and social capabilities is the foundation for learning and for citizenship. Establishing a continuum of care through a multi-tiered system of support that includes promotion, prevention, early intervention and individual student support. To effectively support children and young people, schools need to focus on proactive and responsive approaches that use universal, targeted and intensive measures.



Staff Capacity

All staff should have access to practical support that is evidence-based and comprehensive to build their capacity to meet their own needs and the needs of all students. This support encompasses high-quality professional development, induction and mentoring collaborative learning communities, access to tools and resources, and coaching to build thriving expert teaching teams.



Student Capabilities

Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and a sense of self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world around them. Explicitly teaching social and emotional skills and behaviour expectations, with opportunities for developmental skill building and authentic practice, provides a foundation to grow all students' capabilities to engage and learn.



Continuum of Care

A multi-tiered continuum of care, encompassing both proactive and responsive measures, is an evidence-based and structured, whole-school approach to identifying and supporting the needs of all students. This includes a school-wide understanding of behavioural expectations, high-quality classroom instruction and evidence-based support for students, provided on a sliding scale of intensity (universal, targeted, intensive) responsive to individual need.

Collaborative Communities

Collaborative Communities emphasises the importance of shared responsibility, with a commitment from all stakeholders to support student wellbeing, behaviour support and engagement for learning (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Empowering families recognises that they are best placed to communicate their children's needs and capabilities, respecting each person's culture and identity (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Taking actions to create collaborative communities will increase each school's ability to meet the diverse needs of their students and families and build lasting relationships to support children's safety and wellbeing. Key practices include creating support networks and partnerships that facilitate clear communication, providing accessible information to empower families to meet the needs of their children, and building community by honouring the culture, traditions and values of families (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).



Partnerships

Partnerships focus on shared responsibility and decision-making, recognising that everyone has a role to play in creating a culture of wellbeing and engagement (SAMHSA, 2014). School-community partnerships are purposeful and authentic and inform strategic planning to meet student needs. Schools build collaborative competence through developing understanding, seeking clarity, having shared outcomes and communicating effectively.



Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness encourages curiosity and critical reflection about our own and others' cultures and identities, recognising and honouring the connection to tradition, values and customs. Providing opportunities that reflect and celebrate diversity, strengthens and supports healing, wellbeing, spirituality, and resilience.



Communication

Schools develop procedures to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders to monitor, evaluate and adjust, partnerships, programs and initiatives to ensure they contribute to meeting student engagement, wellbeing and learning goals. Effective communication practices should be clear, consistent, and inclusive, offering opportunities for stakeholder feedback and are conducted with transparency to build and maintain trust and credibility.

Afterword

What happens in schools can have a significant and lasting impact on wellbeing, learning and life outcomes for our students.

A whole-school approach to student engagement, wellbeing, and behaviour support for learning fosters hope and optimism by creating an inclusive and nurturing environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to succeed. There is substantial research showing the interrelatedness between student engagement, wellbeing and learning, highlighting that schools must be responsive to the diverse needs of our school communities.

CEDR is committed to prioritising student wellbeing and trauma-aware education in daily practice. All schools are challenged to create a culture where wellbeing and engagement are the cornerstones of learning, ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive academically and personally. This document provides a framework for

all schools to review their current practices, identify strategic priorities, and implement evidence-based approaches to be responsive to the needs of their students.

“Educating is not a profession but an attitude, a way of being; in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of (humanity) who always retains the Creator’s hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate” – Pope Francis.

Supporting Materials

CEDR Documents

- CEDR Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- CEDR Student Engagement and Behaviour Support for Learning Policy
- CEDR Counselling in Catholic Schools and Colleges Policy
- CEDR Student Protection Policy
- CEDR Inclusive Practice in Catholic Schools and Colleges Policy
- CEDR Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
- CEDR Pastoral Care in Catholic Schools Policy
- CEDR Respectful Relationships Education Policy
- CEDR Anti-Bullying Policy
- CEDR Teaching and Learning Framework
- CEDR Respectful Relationships Education Curriculum Materials
- CEDR RE Policy

External Materials

- [Australian Curriculum v9](#)
- [National Catholic Education Commission \(NCEC\)](#)
- [Catholic Education South Australia \(CESA\)](#)
- [Evidence for Learning \(E4L\)](#)
- [Be You – Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiative and Resources](#)
- [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [The Australian Government Family-School Partnership Framework](#)
- [QUT: A Systematic Framework for Trauma-Aware Schooling in Queensland](#)
- [Berry Street Education Model \(BSEM\)](#)
- [MacKillop Education's ReLATE Model \(Rethinking Learning and Teaching Environments\)](#)
- [Australian Education Research Organisation – Classroom Management Resources for Australian Teachers and Leaders](#)
- [ACER – School Improvement Tool](#)
- [Black Dog Institute – Education and Services – Schools](#)

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