



# Evaluation of the Berry Street Education Model: Trauma informed positive education enacted in mainstream schools

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## **EVALUATION OF THE BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL: TRAUMA INFORMED POSITIVE EDUCATION ENACTED IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS**

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*At the Youth Research Centre we acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our centre is located and where we conduct our research and teaching. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future.*

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Berry Street Childhood Institute invited the Youth Research Centre (University of Melbourne) to undertake a research and evaluation project examining the effectiveness of the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM) when used to engage young people in mainstream schools.

The BSEM is a Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE) initiative (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, 2016), designed to inform and guide teacher practice and student learning within Berry Street's three specialist campuses. The Model aims to expand the possibilities of teaching and learning at these settings through integrating clinical, educational and welfare approaches and perspectives and is seen as both innovative and unique in that regard.

The development of the BSEM, over several years, has focused primarily on its application in specialist settings to young people experiencing trauma. There is also a growing recognition of the need for better-informed teacher expertise and practice within mainstream schools. This is particularly the case in severely socio-economically disadvantaged areas where schools are catering for significant numbers of students needing complex educational and therapeutic support.

On that basis, in 2015, Berry Street partnered with two Government schools, one Primary and one P-12, by piloting the Model in selected mainstream classes. The schools in question, referred to here as Mt Excel PS and Latimer Valley P-12, are described as dealing with significant levels of disadvantage, disengagement and behaviour issues, and a high incidence of Child Protection notification.

It was anticipated that, when applied at the two Government schools, the BSEM would:

- Inform the teacher's overall classroom approach (i.e. IMPLICIT teaching, e.g. whole school approach, staff modelling, interactions); and
- Be articulated through specific classroom sessions/activities (i.e. EXPLICIT teaching, e.g. curriculum integration through reading activities, and personal development activities).

# RESEARCH DESIGN

The evaluators have utilised qualitative and quantitative tools and techniques in addressing the research questions below.

## **Overarching research question:**

*Can the BSEM be applied in Government schools?*

## **Sub-questions:**

*Has the use of the BSEM impacted on student wellbeing? If so how?*

*Has the use of the BSEM impacted on (a) student achievement, including literacy and numeracy (b) student engagement, and (c) school suspension or incident data? If so how?*

*What have been positive outcomes of the BSEM pilot?*

*What have been the key challenges of the BSEM Pilot?*

Data collection was carried out in two stages, near the commencement of the Pilot and following its conclusion. Interview data was drawn from focus groups conducted with students, teachers and school leadership during two sets of visits to the participant schools (Latimer Valley P-12 and Mt Excel PS). Student focus groups were comprised of young people across Years 5-8 at Latimer Valley P-12 and Years 5/6 at Mt Excel.

**Table 1: Focus group participants**

	Latimer Valley (P-12)		Mt Excel (PS)		Total
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	
School leadership	4	2	2	1	9
Teachers	5	8	2	4	19
Students	13	13	13	13	52
Total					80

A total of 26 young people (13 at each setting) formed focus groups for the first stage of the interview process. All but three of the young people (two at Latimer Valley P-12, one at Mt Excel PS) were able to take part in the second round of focus groups. Their places were filled by other students, including two young people from the FLO program at Latimer Valley P-12.

Analysis of findings from Phase One informed the delivery of an Interim Report to Berry Street in July 2015.

Interview data collected during Phase Two was supplemented by school outcomes data including:

- Student wellbeing data (per a modified version of the Student Attitude to School survey (SASS)), completed by students at the start and conclusion of the pilot.
- AusVELS data, December 2014 and December 2015; and
- School suspension data 2014-2015.

This final report incorporates findings from both stages of data collection.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Berry Street is the largest independent child and welfare organisation in Victoria. During the past decade (i.e. since 2003) its wide range of services and activities has expanded to include direct provision of alternative education for young people who are affected by experiencing or witnessing trauma. There are currently three Berry Street School campuses, each of which emerged out of concerns at the inability of local mainstream settings to adequately meet the complex educational and therapeutic needs of these young people.

Teaching at each Berry Street campus is framed by the organisation's own model of education. The BSEM draws on extensive international research that has included systematic review, analysis and comparison of such programs and philosophies as the Sanctuary Model, USA (Bloom, 1995), or the Calmer Classrooms, Australia (Downy, 2007) approach.

Most existing (or traditional) models take a two-tier healing approach to learning that focuses primarily on repairing the student (i.e. fixing self-regulatory and relational abilities), and progressing from a deficit perspective (e.g. what deficiencies or developmental struggles does this student face?) (Brunzell, Waters & Stokes, 2015).

The BSEM seeks to take the healing approach a step further by adopting a 'strengths' perspective (e.g. what strengths does this student have to build upon for future success?). The Model proposes three tiers of therapeutic learning and growth. It builds on (or extends) the focus of previous practice on **repairing the student's regulatory abilities (Tier 1) and repairing the student's disrupted attachments (Tier 2)**, by adding a third domain: **increasing the young person's psychological resources in order to promote post-traumatic growth (Tier 3)** (see Figure 2).

It is argued that by focusing on healing while simultaneously providing pathways towards post-traumatic growth, the BSEM expands the possibilities of teaching and learning and makes a unique contribution that bridges research from the fields of traumatology and positive education. Berry Street likewise argues that the Model has strong cross-sectoral potential, believing that its impact within specialist settings is replicable and it can be applied effectively in mainstream schools. Almost 40% of American school students can be defined as being trauma-affected, based on them having been exposed to some sort of traumatic stressor. The majority of these students are in mainstream schools (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014). This finding has clear and disturbing implications for the Australian educational community.

Teachers in both mainstream and specialist settings increasingly confront challenges in educating students who present with a range of symptoms and behaviours that include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), peer bullying, school refusal, conduct and oppositional-defiance disorders, distracted or aggressive behaviour, limited attentional capacities, poor emotional regulation, attachment difficulties and poor relationships with peers. There is growing need for educational approaches that address effectively the complex needs of the growing proportion of students who are struggling in 21st century classrooms.

# DESIGN OF THE BERRY STREET EDUCATION MODEL (BSEM)

The design of the BSEM draws on neuro-scientific findings in contending that the child’s biological and developmental responses to trauma need to be addressed before he/she is ‘ready’ to build relationships and engage with learning content. Emphasis on repairing the dysregulated stress response in trauma-affected students draws on the understanding that (a) self-regulation is a core developmental ability for children, and (b) by strengthening emotional control and impulse management, regulatory capacities are crucial to the child’s healthy development (Bath, 2008). Educational and therapeutic strategies aimed at addressing the dysregulated stress response and building regulatory capacities involve the creation of environments within which young people can explore self-regulation and co-regulation, identify negative emotions and learn to manage their behaviour. Such environments support young people through classroom activities that have both physical and emotional foci. Physical regulation activities seek to align the body through sensory integration and rely heavily on rhythm, repetition and routine. Emotional regulation activities aim to help the young person identify, acknowledge, label, understand and work with difficult feelings; build the capacity to communicate those feelings to others; link internal thoughts to external stimuli; acquire and practise strategies for de-escalating emotions; and learn how to return to a comfortable state after arousal.

The BSEM comprises five domains or ‘pedagogical lenses’: **BODY, STAMINA, ENGAGEMENT** and **CHARACTER**, all anchored by **RELATIONSHIP** (see Figure 1).

In turn, each of the domains/lenses contain a cluster of focus themes within which are located sets of teaching and intervention strategies and recommendations (see Figure 2). Identification of the themes has been determined by international research evidence (see Brunzell et al., 2016).

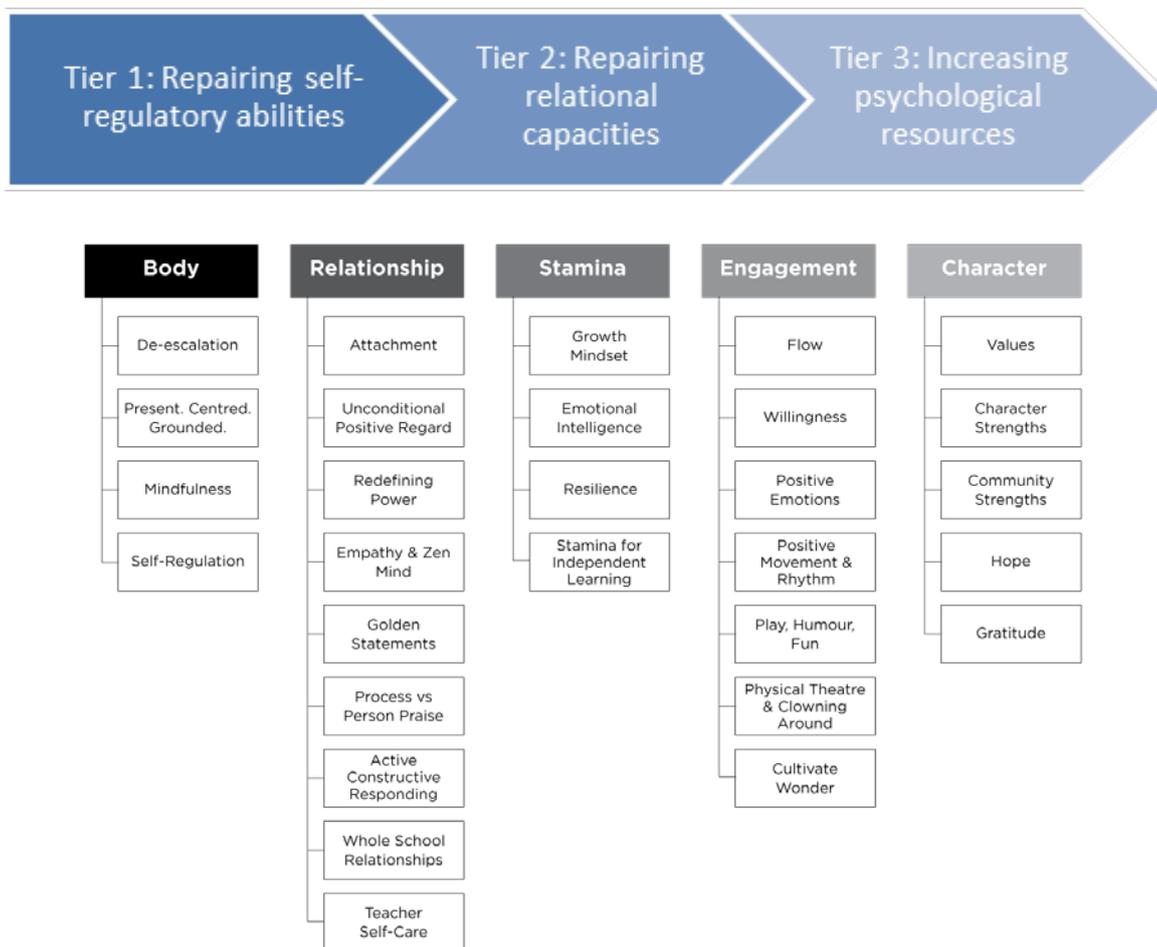
Application of the BSEM is developmental or sequential, with teachers and students expected to work progressively from the domain of **BODY** through to the domain of **CHARACTER**.

Piloting the BSEM at each of the two mainstream settings involved the ‘roll out’ of strategies and learning activities to do with the **domains of the BSEM**. The Berry Street trainers provided teachers with (a) intensive professional development in the area, and (b) detailed advice on structuring the teaching day in the form of a suite of printed curriculum guides.

**Figure 1: The Berry Street Education Model**



**Figure 2: The BSEM including tiers, domains and themes**



The BSEM identifies a range of classroom strategies, ‘brainbreaks’ and comprehensive lesson plans for use in introducing and implementing each of the domains and their component themes. ‘Strategies’ are defined in the BSEM as ‘intervention activities used by the teacher in leading the classroom’ and ‘brainbreaks’ are flexible, short-burst (2-5 minute) physical activities that can be woven into class procedure. The brainbreaks are called upon when needed (such as when students are not concentrating, or at transition times). They may also be used to respond to an individual student’s emotional state at any time. Lesson plans, based around core learning intentions/goals, are detailed descriptions of combined activities that seek to scaffold student learning, and integrate curriculum content into complete learning units. The lesson plan informing the classroom activity of creating an escalation map might include: Background information (outlining the reasons for the activity); Lesson aims/objectives (e.g. to identify stressors in the classroom; to monitor use of de-escalation interventions); A list of materials (in this case, the escalation maps); An estimate of session duration (e.g. 20 minutes); and Description of the activity (e.g. Distributing maps to students and explaining their purpose, implementing ‘safety plans’, monitoring efficacy of interventions through regular mapping).

The domain of **BODY** (as detailed in Figure 2) provides an example. Classroom practice and planning are framed by four inter-connected themes: **Self-Regulation, Present. Centred. Grounded., Mindfulness,** and **De-escalation**. In focusing on the theme of **Self-Regulation**, teachers offer classroom content around the topic of stress that provides students with (a) the means of identifying their own stress responses, (b) information on the effects of stress on the body, (c) opportunities to reflect on experiencing stress, (d) different coping strategies (both in school and outside), and (e) the means of identifying readiness for learning. A popular teaching tool in regard to (e) is a ‘Self-regulation’ or ‘Ready to Learn’ rubric which co-ordinates students’ emotional states with colours and enables students to ‘shift’ from one colour to another as they feel more or less able to learn.

Within Self-regulation, the sub-theme of **Rhythm** articulates research findings that trauma and chronic stress impact negatively on the body’s capacity to regulate such basic functions as blood pressure, heart rate or body temperature. In aiming to entrench rhythm and repetition into the school day, teachers typically record students’ heart rates (as a rhythmic form of body regulation), or use rhythm in ‘brainbreaks’ or as *“a form of triage”* (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, in press). Popular examples of rhythm-related brainbreaks include Silent Ball, Brain Gym and call and response games.

The theme **Mindfulness** focuses on the student’s awareness of his/her physical self and responses, specifically breathing, noticing and listening. Mindfulness crosses over to other foci such as rhythm and self-regulation. Teaching activity might include focusing attention on a single point, listening to classroom sounds, visualising colours or emotions, visualising a favourite location, and so on. Linked to this is the other theme of **Present. Centred. Grounded.**

Defined by Brunzell et al. (2016) as a suite of mindsets, strategies, and interventions that instil a strong self-regulatory student capacity, the theme **De-escalation** is typically addressed through class discussion, the creation and use of de-escalation maps, and the collaborative design of individual safety plans that (a) identify strategies or tools to be employed by the student at times of emotional arousal (e.g. Going for a walk, listening to music on headphones, taking time out with another staff member) and (b) provide teachers with knowledge about the student’s stressors, triggers and environmental variables. In focusing on De-escalation, the teacher needs (a) to proactively create a calm, routine and predictable environment, consistently monitor and identify aroused stress states, and (b) implement interventions to maintain optimal states.

As noted above, systematic utilisation of the BSEM in class builds on the foundations laid by the introductory activities within the **BODY** domain. Subsequent progress by teachers through the BSEM domain sequence of **RELATIONSHIP, STAMINA, ENGAGEMENT** and **CHARACTER** articulates and addresses the other two tiers of Berry Street’s modified approach to trauma-informed pedagogy, i.e. **repairing disrupted attachments** and **increasing psychological resources**. While there is insufficient space here to enable a detailed summary of the post-body domain sequences, the following examples provide some insights into the rationale behind specific teacher practices.

Within the **RELATIONSHIP** domain, for instance, BSEM frames classroom practice and planning around such themes as **Attachment, Empathy and Zen Mind, Whole School Relationships** and **Unconditional Positive Regard**. Implementation of attachment-based strategies seeks to create a strong class environment centred on comfort, safety, consistency, trust, worthiness and belonging. The theme of **Whole School Relationships** embraces shared responsibility for the student within a

consistent and closely aligned whole school context. (Implicit in the concept is the importance of peer and supervisory support for the teacher). Developing **Unconditional Positive Regard** encompasses being able (a) to maintain a vision of the child's wholeness that can separate the student from his/her behaviour, and (b) recall the 'thwarted pathways' of the child's development and, as a result, attempt to build capacity where particular developmental milestones have been missed. The **RELATIONSHIP** domain is the BSEM's 'anchor'. Brunzell (2014) notes that "*The relational milieu of the classroom is the primary location of relational intervention*" (p.50) while Brunzell, Waters and Stokes (2015) argue:

*"A relationally based classroom is predicated on the belief that struggling students will put forth their best efforts for teachers they like, respect, and believe will be present for them at times when they are not at their best"* (p.6).

Activity within the **STAMINA** domain focuses on developing or building emotional intelligence, personal resilience, frustration tolerance and the capacity to self-regulate. Dominant sub-themes are Resiliency (i.e. employing 'biological, psychological and social resources to overcome adversity' or reconceptualising failure as 'an opportunity for new learning'), Emotional Intelligence (i.e. perceiving emotions; understanding, appraising and identifying emotions and how they change over time; managing emotions) and a growth mindset (embracing opportunities to grow, and to make and learn from mistakes). Encouragement of a *growth mindset* (as opposed to a *fixed mindset*) is a BSEM strategy aimed at building the student's stamina for learning (Brunzell, 2014, p.27-30).

In describing engagement within the **ENGAGEMENT** domain as 'a complex interaction of behavioural, affective and cognitive motivations and competencies', Brunzell (2014) highlights the imperative of providing learning experiences that 'trigger interest', have a purpose and are relevant, relate to the students' own ambitions and vocational goals, and fall within the students' competencies. Responding to research evidence linking positive thinking/ positive emotions to improved attention, and enhanced growth, health and overall wellbeing, teachers typically 'positively prime' their classes, i.e. employ such engagement activities as transitioning into lessons with 'positive hooks' (short-burst attention-grabbing activities). Other engagement strategies might include short 'fun breaks', or fun stories and scenarios. Music or particular arrangements of classroom furniture have been cited as positive primers that assist the student to concentrate and work effectively.

The **CHARACTER** domain draws on the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004), specifically the Values in Action (VIA) classification of 24 signature strengths and their six corresponding virtues with the understanding that explicit teaching about character strengths (i.e. positive traits manifested in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours) has been demonstrated to impact positively on both school performance and student wellbeing. The domain focuses on what is 'right' within the young person and the group. Teaching strategies and activities aimed at helping students to identify and practise their personal strengths, articulate their personal values, develop understanding of themselves and others (in context of community), develop tolerance and respect for others' strengths, and employ strengths and values for future pathways, include exploration of character as part of the curriculum, identifying individual talents, inserting into the program of positive 'breaks', storytelling, 'strengths spotting', 'strengths assessment' activities, and applying/ modelling resilient mindsets to small adversities in day-to-day classroom management. Exploration of personal strengths and values within context of the values/strengths of others culminates in reflection on the **Gratitude** and **Hope** themes.

# THE PILOT

The pilot program comprised two schools. Latimer Valley P - 12, an outer metropolitan P - 12 school of 1900 students and Mt Excel, a regional primary school of 150 students. The community and educational context for the two schools are described below.

## SCHOOL CONTEXT

Latimer Valley is a (very) large P-12 College on the outskirts of metropolitan Melbourne, situated on 14 hectares. In 2015 the school had an enrolment of 1900 students. School administration and leadership are provided by an overall College Principal, supported by three Campus (Junior, Middle and Senior Year) Principals and 200 teaching and support staff.

Mt Excel Primary School is a small Prep-Year 6 setting in regional Victoria, catering to 150 students in 2015, and employing approximately 30 teachers, welfare personnel, Koorie support officers and Education Support Staff.

The BSEM at Latimer Valley P-12 was piloted with students in two cohorts:

- The middle years, approximately 600 Year 5-8 students, accommodated in five home groups. The pilot targeted teachers and around 120 young people in one home group or neighbourhood, 'Hazelton', which comprised five classes (three Years 5 and 6, one Year 7 and one Year 8 class), operating within an open learning space.
- Flexible Learning Option (FLO) cohort (onsite), which included approximately 15 students who were placed in the program for additional flexible learning supports.

At Mt Excel PS, the BSEM was a whole-of-school undertaking targeting all students (from Prep to Year 6).

## COMMUNITY AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The rapid growth of Latimer Valley P-12, from 115 students when it opened in 2009 to its 2015 ceiling, has reflected the equally rapid explosion of residential housing development and settlement in one of Melbourne's primary 'growth corridors'. From 16,000 in 2002, the population of the suburb doubled within a decade (approximately 33,000 according to the 2011 Census). While the most recent Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) has ranked the locality at 951.8 (ABS, 2011), both the literature and interview responses suggest considerable complexity across a community where outward indicators of prosperity (a predominance of average income levels and a large incidence of people buying their

own homes) mask significant hidden poverty and pockets of real vulnerability and marginalisation (McInerny, 2010).

Key factors that have acted adversely on the community (and have persisted) include ongoing issues to do with isolation and lack of access to services, gaps in services, inadequate public transport and pressures associated with high levels of financial commitment. In regard to these issues, linkages have been drawn between employment uncertainty within downsizing work cultures (compounded by fluctuating interest rates and such location-based necessities of buying and running more than one car) and stress leading to family breakdown, not infrequently compounded by pressures around child support. As has been noted by McInerny (2010):

*“As in so many other of the ‘urban fringes’ areas, it’s about infrastructure where the population has doubled ... but with no planned provision for community services ... In regions like ours ... there aren’t the ... giveaway signs individuals and families may be under major financial stress, isolated and underserved ... the housing is new and the streets wide ... You can drive through and not actually see the need” (p.2-3).*

Social isolation reportedly tends to be compounded by a degree of tension between some of the suburb’s more established families (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) and the ever-growing recent arrival cohort. The diverse multicultural mix is reflected in enrolments at Latimer Valley P-12, and the need for its English Additional Language (EAL) program to cater for some 40 language groups, among them Tamil, Indonesian, Arabic, Turkish, Urdu, Sinhalese, Syrian and Russian. (The school population currently encompasses large cohorts of Islander, Indian, Sri Lankan and refugee families).

*“My impression of the suburb is there’s a very new part and a very old part ... There are constantly new estates being built ... It seems like it’s a very affordable option for people with large families or newly arrived to Australia ... a lot of people that probably financially, are having some difficulties... But then, [it’s] quite mixed ... you get families that seem to be doing relatively well ... As a whole [though] it’s probably more challenged than not ... I get a sense of how much need there is and how much need probably goes under the radar as well. . There’s definitely a lot of families that would be struggling ... We’re getting a huge wave of EAL students as well ... In the last six months to a year, a lot of newly arrived families ... very varied levels of need some of these families have” [Latimer Valley P-12 Welfare Officer].*

Mt Excel is a small rural city dealing with entrenched and recognised socio-economic disadvantage, approximately 150 km from Melbourne. Part of Victoria’s energy production network, it has a population of approximately 14,000. After several decades of industry-related growth and prosperity, Mt Excel experienced a far-reaching economic downturn (and mass job losses) following privatisation of the power industry in the 1990s. Recovery has been slow; Mt Excel was identified among the most disadvantaged towns in Victoria by SEIFA 2013 based on such criteria as ‘developmental vulnerability’ at start of schooling, rates of adolescent self-harm, unemployment and limited income. (The last census showed average wages to be lower in Mt Excel than in other cities within the same Local Government Area). Unsurprisingly, Mt Excel PS serves a student cohort identified in the “*bottom five per cent*” (i.e. among the most disadvantaged in the state). According to the School Principal, “*a lot of the kids are from broken homes ... 70% to 80% have no positive male role model ... we have a number of kids in out-of-home or foster care ... a high number ‘at risk’*”. At the time of the Pilot, 75 Mt Excel PS

students (i.e. half the school population) were subject to some sort of intervention, whether through Child Protection, DHS Case Management, Anglicare or Berry Street's Take Two program. More than 25% of the school community were of Koorie background. Eight students were on the Program for Students with Disability (PSD).

By contrast with Latimer Valley P-12's diverse cultural mix, there were only three EAL students at Mt Excel. While a majority had attended kindergarten, most junior school students were 12-18 months below their peers academically on entry. (Year 3 NAPLAN results have tended to indicate that the gap does not subsequently close sufficiently for them to perform to average level by Year 3. At the same time, school leaders cautioned against making blanket judgments about students' academic capacity based on NAPLAN. Whereas results over the years have tended to be fairly constant at most schools, results at Mt Excel PS were described as "*very cohort specific*", i.e. up and down depending on the actual composition of particular classes).

## EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY THE TWO SCHOOLS

When asked to nominate the main educational challenges being faced by their school communities, teachers at both settings highlighted:

- The diversity of student abilities (compounded at Latimer Valley P-12, for example, by large numbers of students with limited previous schooling and/or working with EAL students).
- The difficulty of trying to engage or motivate disengaged students ("*getting them to understand that learning is important ... some kids have potential yet don't want to do anything*").
- The difficulty of trying to accommodate both highly engaged, average and disengaged students in any one class setting ("*so many in each classroom don't fit at either the high end or the other end where they don't understand how to act in school*").

Concern was expressed at Latimer Valley P-12 at (a) the sheer student diversity and (b) the high level of need within the student body and limits on the school's capacity to meet it. (According to one of the school's welfare staff, "*There is so much need ... you've got the really high risk kids who are on everybody's radar, then the next tier down, kids who could do with more input –midline kids who could use emotional support - but are missing out because of the time that needs to be spent with the high risk kids*").

The school differs markedly from the norm given the extraordinarily rapid growth of its catchment area, and – as a consequence – continually evolving student and staff profiles. As one member of school leadership noted, this places considerable demands on the community, from both organizational and teaching perspectives. In particular, teachers recognise that they need to be more

vigilant in identifying or monitoring some students' more complex educational needs than would be the case in smaller settings. As one teacher representative observed: *"For the last six years, we've welcomed forty more new staff each year ... Just when you think you've trained everybody up, there's another batch of newcomers ... And there are always new students coming in ... and we're constantly needing to track them"*. There is, at the same time, recognition that the ever-changing context has provided a valuable practical training ground and out-of-the ordinary experiential opportunities for a (largely) young staff.

For staff and leadership at Mt Excel, the difficulty of *"transcending"* the students' socio-economic background and the home-based tensions articulated through negative behaviours, have been cited as the school's biggest challenges. Teachers pointed to the amount of time taken away from classroom instruction by dealing with *"disruptions, fighting, incidents in the yard, etc."*

*"Not a lot of it is major but we constantly have to take time to sort the incidents out when we should be teaching the class. By way of example – we have 44 students in the 2-3-4 unit this year ... 15 of them never give us trouble, the rest all have some sort of issue. 10-15 are full-on-trouble, the rest 'on the cusp'. More than 50% need dealing with. For some we might have an incident a fortnight, for others there are daily issues. They might be relatively settled in class but we're still having to spend 10-15 minutes after lunch just dealing with lunch-time issues ..."*

School leadership underlined the connection between 'incidents' and:

*"... all the stuff the kids bring in with them ... Most of the issues are related to home and that's out of our control ... Kids are often late in ... might miss the first half hour then it might take another half-hour to feel in the mood for learning. Some kids might be doing all-right in class but if they've had a bad morning it takes them a while to engage ... The academic stuff tends to come second because the kid's welfare is the priority. If they're not happy, they won't learn ... Lots of the kids are well below standard ... and most don't move very high. We can't control the home background – it's more challenging than behaviours"*.

## INTERVENTION STRATEGIES PREVIOUSLY USED BY THE TWO SCHOOLS

Staff at both schools noted that the decision to trial the BSEM in 2015 culminated a succession of strategies or interventions that have had varying degrees of success in re-engaging students.

At Latimer Valley P-12, these interventions have included:

- The implementation of a variety of extra-curricular sports and interest groups. Soccer groups, for instance, have impacted positively on participants' confidence and self-esteem. Separate boys and girls discussion groups have, in some instances, given "a voice" to students who felt they didn't have one. This outreach has been largely co-ordinated by the school's welfare team and a funded chaplain whose role has included running six to eight different groups a term.
- A strong policy focus on mentoring and modelling for new/less experienced teachers that includes demonstration classes and coaching by leading teachers. While the relative youth of many of the teachers was cited as an advantage (particularly with regards to their capacity to interact and communicate with students), it was recognised that recent graduates frequently face a strong learning curve on their first encounters with challenging students.
- Establishment of a FLO onsite. The FLO program responded initially to concerns at the high suspension rate among middle years (male) students at Latimer Valley P-12. Based in part on the FLO program set up for older students at another local college, and developed in close consultation with Berry Street, it was designed specifically for students identified as trauma-affected by the welfare team, or through conversations with mentor teachers and sub-school leaders (and based on such criteria as attendance levels, disengagement, lack of connectivity to school, family background, level of skills attainment, etc.).<sup>1</sup>
- Having been in operation for two years, FLO has been viewed as a stepping-stone to more general uptake of the BSEM. The school's welfare team has been primarily responsible for ensuring the participants are connected to appropriate support mechanisms. Recognising the negative impact of home factors (such as acrimonious parental splits) on many of the participants, emphasis has been placed on school (through FLO) being stable, structured and safe.
- FLO's physical location has articulated the school's commitment to ensuring (and maximising) connections between the alternative and mainstream programs. In 2015 nine middle school students were enrolled in the FLO program. While their classroom activities largely reflected the mainstream curriculum, delivery was highly individualised and informed by Individual Program Plans.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the teacher currently co-ordinating the FLO program: "Our first challenge has been just getting them to school ... [formerly] when they were attending, they either misbehaved or would withdraw completely ... There was very little understanding of how they were behaving ... very little self-regulation ... some would get angry and not be able to tell you why ... We've worked at getting them to acknowledge 'This is what anger looks like' ... we're now getting them to self-regulate".

- The program has enjoyed some success in transitioning the young people back into Latimer Valley P-12's Year 10 VCAL, but it was recognised that some participants are unlikely to re-join the mainstream program. Educational decisions, made on a student-by-student basis, have sometimes included referral to alternative settings (usually over behaviour issues); generally, however, FLO has enabled the school to 'refer out' fewer students. Having paved the way for an alternative and trauma-informed educational approach, FLO was at the core of the roll-out of the BSEM at Latimer Valley P-12 in 2015.
- A strong staff professional development program focused on (a) familiarising teachers with stages of child and adolescent development, (b) providing teachers with 'a toolbox' enabling them to work with diverse curricula, alternative ways to deliver curriculum and issues in classroom management.

Reference was made by interviewees at both schools to the essential role played by their welfare teams in supporting the school community. Given the size of Latimer Valley P-12, the welfare team has played a key role in identifying and connecting with students at risk. (*"The team is pretty savvy"* was one comment. *"One thing we do well here it's that whole connecting to the kids bit"*, was another). At the same time, there was recognition by both teachers and welfare personnel of the need to teach resilience. *"[Intervention] can work against you by making some kids overly dependent ... We need more of them calming themselves down rather than asking 'What will I do?' We need to include elements of 'You can do it' ... teach them to look at things on a catastrophe scale"*.

At Mt Excel, subscription to the BSEM has been supported by almost a decade of concerted effort to shift school culture. At the outset, student suspension rates – and the recognition that, apart from providing a break for staff from challenging behaviours, *"suspensions don't work"* – were a key focus. Rethinking the school's discipline protocols encompassed a series of principal-initiated forums for teachers, parents and students in which the school community deliberated such questions as, *"what is acceptable/appropriate behaviour at school?"* or *"what should parents, students and teachers expect of each other?"* The students themselves helped identify what they felt were appropriate benchmarks. Resultant policies and strategies included:

- Active promotion of the philosophy that school needs to be a welcoming environment that it is there to support the whole family. (As a result, according to the Principal, *"The parent community is [now] very much on board ... they know by experience that issues are going to be dealt with. There's very rarely any screaming or yelling ... They realise we'll take complaints seriously ... We have distressed parents knowing they can call in because it's a safe place... we have welfare people team if there's a court date ... someone can organize legal help with DHS who can help and DHS support"*).
- Establishment and maintenance of the school's own transport thus helping ensure students arrive each day. *"We've had quite a transient population in the past ... families shifting from one part of the town to another used to mean changing schools ... our bus service counters this and brings the kids in"*. (In 2015, three buses transported 45 students, a third of the school population, all from within the regional town of Mt Excel).

- Active employment and support of staff who ‘like the kids’ and ‘want to be there’ – i.e. *“recruit hard and manage well”*. (According to the Principal, *“Relationships are the number one consideration ... the staff are good at dealing with fractured relationships”*).
- Expansion of the school’s welfare team that has included recruitment of a Koorie Engagement Officer and Chaplain.
- Introduction of a ‘Buddy’ system whereby a distressed or disruptive student has been given the opportunity (pre-arranged between staff) to move to another classroom and calm down. This has also given the teacher and home class *“a break”* from the student in question.
- Extension of teacher-welfare partnerships through a policy of calling in the welfare team when more major disruptions occur, thus leaving the teacher able to continue instructing the rest of the class. (At the same time, the Principal noted that his teaching staff have become more and more adept at defusing and diverting minor incidents themselves).
- Establishment of a withdrawal/reflection room for use when the ‘Buddy’ system has not been sufficient. Time spent by the student working away from other distractions has been based on the credo ‘Time In rather than Time Out’ (and the understanding that, no matter what, the student will not be suspended or sent home). This and other interventions have been documented by staff in a form known to all players as the ‘Pink sheet’. According to the Principal, *“Having to contact parents doesn’t usually happen now ... [The situation] has changed a lot because we have the protocols in place, the welfare team in place, and the main focus of the teachers is on teaching and learning ... This model works well – and can fit in well with the BSEM”*.
- Introduction of a regular exercise program across the school for the first 5-10 minutes of the day, comprising of Yoga, ballgames, running races, etc. This has been seen as *“a good chance for kids who’ve had a bad morning to ‘freshen up’”*. An impromptu *“run”* outside has also sometimes been initiated when a class was rowdy or slow to *“get moving”*.
- Partnership with Berry Street in 2013-14 trialling in some classrooms the Berry Street *Rhythm Project*. The project advocates the use of regular rhythmic activity to calm children, thereby hopefully facilitating improvements in their learning. Instruction in calming techniques, different ways to transition between activities, and utilising ‘brainbreaks’ to refocus on learning, have anticipated - and paved the way for - the roll out of the BSEM across the school.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BSEM TO SCHOOLS

The BSEM was seen as a coherent means of developing teacher skills and sensitivities, thereby enhancing their capacity to engage meaningfully and productively with the more vulnerable or marginalised members of their classes.

Implicit in their enthusiastic participation in the pilot were three reasons supported by both schools. The recognition that:

1. Mainstream teaching approaches and pedagogies were failing to meet the needs of significant numbers of students;
2. Student populations were confronting diverse and complex challenges; and
3. Teachers were confronting significant professional and personal challenges in dealing with the diversity of student need.

At the same time there was feeling that the BSEM had potential for more general application. (Staff at Latimer Valley P-12, for instance, noted a high incidence of student anxiety during transitions – particularly at the start of Year 5 - in what has become a very large – and sometimes – intimidating school environment. Likewise, differing levels of stress typically surround the delivery of NAPLAN and other tests or deadlines for assignments or Year 12 exams. The need for development of strategies to deal with such stress and anxiety was clear).

Interest in trauma-informed pedagogies was nurtured at both schools by:

- Peer networking (both the Principal and a Leading Teacher at Latimer Valley P-12 had previously worked locally with Berry Street's Education Officer, while the Principals of Mt Excel PS and Berry Street's Mt Excel campus were part of the local school leadership forums);
- Growing interest among Principals in the area in alternative 'Teaching Unit' models; and
- An interest by schools in both districts in developing and enhancing strong community partnerships.

In a very practical way, it has addressed a key recommendation of the school's most recent Departmental Review.

*"The last school review commented on our strong Welfare and Discipline policy and asked 'How can you build on that and teach your kids the social skills they need to be part of an effective broader community'. Taking on the BSEM frees the school from the reviewer's request that we pick up a social skills program. Such programs often 'sit outside' our everyday practice [whereas] this approach provides us with learning tools for ourselves in context of what we're already doing in class ... The [BSEM] offers the elements we wanted" [Principal, Mt Excel PS].*

According to Latimer Valley P-12's Principal:

*"Having looked at various models, what appealed [about Berry Street] was their record of work with very disengaged students ... They're dealing with the extreme end where the options are not very good ... We're trying to work on students before they get to that point and it seemed logical to take their approach into the mainstream ... We needed staff dedicated to that vision and the idea [gradually] blossomed..."*

These sentiments were echoed by a Leading Teacher at Latimer Valley P-12, who acknowledged: *"The more strings to our bow we have, the more support we can give our staff in building their capacity and confidence with those strategies, the better off our kids will be".*



# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion in this report will focus on three areas:

1. The preparation of teachers to deliver the BSEM model;
2. How the model was implemented and its impact (under the five domains of **BODY, RELATIONSHIP, STAMINA, ENGAGEMENT** and **CHARACTER**);
3. The overall impact of the model on teaching, learning (including student achievement) and wellbeing within each of the schools.

## PREPARING TEACHERS TO DELIVER THE BSEM MODEL

In both cases, the Pilot program built on an existing relationship with Berry Street. Mt Excel PS had participated in the Berry Street *Rhythm Project*, and Latimer Valley P-12 had been in consultation with regard to the establishment of the FLO program.

The BSEM was presented to staff at the two schools through a sequence of professional development workshops, seminars and training sessions, specifically geared to the needs of each setting. These sessions were led by Berry Street Childhood Institute's Senior Advisor Education, Tom Brunzell, and Senior Trainer, Leonie Abbott.

Utilising a 'blended learning' methodology, *"based on instructor expertise, peer-collaboration, and opportunities for participants to pilot learned strategies"*, the professional development program has aimed to achieve increased teacher capacity to work with challenging students. Each session focused on a different component of the model (the purpose of patterned repetitive movements in calming people, for instance, or the development of relationship strategies). The Berry Street trainers then provided follow up sessions with staff which at times provided the opportunity for the trainers to model the activities they were presenting in the classroom.

Principals, senior staff and teacher interviewees at both Pilot schools confirmed that the professional development program had *"resonated with"*, *"been enjoyed"* and *"been embraced by"* the staff, and cited particularly strong responses to the practical value of strategies modelled in class by the Berry Street trainers and suggested during the sessions.

*"What stands out"* [reported one teacher at Mt Excel PS] *"is that stuff we've learned [at the most recent session] we can implement straight away. [The strategies and brainbreaks] are short, sharp and specific ... but they're relevant to all the kids ... You can use them with your most 'engaged' kids ... [The training] reminds you ... make sure your kids are ready to learn"*.

Importantly, the teacher in question conceded the pertinence of the BSEM model to his own self-awareness and capacity to reflect: *“All this stuff can be used by ourselves. It’s really important that we’re modelling it, using the strategies when we’re having a difficult moment”*. During Phase 1 of the evaluation, strategies were shared and reinforced at weekly staff meetings where the teachers modelled and shared activities they were finding successful (e.g. using **Mindfulness** focused activities such as closing eyes, deep breathing and visualising a colour to represent emotion as settling devices) or discussed alternative ways *“to frame messages”* in class.

Re-interviewed during Phase 2 of the evaluation process, the same teachers continued to applaud both the ‘relevance’ of the training and its accessibility. *“It was well-timed and taken on well”*, according to the Principal. Themes and issues highlighted by teacher reflection on the full year’s professional development program included:

- Strong agreement that the days were crucial to teacher engagement with the model. While the usefulness of the BSEM curriculum guides was acknowledged, there was consensus at Mt Excel PS that: *“Tom and Leonie really nurtured the staff and wanted to get the best out of them ... You couldn’t just take away the books ... We needed the combination – intense professional development and the books”*.
- Staff at Latimer Valley P-12 highlighted the additional value of follow-up meetings with Berry Street staff: *“The PD days were very engaging and had a good take-up by teachers ... but the [additional] meetings offered support at a deeper level ... more detail, more insights into accountability”*.
- Some reference was made (at Mt Excel PS) to the rigorousness of the training. *“There was a lot to take in ... the Stamina stuff was particularly dense”*, reported one (first-year) teacher who felt that an 18-month pilot might have been less demanding. Others reported *“never having felt overwhelmed”* by the volume of material, and cited the experience as *“...always a positive way to spend a PD day”*.<sup>2</sup>

*“The PD was fantastic ... aimed at the teachers in a way they could understand ... I loved every minute of it. Our PD had previously looked a lot at teaching and learning. Now was the time to look at behaviour ... getting the kids into a position where they could learn”*.  
[Principal, Mt Excel PS]

*“Our priority [with the Pilot] has been to get the staff on board ... make sure they have their support mechanisms in place, and tools they can utilize once they’re comfortable with them ... we’ll probably involve the parents further down the track ... “*  
[Principal, Latimer Valley P-12]

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that professional development content needed to be compressed at the school because of limited time available. Ideally, the training would be spread across a larger number of contact hours between trainers and teachers.

- While one teacher felt that the BSEM professional learning had reinforced teamwork at Mt Excel PS (“*there were no barriers between the teachers, the aides and the Principal*”), another interviewee suggested that, “*in the interests of whole-of-school consistency - future training in the Model needed to take in ALL school staff, including admin, welfare, ancillary and (if possible) regular Casual Relief Teachers*”, citing instances where, for instance, relief staff had taken an approach to classroom management that diverged markedly from the BSEM, one teacher stressed: “*The approach needs to be adopted school-wide ... with everyone on the same page ... Everybody needs to be putting the same value on it*”.

The experiences of two recent teacher graduates at Latimer Valley P-12 highlight the practical value of the BSEM training in providing a ‘toolbox’ of activities during their formative years in teaching.

- One recent graduate teacher, who took up his first ongoing appointment at mid-year, confided that the BSEM curriculum guides had become his ‘bible’. “*Thrown in at the deep end*” (i.e. by joining the FLO team) he was reportedly “*devouring the bits [elements of BSEM training] that he had missed*” and drawing heavily on the Model in learning to construct effective lessons.
- The other young/less experienced teacher, who was experiencing classroom management difficulties with a demanding middle year’s cohort, likewise credited the usefulness of BSEM strategies in helping him connect with his classes. He commented that these strategies had enabled him to continue with teaching as a profession.

# IMPLEMENTING THE BSEM PROGRAM INTO THE SCHOOLS

The following section describes how the model was implemented under each of the five domains and the responses to the implementation from teachers and students. As mentioned previously, the five domains are **BODY, RELATIONSHIP, STAMINA, ENGAGEMENT,** and **CHARACTER.** Under each of the domains are a number of themes (see Figure 2, page 8).

Table 2 provides an example of how the BSEM activities were implemented over the year at Mt Excel PS from Prep to Year 6.

**Table 2: BSEM activities implemented at Mt Excel PS (Prep - Year 6)**

	BODY (Terms 1-4)	RELATIONSHIP (Terms 2-4)	STAMINA (Terms 2-4)	ENGAGEMENT (Terms 3-4)	CHARACTER (Term 4)
PREP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-regulation (Use of breathing, belly breathing)</li> <li>• Present Centred Grounded</li> <li>• Brainbreaks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Zen Daily</li> <li>• Unconditional Positive Regard</li> <li>• The Whole Person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stamina for Reading</li> <li>• Resilience</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths for Thanksgiving</li> <li>• Visual displays of strengths</li> </ul>
Year 1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-regulation</li> <li>• Rhythm</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Brainbreaks</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stamina for Reading</li> </ul>		
Year 3-4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships through de-escalation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth Mindset</li> <li>• Stamina for Reading</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths</li> </ul>
Year 5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brainbreaks</li> <li>• Personal de-escalation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stamina for Reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive emotion (positive primers)</li> <li>• Play, humour &amp; fun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Values (Values Mirror)</li> </ul>

## Domain 1. Body

According to the BSEM outline, both schools started introducing activities, strategies and lessons within the first domain **BODY** early in Term 1. At Latimer Valley P-12, the vehicle for delivery was the Middle Years Neighbourhood program, four hours of weekly welfare and wellbeing activities that included a pastoral care component. At Mt Excel PS, the Model was absorbed across the school into both everyday routines and the curriculum. The BSEM was articulated during morning talk, exercise, between classes and after breaks, as well as through curriculum activities such as ‘stamina for reading’. Initial teaching focus was on:

- Promoting and enhancing *self-regulation* through the use of psycho-education and self-monitoring tools and strengthening the *rhythms* of students’ bodies through brainbreaks, heart rate, and physical regulation;
- Introducing the concept of mindfulness and integrating mindfulness activities into the school day; and
- Utilising student-friendly tools and strategies to facilitate and create *de-escalated* classroom environments.<sup>3</sup>

At Mt Excel PS, introduction of the self -regulation sub-theme **Rhythm** across the school included a strong focus on transitions (i.e. transitions from one class to another, one lesson to another, or from the schoolyard to the classroom). One of the teachers noted:

*“Quite often the kids come back from another class rowdy, the same after breaks. Therefore there’s the need for a calming activity ... We might get them to do a [mindfulness-related] breathing activity before they come in ... Eyes closed, hands on belly, feel your breath, focus on breathing deeply ... it stops conversation, calms them down ... they’re a bit more settled to start work ... in the past, I’d just herd them all in ... It’s a lot to do with me having control ... ‘keeping the power’ in control of the grade”.*

Students at both settings cited the value (“when we’re really hyped up” or “on hot days”) of:

- Different variants of Silent Ball with their emphasis on “following instructions ... getting people to concentrate ... calming down ... focusing on work”. (“Sometimes you have to stand on one foot ... If we’re really distracted, it gets rid of energy, and by the end we’re calm”).
- Running a lap around the soccer court.
- A popular innovation with Year 5/6 students at Mt Excel PS was ‘Commando Course’, implemented sometimes “before class” or “sometimes when the class is being ‘silly’”. One student was designated leader and class members followed him/her, in silence, to an outdoor area equipped with slides, climbing platforms and an obstacle course. “After we go up, over and around [the equipment] we line up to go back into class”. Usually lasting just 2-3 minutes, and usually followed by a teacher-led breathing activity, Commando Course reportedly “gets oxygen into our bodies”, or “keeps our brains working”. Students highlighted the activity’s usefulness in “helping ... get ready for work”, ensuring “we’re a bit calmer when we get inside”, and “clearing silliness out of my head”.

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3 Brunzell et al. (2015)

- Balancing on heels with partners.
- Going outside, playing a few games, ‘getting a bit of fresh air’, then lining up.
- Repeated reference was made by Mt Excel PS students to the usefulness of ‘breathing exercises’, “counting your pulse rate or heartbeat” or thumb pointing (‘left brain, right brain’) in helping “calm us down”.

At Latimer Valley P-12, the Middle Years teachers focused strongly on the **Self-Regulation** theme when dealing with stress.

Early classroom content included identifying stress, its causes and manifestations (i.e. “getting them reflective about their own behaviours around stress management”), and examining the effects of stress on learning (and hence the importance of tackling it).

From an initial ‘we’re going to talk about your body and how stress affects you’, teachers predictably worked across the themes:

- Initiating pulse and heartbeat measurement and left and right brain activities (both as ‘warm-ups’ at the start of a session and as the means of focusing the young person on his/her body in terms of learning or understanding “where stress affects me”).
- Assisting each student to develop the standard de-escalation tools (a personal Safety Plan and an Escalation Chart).<sup>4</sup>
- Utilising rhythm-related strategies and brainbreak activities (like ‘Silent Ball’) flexibly, sometimes as part of an overall lesson plan, at other times spontaneously, to break up a session or “just to bring the kids down”.
- Daily use in the FLO unit of a ‘How do I feel?’ self-regulation rubric in which levels of readiness for learning are displayed on colour-coded charts.

At Latimer Valley P-12 a student in the FLO program made particular reference to the value of the self-regulation strategy of alerting the class teacher to his emotional state through a Mood Colour Chart.

*“It helps with your learning because if you put your name on ‘red’ it lets the other students know not to really annoy you in the session ... just leave you alone. At the end of the session, the teacher asks if you want to move up, like, to ‘green’. Half the time, the kids move from ‘red’ to ‘green’ if they’re feeling a bit better ... sometimes they stay on ‘red’ for the whole day ... The teacher tries to talk to them a bit, ask if they want to participate ... If they say ‘no’ or seem really ‘aggro’, she leaves them alone for a few minutes ... if it happens a third time, she’ll just let them go a little while longer ... That happened to me once, but by half way through the day I felt better”.*

Similar references were made by other students to the value of recording feelings and engagement levels using a self-regulating colour chart. “We have name cards and the teacher puts our names on the colours. Red is really angry or upset, orange is all right, yellow is half-ready and green is ready for learning ...” reported one student. “Half the time I’m on green... a couple of times this year I’ve been on Red” one student shared in a daily diary with the teacher.

<sup>4</sup> As anticipated, the Safety Plans quickly provided teachers with ready reference responses to the questions ‘what makes you stressful?’ and ‘what’s in place’ to counteract these stressors. One teacher commented: “The kids choose the activities themselves and compile a list of stress-reducing strategies – ‘What I can do when I’m stressed or angry’ ... It might be ‘I want to visit Miss So and So or stay outside in the quiet, or take a ball and bounce it outside for a while’ ... so if one of them comes into class stressed or uncooperative, the teacher will know what to do” [Teacher, Latimer Valley P-12].

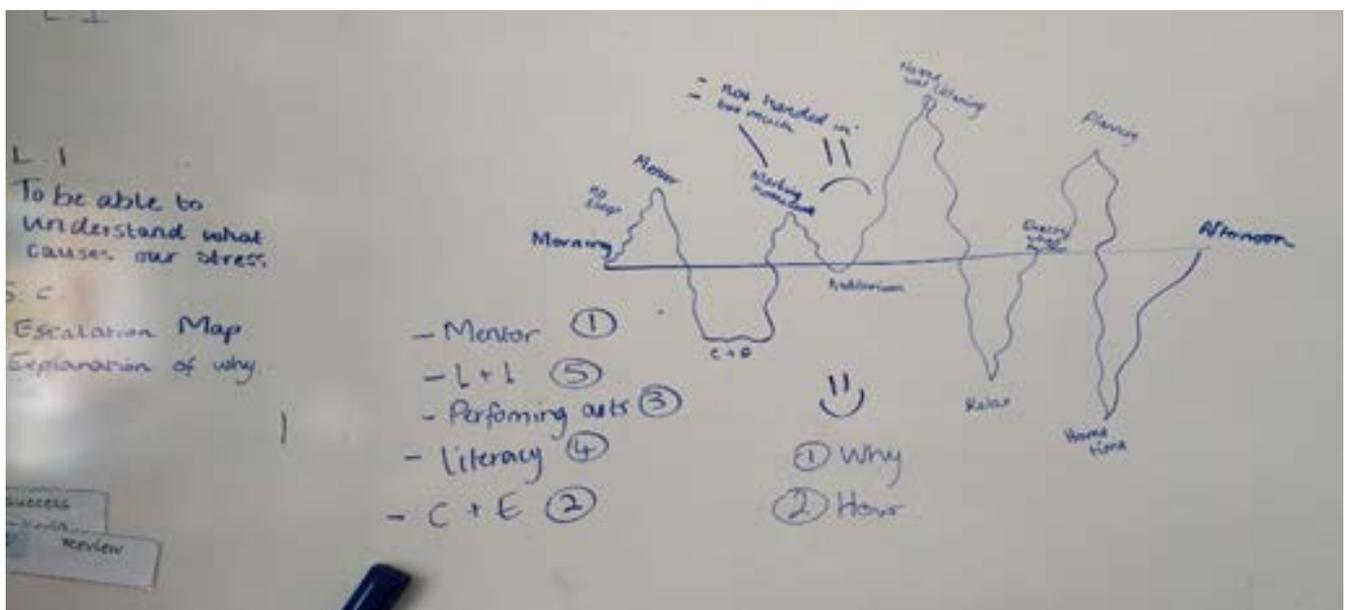
- Having seen fellow students “scared to come to Middle school ... There’s much more responsibility in Middle school ... [the move] gets them anxious ... ‘How will I get the work done in time?’ [etc.] ...” other interviewees noted that they had seen self-regulating strategies being used in such cases. Comments by students at both settings included: “[The] activities are pretty good ...”; “... [Some kids have] learned a bit how to control their temper ... instead of going out and maybe hurting someone”; and “I think the face chart and the work on anger levels are making the most difference”.

From the outset at Mt Excel PS activities were modified according to age. It was recognised that older students would have a greater understanding of ‘stress’, for instance, than their younger peers. Lesson content for the Year 5/6 cohort at Mt Excel PS in connection with the **Self-Regulation** theme included discussion on the causes of stress, the feelings behind stress and “how we feel when we are stressed”, and instruction in ways to “deal with it” (or self-regulate).

After working on self-regulation the teachers started mindfulness activities with the students. A Year 6 student at Mt Excel PS noted her tendency to have difficulty concentrating when other students were noisy or didn’t take a class activity seriously. (“I like to learn but people distract me. When we’re lining up, I get stressed by everyone screaming, crowding ... everyone arguing, yelling, and getting mad about what’s just happened [in the yard]”). The student in question believes she is learning to deal with her annoyance by using breathing exercises acquired through the BSEM’s **Mindfulness** focus. Another Mt Excel PS student reported: “I turn my thinking brain on, listen to the teacher and know what to do. I get frustrated when I can’t think – I try to think what to do next. Breathing helps”. The **Mindfulness** and **Present, Centred and Grounded** themes appear to have resonated with a number of young people, as indicated by the comment: “We learned about each one and practised them a bit ... we can still use it ... It helps you forget about what’s happened in the past ... You need to be centred if you’re ready to learn”. Likewise, another popular activity among Mt Excel PS students has been the task of imagining one’s favourite place or ‘own room’. (For young people at Mt Excel PS, favourite ‘retreats’ ranged from bedrooms to the Anaheim Ice Hockey rink).

Teachers also introduced the fourth **BODY** theme, **De-escalation**. One tool used was the escalation map.

**Figure 3: A teacher’s escalation map at Latimer Valley P-12**



This simple one-page tool allows a student to draw a line on a continuum to represent moments in their school day when they feel escalated and de-escalated. Students then label what particular event occurred or why they felt a shift in their escalation (Brunzell et al., *in press*). Some students indicated that construction of escalation maps had been “helpful”. One girl believed the activity had “improved [her] positive thinking” while, noting the rapid growth of the staff and student populations at Latimer Valley P-12, another student observed:

*“It [the map] has helped with not getting angry ... We got a new lot of teachers at the start of the year and they’re still learning about us ... it’s a way of telling teachers how you feel”.*

Other strategies reported by students as having been effective in countering inattention or as calming agents (in their own words, activities designed to “get our brains switched on”, “change your mind-set”, “focus more on something else”, “get ready for learning”, “get us started again”, “use both sides of the brain”) have included opportunities during Morning Circle Time to take part in Get-to-know you sessions or to discuss, “what we did the night before ... how we’re feeling ... [It] helps make you calmer and ready to work”.

Underlining, (a) the fundamental importance of addressing the ‘physical’ before moving through the rest of the BSEM sequence, and (b) the resonance, throughout the year, of introductory activities within the **BODY** domain, students:

- Noted the value of rhythm-related activities in “getting you moving ... it’s good” and of “putting things about yourself” on de-escalation charts or cards in helping articulate “how you feel during the day”;
- Identified activities they found particularly useful, e.g. Imaging spray painting your name, furnishing ‘your favourite room’; and
- Provided examples of how they had learned to apply self-regulatory strategies, e.g.

*“A boy in our class gets stressed very easily ... the teacher helped him work out ways to help calm him down ... like stress balls”;*

*“There’s a room in the team leader’s office ... a quiet space where you can be by yourself”*

*“I feel a bit better [now], a bit more able to cope if things get difficult. It helps Dad to cope with things when he gets stressed. I told him, ‘take a deep breath’ and it helped with his stress on holiday”.*

Latimer Valley P-12 students made particular reference to the applicability of strategies to test situations:

*“Our teacher taught us to breathe in, breathe out ... count backward if you’re stressed ... Just try and calm. Go outside and have a stretch ... We used breathing for the exams ... Think positive, you’re going to pass, you’re not going to fail.”*

*“With exams, a lot of us get stressed by time limit... Now we know: Take deep breaths, re-read the question and think about how to answer it. Learned a bit of stamina. Everybody did well in exams.”*

The students also highlighted connections between **Self-regulation**, **Mindfulness** and the school’s participation in ‘R U OK? Day’ – “a calm, relaxing day when you didn’t have to stress about anything”.

## Domain 2. Relationship

Positive student assessment of their teachers during Phase 1 interviews was reinforced by student comments at the end of the pilot. In terms of the **Empathy and Zen Mind** and **Attachment** themes, for instance, the response *“My class has a good teacher .... She knows how we feel”* was typical. Also in regard to **Empathy and Zen Mind**, other student comments included:

*“The work this year has helped because we know how other people are going to feel, like anxiety or something ... they’re nervous ... if you make them feel a little more confident, they can do it”.*

*“We’ve got a very supportive class. If someone can’t shoot a basketball, for instance, we always cheer them on. There’s a very small boy in our class – he couldn’t shoot, but everybody cheered him and he persisted and succeeded in shooting a basketball”.*

*“We’ve learnt to treat people with more respect and how you want to be treated ... Judge everyone how you want to be treated”.*

One young man confided his former propensity to dislike the teachers and *“get in trouble a lot”*, partly through being distracted by large teaching groups and the noise of *“29 students mucking up”*. Having completed a half-year exposed to BSEM strategies in the alternative FLO program, he described himself as now feeling:

*“... like normal, more relaxed ... We didn’t do the techniques in [previous class]. If you’re in trouble you get suspended - that’s it. They don’t do stress ball or music. Since I moved to FLO I haven’t been in trouble the whole time ... I’ve learned how to stay out of trouble ... Not once. I haven’t even been suspended ... the teachers are the best. They care about me ... They understand me ... They talk about what we did at the weekend ... what we’re gonna do ... you feel like you belong. I listen to them the whole time”.*

These remarks were echoed by another FLO participant who reported having (a) *“learned to get on with others ... I used to don’t like anyone ... I used to fight a lot”*, and (b) been able to take his anger management and de-stressing techniques and apply them at home.

In discussing the theme, **Unconditional Positive Regard**, a teacher at Latimer Valley P-12 cited the example of a challenging student who she *“struggled to like”* at the outset, and with whom she has since *“built a relationship ... I now like her ... She still needs to sit separately [because of her tendency to interact negatively with classmates] but we’ve been able to work on her stamina ... just staying in her seat [for increasing amounts of time] ... If there had been no Berry Street model, we wouldn’t have reached this point”.*

A relationship-based focus on the ‘whole person’ in the **RELATIONSHIP** domain likewise worked effectively in the case of a young boy prone to temper tantrums in class. The use of phrases such as *“You’re having a bad day ... do you want to talk about it?”*, or *“You’re a good person but the things you’re doing are not”* enabled both teacher and student to separate the person and the behaviour/

process, resulting in “fewer meltdowns” than at the start of the year. There was general agreement as to the value of the BSEM in enhancing:

*“... what we know about the whole child ... knowing the kids’ backgrounds ... knowing the importance of connecting with the kids ... talking about their footy training or their hobbies when they first arrive in the morning ... making sure they have a sense of my teacher cares about me, knows about me. The kids are more aware of what we [teachers] like ... They know us, we know them ... there’s mutual respect”.*

The **RELATIONSHIP** domain was articulated in the Year 1-2 area at Mt Excel PS by teacher use of process versus person praise (focusing on the ‘whole child’) and **Unconditional Positive Regard**.

### **Domain 3. Stamina**

Students at both schools demonstrated a strong practical understanding of the process of moving from a ‘fixed’ to a ‘growth’ mindset, applying the idea to the completion of maths problems, for instance. The concept of stamina tools for learning was particularly well-entrenched at Mt Excel PS thanks to the school-wide subscription to its Stamina Tools for Reading strategy.

Taking their lead from a work sheet that described what ‘real’ and ‘fake’ reading looked like (i.e. focusing on the book, turning pages at appropriate time, concentrating versus turning pages too quickly, talking to other people, looking around the room, holding the book upside down, etc.), interviewees reported marked improvement in the various grades’ capacity (over seven weeks) to focus and pay attention to a reading task. One Year Six student described what they did:

*“How it works is - we all start reading at the same time, if one person mucks up during reading or gets distracted – they stop the timer and we go and sit on the floor. Our goal is not to get distracted and not to look up from our books”.*

Progressing from an initial 36 seconds to 16 minutes (and, ultimately, 20 minutes) was cited as a satisfying achievement by several of the students. They commented:

*“We all felt really good. I felt really proud of myself because we wouldn’t have done it before. We got an award thing. We went out for sport”.*

*“I felt very happy ‘cause I read the best I’ve ever read by myself”.*

*“It got easier ... every time we tried”.*

Comments such as “reading is easier [now]” or “I read every night”, together with a willingness to discuss their personal reading tastes, supported teacher perceptions of the strategy’s success. (Among the ‘likes’ were “personal things like diaries”, “joke books - when I’m feeling really down”, “books that are interesting ... my favourite is Captain Underpants” or “Harry Potter ... I’m up to page 179 of the first one”).

Maths sessions were seen as a logical vehicle for launching discussion on moving from a fixed to a growth mindset (within the **STAMINA** domain) with students in Year 3-4 at Mt Excel PS. While the teacher recalled that some children had difficulty remembering the actual terms, he reported that the concepts of 'giving up' versus 'never giving up ... always making an attempt' had been taken up readily by the class.

Within the **STAMINA** domain, a Stamina Tools for Reading approach was adopted and generalised across the year levels at Mt Excel PS. Teachers from Prep to Year 6 played variations on building students' reading times (from a few seconds to, in one class, more than 20 minutes) through the use of stamina strategies.

Teaching about **STAMINA** focused on student's attention spans, with another strategy conceptualising a stamina thermometer, i.e. visually recording the length of time individuals/group are able to concentrate on one task – e.g. building up from 20 seconds to 5 minutes.

In describing and defining the **Resilience** theme, teachers and students shared discussion on what the term had meant in their lives before creating motivational posters or 'resilience bubbles', and exploring high and low resiliency to classroom (and life) situations.

In initiating discussion on moving from a fixed to growth mindset (within the **STAMINA** domain), a particularly engaging strategy drew on the use of play-dough. Being asked to model a 3D object (an airplane or horse, for instance), provided the focus for discussion around changing thought patterns, progressing from a negative 'I can't do it' stance to a more positive, 'I can't do it ... yet'.

#### **Domain 4. Engagement**

While the training sequence included work around the **ENGAGEMENT** domain it was noted that the teachers focused on the other domains in more detail with their class activities. What has resonated most strongly with teachers and students at both settings have been the concepts of 'positive priming', i.e. lifting students up for learning; willingness and motivation. Implicit in feedback from both schools was the link between feeling positive and increased capacity for productive work.

A Year 5-6 teacher at Mt Excel PS cited the ongoing value of brainbreaks at transition times, and of positive primers (i.e. little activities, within the **ENGAGEMENT** domain, that promote laughter and "feeling good about yourself") in "closing out everything and getting the kids focused on one thing ... given that there's often so much happening in their lives". He reported that presenting a quick 10 minute group scenario or riddle (like 'I met a man going to St. Ives') had the capacity to lift the overall mood of the classroom and nurture a "good learning environment".

#### **Domain 5. Character**

In addition to reporting their enjoyment of identifying and charting their signature strengths, students at both schools noted that discussing **Values** had enabled them to identify what mattered most in their lives. Several young people expressed agreement as to the importance of family and friendship; others made mention of fairness, bravery, honesty and humour. One boy, with a history of problematic behaviour, highlighted the importance for him of being able to interact one-to-one with his teacher.

In articulating the **Values** and **Character Strengths** components of the **CHARACTER** domain, teachers led students in:

- Compiling personal values charts (identifying and defining values and choosing which values “suited us best”) and brainstorming the concept of what might make a values super-hero.
- Utilising strengths cards (a small group activity helping young people reflect on personal attributes through selecting the strengths most pertinent to themselves from a table full of cards).
- Developing a strengths chart (choosing a strength and creating an activity around it), identifying strengths depicted in a piece of writing.
- Rating strengths in order of personal importance or relevance (i.e. What’s important to me? What’s not so important to me?) and sharing the findings with classmates.

## OVERALL IMPACT ON TEACHING

School leadership at Mt Excel PS reported that the Model had been taken on board by teachers “across the school”. They commented that “every teacher is using Berry Street strategies, and the Model is becoming ingrained in the way the teachers teach”.

While the take-up has obviously been more localised at Latimer Valley P-12, school leadership discussed its value (and, in particular, the value of the professional development sessions) in providing teachers with a toolbox of “other ways to tackle” student disengagement. They noted that positive teacher responses within the pilot cohort had reverberated elsewhere in the school, and that word about the Model - and some of the concepts - had “filtered out”.

*“The [BSEM] team has shared a lot of their learnings with other teachers. They shared ideas on resilience [for example] ... The ideas are spilling over into other areas of the school”.*

A teacher interviewee, who had not been part of the Pilot but had observed some teaching strategies in action, reported finding strategies such as Silent Ball, a dictionary game or ‘Greedy Pig’ (a dice game enabling students to accumulate points) useful ways to break up a two-hour maths block. (“I usually put in a brainbreak after 15 minutes [of class-work]”). He reported that one of his colleagues, a Creative Arts teacher, had also started using brainbreaks with her Year 10 and 11 classes.

As noted earlier, the FLO program - Latimer Valley P-12’s specific Flexible Learning initiative, was set up using Berry Street guidelines. Faced with a complete re-structure (including major changes to both students and the staff team) at mid-year, the Unit Co-ordinator credited the BSEM with having provided direction during a particularly challenging period of change: “It was very timely... an opportunity to reinforce the Model’s philosophy and to re-confirm how central relationships are in effective teaching”. Having “started again with **Self-Regulation**, development of Safety Plans ... asking

*the students to select ways they could chill out”, she stressed the particular value for teaching of:*

- Uniformly structuring classroom activity around brainbreaks. *“Brainbreaks provide the hook at the start of the lesson, then we plan three activities over an hour, broken up by two or three brainbreaks”;*
- Synchronising staff exercise of **Unconditional Positive Regard** (including being aware of the language used in the classroom); and
- Uniformly keeping a Zen zone, i.e. remaining calm, *“being aware of ourselves ... being kind to students even when they’re not being kind”.*

A new staff member in the FLO program, relatively new to the profession and with no previous exposure to trauma-informed pedagogy, cited the usefulness of BSEM in his lesson planning. *“I was really out of my depth at first ... where do I start? The Model was exactly what I needed ... Brainbreaks were really important ... they gave me a ‘balancing ball’ ... taught me how to break a lesson into mini-lessons using 5 minute brainbreaks ... like Silent Ball, guess the song, or hangman”.*

Teachers at both schools credited the Model with (a) helping them *“deal with kids as individuals”* and *“deal with difficult kids”*, (b) providing them with a toolbox for engaging and connecting with the students, and (c) enhancing their own self-regulatory capacities, resilience and stamina.

Comments included:

*“As a teacher you get overwhelmed ... the strategies work to get adults to de-escalate ... they can be very beneficial”.*

*“I find I’m not yelling as much ... I don’t like doing that ... the other kids don’t need to hear a raised voice... I’ve made a conscious effort to do that ... and, in return, I feel less need to do it. Talking things through is a better option”.*

The changes in these comments from the teachers are reflected in the decreased suspension rates of students at both schools during 2015. Teachers felt more in control of their classrooms and better able to relate to their students.

Discussing his work with students in the **CHARACTER** domain, the same teacher highlighted the power of learning what the students’ valued and understanding what shaped them as a person. Noting that few of the young people would have previously reflected on their values or strengths, he cited the reciprocal value for students of understanding what the teachers and their peers might value.

An enthusiastic, first-year teacher credited the BSEM focus on growth mindset with helping her to *“let it go”* when a lesson did not go as planned. (*“Maybe we’re more flexible now ... If we expect the kids to have that mindset, we should expect it of ourselves”*). Another teacher spoke warmly of the impact of the BSEM in enabling him to be open with students: *“Being able to say: ‘I’m really frustrated at the*

*moment ... I'm going out for a drink and I'll be back in a moment' and [over the course of the pilot] experiencing fewer peaks of frustration".*

Perhaps the most eloquent assessments of the value of the BSEM to their teaching were comments by two teachers at Mt Excel PS, both scheduled for transfer to other schools in 2016:

*"I'm going from Prep to a 5-6. I'm looking forward to using it [because of] the level of understanding about the kids ...and the way they feel ... rather than just using it to make themselves better ... they will understand what's it's for and used for ...I'm looking forward to actually spreading the word about it to a different school".*

*"You've asked about success ... Having had a junior grade and seeing what can work with the juniors ...I'm looking forward to taking all that stuff to Secondary, like getting into the stamina stuff ... They've got great ideas ... So it's not even a question for me. Like, that's how fantastic I think it is. In terms of what's happened at our school ... 7 or 8 out of 10? It needs work, it's not perfect. But I think it's that great that I want to use it next year".*

While getting the concepts across to cohorts that ranged from Prep through to Year 8 challenged the inventiveness of staff at both settings, interview feedback indicates that they felt sufficiently comfortable with BSEM activities and strategies to use them flexibly. At Latimer Valley P-12, the Years 5/6s and students in the FLO program reportedly responded well to activities but, in some cases, had trouble with terminology such as 'resilience' and 'growth mindset'. Staff found that substitution of such descriptors as a 'stuck' mindset, 'finding your positive place' or 'do something to calm down', had been productive.

There was agreement among the teachers that the Model was adaptable and fluid enough (a) to allow teachers room to modify terminology and/or and activities where necessary, and (b) to some extent, to 'pick' and 'choose' how it was presented. At Mt Excel PS's Prep level, for instance:

- Discussion about values and strengths prompted the development of a 'Wall of Awesome' on which particular acts, breakthroughs or academic successes were recorded. Students were encouraged to identify positive achievements by their peers (i.e. acts of kindness, helping someone out, improvements in performance, etc.). The teacher credited the wall with having helped class culture to become positive.
- Brainbreaks at Prep level morphed into 'Being a bit more Zen', i.e. stopping to take a breath, lie on the floor, listen to quiet music, etc. when a lesson might not be going as well as could be.

## OVERALL IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Teachers at both schools provided a variety of success stories attributable to the pilot, generally agreeing that the majority of the kids have taken the concepts on board with enthusiasm. *“Some kids always resist”,* conceded one teacher from Latimer Valley P-12, *“But – apart from a couple of outliers – most kids have really taken to it”.*

*“There’s obviously work to be done” [reported the Co-ordinator of the Pilot Home Group/ Neighbourhood at Latimer Valley P-12] “but, generally ... it has helped the neighbourhood de-stress and relax ... The terminology has been helpful, we’re able to use it in conversations with the kids ... There’s less ‘he said, we said’, a lot more understanding of each other. The kids are getting on better ... they will come up to us and say, ‘So and so’s not good today ... a bit upset”.*

Recalling how, at the start of 2015, she had been confronted by *“a lot of [young] kids flatly refusing to do things”,* a teacher at Mt Excel PS reported: *“We had to struggle with behaviours at first ... now having had all these strategies, we can sit back and say, well, they weren’t so bad after all. The strategies really helped. For most of the year, it’s been easy to have a positive mind-set as a teacher”.*

General student appraisals of the pilot included:

*“The BSEM has helped us to know how to control our bodies and be open to different things”.*

*“The activities help get all your energy out so you’re ready to learn”.*

*“They [in reference to the self-regulatory tools] help you forget all your problems. When you come inside – when you worry about what they did to you outside ... so you can move away from what they did to you ... so you can focus on [schoolwork]. Someone says something nasty then you come back in and an activity [helps] you forget it and be happy”.*

## OVERALL IMPACT OF THE BSEM ON THE TWO SCHOOLS

Interviewees at both settings noted that implementation of the BSEM has been consistent with changes over recent years to school culture and growing recognition of the need for alternative pedagogical approaches that aim to address the needs of a growing sector of the student population.

At Latimer Valley P-12, for example, school leaders described the culture as *“conducive to the Model ... it was perfect timing ... we wanted to approach behaviour and engagement in a more informed manner [during a period of wider school restructure]”.* Recognising that the sheer size of the school could compound some of the students’ social obstacles, teachers were already working to make the space more user-friendly and as positive as possible. Meanwhile, the creation of the FLO program had formally articulated the school’s desire to cater for students in obvious need of a *“different approach”.*

School leadership at Mt Excel PS credited Berry Street with having provided them with ‘the theory’ and strategies to support its existing philosophy. *“We knew we needed to be supporting the ‘whole child’, academically and emotionally, to keep them engaged ... the Model has given us the reasons for what we have been doing”.*

Staff at Mt Excel PS concurred that 2015 had been *“a good year for the school”*, in part due to the roll-out of the Model. They acknowledged that *“the kids have been much more settled”* than anticipated as the school faces the imminent *“huge change”* of the district’s School’s Regeneration Program.

Staff and students at both schools cited changes in these key areas:

### **Student achievement**

Students at Latimer Valley P-12 did not hesitate to link the roll-out of BSEM activity to academic improvement, making specific reference to the participant cohort’s overall performance on end-of-year exams. Claims included:

*“In Semester 1 most of us all got pretty low ... we’d only just started learning about them [techniques] ... but then you can see the big jump from where we’ve gone, from end of first semester to the end of second semester”.*

*“Everybody passed in our whole class”.*

*“With all the test results, most people got over at least 60 -70, so that shows that all the things we’ve been doing have pretty much paid off”.*

This was reflected in the AusVELS data with effect sizes for number being 0.72 (see below for an explanation of effect sizes as a measure of growth).

### **AUSVELS Data**

Hattie (2009) defines ‘effect sizes’ as measures of the impact of educational initiatives on academic achievement. He designates 0.4 as the ‘hinge point’, i.e. the point at which the initiative is having a greater than average impact on academic achievement (what he describes as one average year of growth), an effect size of 0.6 as having greater than a year’s growth in regard to academic achievement, and an effect size of 1.0 as over 2 years of growth.

Accordingly, effect sizes drawn from comparison of AusVELS data (December 2014 to December 2015) clearly reinforce teacher and student feedback as to the positive impact (growth in academic achievement), to varying degrees, of the BSEM in the two settings. Table 3, for instance, would appear strongly to support school leadership reports of (a) the enthusiasm with which the Model had been implemented by staff and received by students at Mt Excel PS, and (b) the marked extent to which that enthusiasm has contributed to improved learning outcomes and increased growth in academic achievement. Of particular note is the effect size for Reading in Year 5 where the teachers undertook the stamina for reading activities.

**Table 3: Effect sizes in Mt Excel PS's AusVELS data**

Mt Excel PS	READING	WRITING	NUMBER
Year 5	2.09	1.83	1.77
Year 6	1.18	1.31	1.61

AusVELS data (Reading, Writing and Number) for Latimer Valley P-12 is more ambiguous. While effect sizes across subjects are all above 0.6 – confirming (according to Hattie's gradation) that the 'method of teaching' is having a large impact on student outcomes (albeit not so large an impact as at Mt Excel PS) – it should be noted that the non-participant control group averaged a similar improvement. While, SASS data (see Table 4) identifies clear differences in wellbeing between the BSEM and control cohorts, it is more difficult to determine the extent to which the BSEM can be linked directly to improved academic attainment at Latimer Valley P-12.

**Table 4: Effect Sizes in Latimer Valley AusVELS data (for both BSEM and control cohorts)**

Latimer Valley P-12	READING		WRITING		NUMBER	
	BSEM	Control	BSEM	Control	BSEM	Control
	0.69	0.77	0.80	0.69	0.72	0.62

While a number of variables may be influential in this regard, it appears significant that implementation of the Model at the two schools diverged in two significant ways: whole school versus one area, and curriculum integration versus pastoral care. At Mt Excel PS, the BSEM was taken on as a whole-school project and applied across all classes. At Latimer Valley P-12, by contrast, it was piloted with only one middle year's cohort (representing 10-15% of the entire student population). At Mt Excel PS, BSEM concepts and activities were integrated into the day-to-day curriculum (adopting a 'growth mindset' in Maths, for instance) and classroom routines whereas, at Latimer Valley P-12, the primary vehicle for delivery was a subject block (four hours per week) focused on pastoral care.

### **Student engagement**

Recalling concerns at the start of the pilot that brainbreaks and other strategies aimed at getting students "ready for learning" might "eat into teaching time", teachers agreed that the investment had been worthwhile. "They're more sustained for learning than before ... spending more time on task".

Other comments included:

*"The kids are being maintained in a learning environment for much longer".*

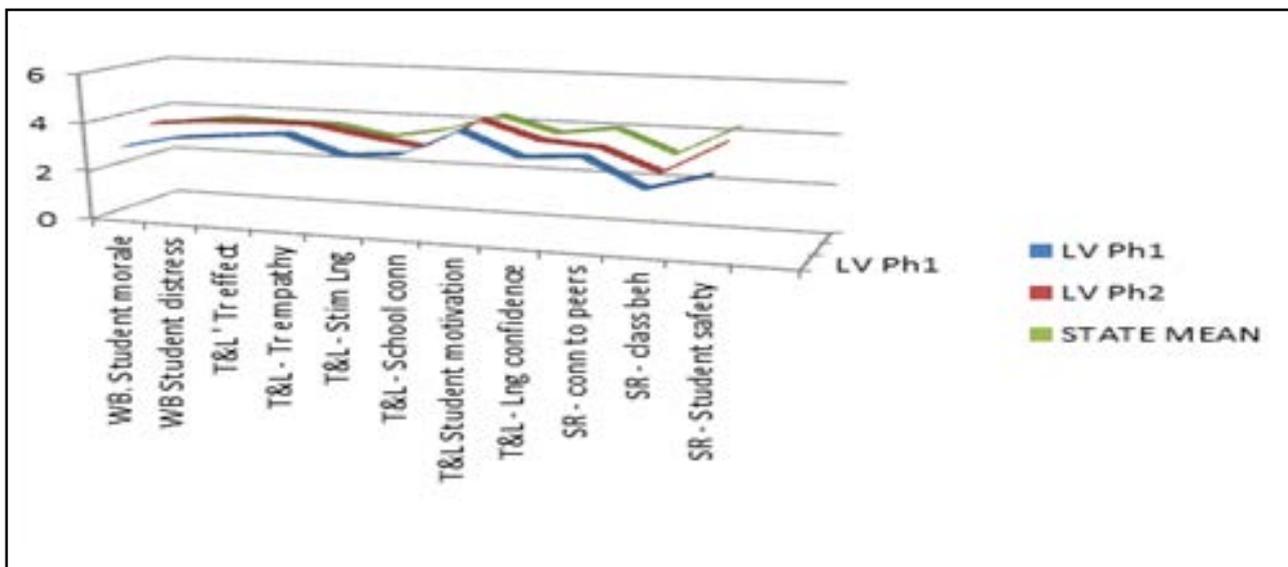
*"Staying in class and being ready and able to learn has been a big change. The kids are putting into place the strategies they know how to use".*

Staff at both schools believed that the model had impacted positively on student behaviour with a noticeable decrease in negative incidents. At Mt Excel PS there was a decrease in suspensions from 57 students in 2014 down to 7 students in 2015. At Latimer Valley P-12 there was a decrease in

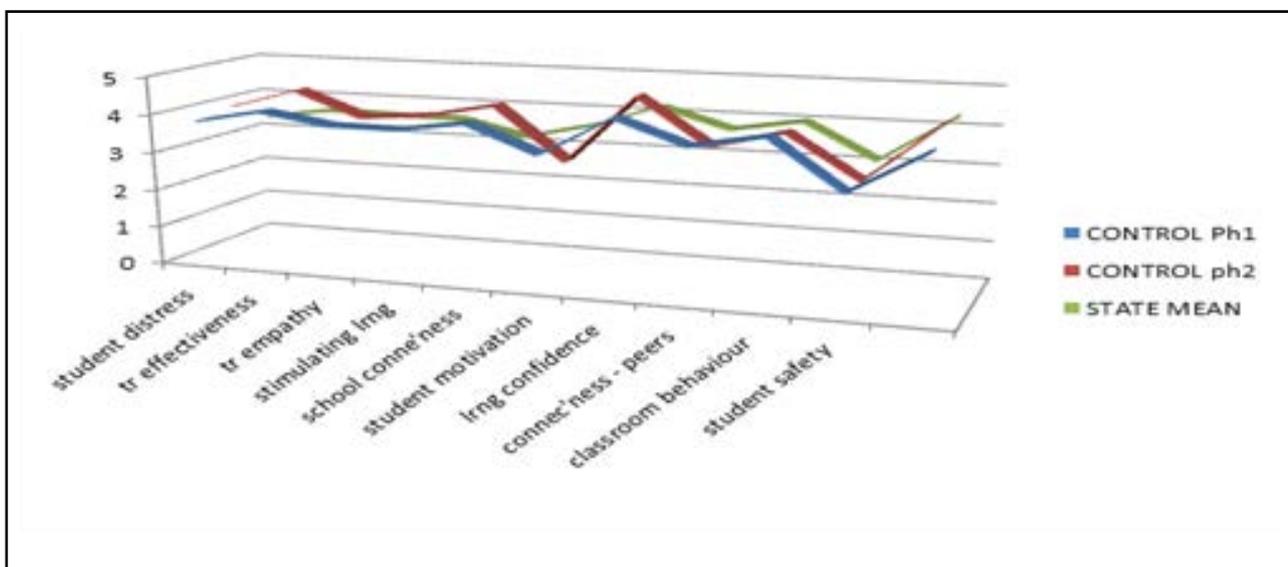
suspensions in the intervention group from 17 students in 2014 to 9 students in 2015. This contrasted with an increase overall in suspensions in the whole school data for Latimer Valley P-12 . These improvements in student behaviour can also be seen in the results of the SSAS survey that was delivered at the beginning and end of the program at Latimer Valley P-12 (intervention group and control group) and Mt Excel PS (Years 5 and 6).

At Latimer Valley P-12 the intervention group recorded improvement in all areas, except one. These included: student morale, teacher effectiveness, teacher empathy, stimulating learning, student motivation, learning confidence, connectedness to peers, classroom behaviour and student safety. One area, school connectedness, recorded a slight decrease (3.27-3.23). These results were in contrast to the control group who recorded a decrease in five of the areas including: teacher effectiveness, learning confidence, connectedness to peers and classroom behaviour, with a far greater decrease also recorded in school connectedness (3.42-2.95).

**Figure 4: Latimer Valley P-12 BSEM Group Phase 1 & 2 against State Mean**

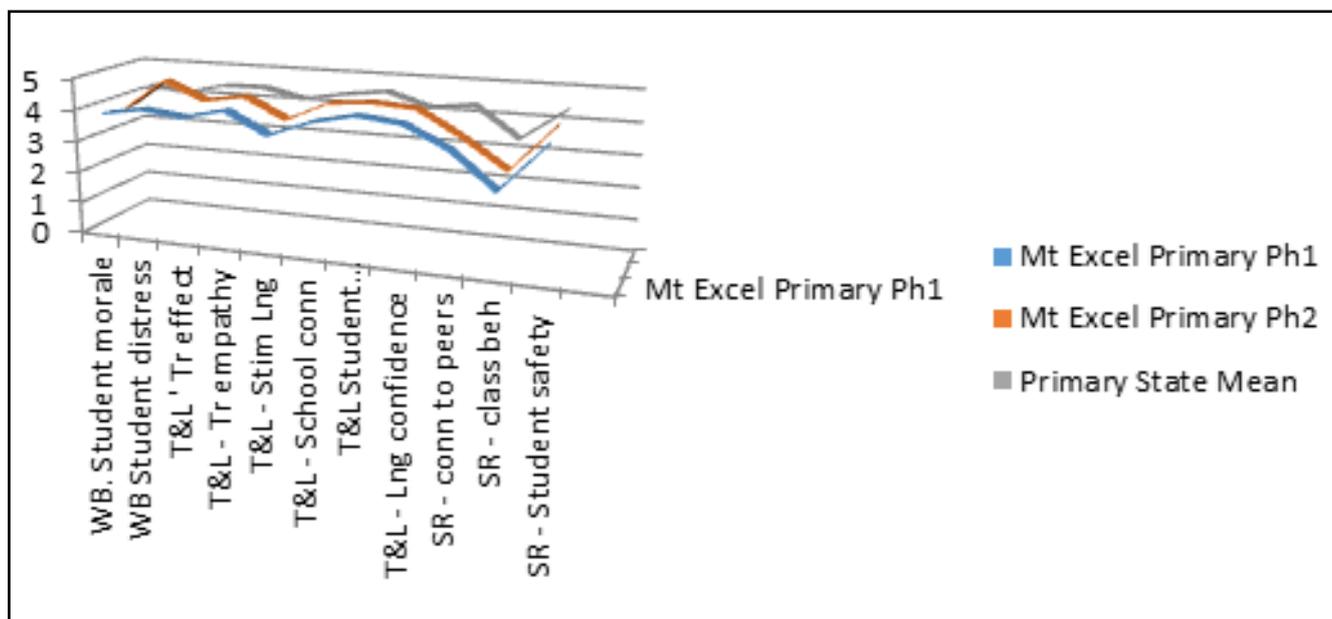


**Figure 5: Latimer Valley P-12 Control Group Phase 1 & 2 against State Mean**



At Mt Excel PS improvement was recorded in all areas. Of note here was a change in school connectedness (4.06 – 4.37) that brought the group surveyed close to the state mean of (4.39). While the results are still below the state mean for many of the areas, learning confidence (4.39) as opposed to the state mean of (4.15) highlighted considerable improvement across the different measures.

**Figure 6: Mt Excel PS Phase 1 and 2 against Primary State Mean**



At Mt Excel PS, four out of eight problem students identified as of “*key behaviour concern*” at the start of 2015, were “*off the list*” by the end of the Pilot. Having absorbed ways to de-escalate, two students, previously prone to upturn furniture when upset, were reportedly presenting minimal behaviour problems by the end of the year.

Family feedback has likewise confirmed the portability of some of the BSEM strategies, reporting that “*kids are calmer at home ... some are doing relaxation exercises at night ... dealing with parents at a calmer level*”.

Staff at Mt Excel PS noted the importance and benefits of a uniform approach to behaviour “*across the whole school*”. The value of consistency has been underlined by the greater likelihood of problems when Casual Relief Teachers (CRTs) are called in.

*“It’s quite deflating when you see CRTs not giving them the space to do their breathing and things like that they would normally do [with regular class teachers] ... [or] when there are flare-ups, when you come in see them hounding the kids or witness raised voices, yelling ... we’ve worked at approaching it differently”.*

Accordingly, interviewees emphasised the need to ensure that future training in the BSEM be generalised as far as possible across the school community, and (where possible) encompass welfare and office personnel, and regular casual staff.

## Teacher-student relationships

Staff at Latimer Valley P-12 reported: *“Relationships with the kids are stronger and better ... We’re now looking at kids with greater empathy and understanding ... asking ‘the behaviour might be telling me this but what’s the real problem?’”. As a result, “there’s [now] a deeper level of teaching and learning at the school”.*

Two comments, one from the leadership team at Mt Excel PS, the other from a senior teacher at Latimer Valley P-12, summarise the overall impact of the BSEM Pilot:

*“Our goal ... understanding the whole child ... academically, socially, emotionally ... giving them internal power and skills to cope with life ... this is being achieved in most cases. The kids are taking the concepts away, taking the breathing [for example] to sports meets or home – and that’s starting to impact on family life”.*

*“We don’t do a lot of explicit social-emotional teaching [at this school], we’re mainly doing curriculum teaching, so I think from a wellbeing perspective, the big benefit of the program being run is .... [to] teach our young people from an early age how to be a well-rounded person ... We all know, if their wellbeing’s not okay, then their learning’s going to be affected .... If we can teach them how to deal with the stresses of life ... and how to interact and understand human relationships, then we’re only going to win in the curriculum side of things ... Young people are being made a lot more aware that there’s a lot more in life than just coming to school ... having that opportunity to learn: What does it mean to be a person? What do I need to know about this life and how do I interact with you? ...We often assume that young people just know that stuff when they don’t... That sort of input is only going to benefit them tenfold as they go on their journey”.*

The SSAS data reflects the changes mentioned above. As noted previously, there was considerable change in some of the areas at Latimer Valley P-12. The largest increase was recorded in regard to student safety with the intervention group recording an increase from 3.14 – 4.02, while the control group recorded a smaller increase from 4.10 – 4.42.



# CONCLUSION

Feedback from the school leadership at both settings has affirmed the positive impact of the Pilot on student wellbeing, achievement, behaviour and engagement. They also affirmed that the Model can be applied to mainstream school settings.

According to senior staff at Latimer Valley P-12, positive outcomes within the pilot 'neighbourhood' have highlighted the potential value of extending delivery across the full middle years' cohort (some 500-600 students). Having had the opportunity to see *"what the Model is ... we now need to embed the practices, get it across the board ... Once it's embedded in the curriculum, it can't just fade into grey"*.

While the sheer size of Latimer Valley P-12 limits the extent to which BSEM can be generalised, at least in the shorter term (*"we can't be holistic at this school"*), staff were optimistic that the challenges they faced in simply dealing with massive growth each year were coming to an end and that greater emphasis could now be placed on pedagogy and approaches to teaching. (*"We're at full P-12 capacity now. The ship will start steadying next year"*.)

As part of its most recent school review at Latimer Valley P-12, student engagement in Prep-12, was identified as a priority key focus for the school. In debating the meaning of engagement, staff have probed the concept of 'readiness to learn' and the use of alternative pedagogies for students identified as 'not ready to learn'. *"We have drawn the idea of 'ready to learn' out of Berry Street ... [and as] an indication of the success of the Pilot, we are making the BSEM elements our own ... We're looking forward to using the model from the start of 2016, in the interests of stability and consistency"*.

Instruction in BSEM strategies in 2016 will be in context of a middle school re-structure that includes separation of Years 7 and 8 from Years 5 and 6, and introduction of 'home groups' at the start of each day. The vehicle for delivery will be a new wellbeing subject called 'Mentor', to be taught/led by the home group teacher. It is anticipated that 'Mentor' will include four hours a term of explicit instruction in BSEM concepts; these concepts will be reinforced, during the first 10 minutes of the day, in home groups.

School leadership at Mt Excel PS has, likewise, expressed determination to 'keep using it' [i.e. the BSEM] and maintain the PD relationship with Berry Street (particularly for new staff). Given the disruption and anxiety that typically attend major change processes in schools, the BSEM has been identified as a key tool in making a chaotic 2016 as smooth as possible, *"the Model will support the kids emotionally"*.

Qualitative data, from teacher, student and school leadership perspectives, has affirmed the impact of BSEM strategies and instruction in effecting positive changes to student behaviour, the development of relationships, self-awareness and school engagement. Quantitative findings, while not always

consistent, have – in general terms – supported qualitative evidence as to the:

- Positive impacts of the BSEM on students' literacy and numeracy attainment (as demonstrated by the effect size data in AusVELS (See Tables 3 & 4);
- Significant decreases in suspension data for both schools among students involved in the BSEM program; and
- Overall improvements to wellbeing data registered in consecutive SSAS data.

Differences in the degree of positive impact, while undoubtedly subject to multiple variables, would appear to be related primarily to the mode of delivery at each setting. It seems logical to deduce that optimum positive outcomes are achieved when (as at Mt Excel PS):

- Aspects of the Model are incorporated into everyday classroom routine (rather than be limited to specific spots on the timetable);
- The Model has been adopted across the whole school (rather than be confined to one area of the school); and
- All staff have been formally (and rigorously) trained by Berry Street personnel.

What has been particularly innovative about the Model, and crucial to its success, has been its sequential structure i.e. the way it was organised by Berry Street and the way it was delivered and experienced in the two schools. Interviewees at both schools acknowledged the importance (as demonstrated in the literature) of laying solid foundations for learning, i.e. by prioritising development of the child's physical capacities, before addressing attachment issues and engaging with curriculum. *"It worked well because of the sequence"* was a representative observation. Other interviewees recognised that:

*"The students need to be de-escalated before you can move on to the next stage ... it is important to build a self-regulated body before you can think about teaching values and character strengths".*

*"You need one element after another, everything builds on the previous domain ... The sequence is very important ... you need to go with the sequence ... Get the kids internalising and understanding how they are reacting then start building the relationship ... without relationships and trust, none of the rest matters".*

It is clear, therefore, that the research question underpinning this report, i.e. *Can the BSEM be applied in Government schools?*, can be answered affirmatively and that (in terms of the sub-questions listed in the introduction) the research process has collated compelling evidence as to the Model's capacity to impact on achievement, engagement, wellbeing and behaviour. There has been greater change to school culture when training and curriculum delivery were developed across the whole school. By providing practitioners with a tool-kit of activities, ideas and strategies, the BSEM has likewise facilitated increased teacher versatility, reflection, confidence and authenticity, while intensive professional development has enabled dissemination of cutting-edge ideas and practice within an alternative pedagogy.

## KEY CHALLENGES

Interview data has highlighted three key challenges for future deliveries of the BSEM. These are:

- Ensuring that participating teachers are fully cognisant with the Model and its components, and feel comfortable in utilising BSEM strategies and activities. To ensure this, the school needs to commit sufficient time to professional development and training and for liaison and follow up meetings with Berry Street. As noted earlier, there was strong agreement that, useful though the curriculum guides are, they need to be used in conjunction with face-to-face training. The professional development days and supplementary meetings have proved to be crucial to teacher engagement with the Model.
- The challenge of maintaining consistency of approach, either (as at Latimer Valley P-12) when delivery of the BSEM is limited to only one sector of the school, or (as at Mount Excel) when the program has been rolled out school-wide. (In this regard, interviewees have suggested that generalising BSEM training across all staff – including non-teaching personnel – potentially maximises the impact of the Model on school culture).
- The challenge of integrating BSEM elements into everyday processes and the school curriculum. (As noted earlier, interview data indicates that ‘embedding’ the Model into the curriculum has greater impact than does limiting delivery of BSEM elements to particular parts of the pastoral care program).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE DELIVERY OF BSEM

- That, in the interests of maximum impact, Berry Street seeks to facilitate school-wide (rather than sectional or year level) implementation of the BSEM.
- That, in committing themselves to utilisation of the BSEM, schools seek to ensure:
  - Engagement of all staff (including non-teaching personnel) in the BSEM professional development and training program; and
  - Allocation of sufficient time and resources to enable the Berry Street trainers to maximise their delivery of professional development content and follow-up.
- That participating schools seek to integrate BSEM strategies, activities and elements into daily routines and school curricula and, where possible, to align use of BSEM elements across year levels. (In this regard, the link between significant effect size shifts in AusVELS data at Mt Excel PS and the school-wide implementation of its stamina for reading strategy seems clear).

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# APPENDIX 1

SASS Averages 2015	Latimer Valley P-12		Latimer Valley (Control)		STATE MEAN (SEC)	Mt Excel PS		STATE MEAN (PRIM)
	Ph1	Ph2	Ph1	Ph2		Ph1	Ph2	
<b>Well-being</b>								
Student morale	2.98	3.63	3.79	3.95	<b>3.6</b>	3.84	3.77	<b>4.25</b>
(Decrease in) student distress	3.45	3.82	4.12	4.45	<b>3.8</b>	4.05	4.73	<b>4.10</b>
<b>Teaching &amp; Learning</b>								
Tr effectiveness	3.65	3.89	3.85	3.81	<b>3.6</b>	3.90	4.17	<b>4.41</b>
Tr empathy	3.84	3.91	3.84	3.95	<b>3.6</b>	4.21	4.39	<b>4.43</b>
Stimulating lng	3.10	3.53	4.09	4.3	<b>3.2</b>	3.55	3.75	<b>4.14</b>
School connectedness	3.27	3.23	3.42	2.95	<b>3.6</b>	4.06	4.37	<b>4.39</b>
Student motivation	4.33	4.43	4.43	4.72	<b>4.2</b>	4.35	4.48	<b>4.56</b>
Lng confidence	3.42	3.74	3.83	3.54	<b>3.7</b>	4.21	4.39	<b>4.15</b>
<b>Student Relationships</b>								
Connectedness-peers	3.57	3.58	4.16	3.99	<b>4.0</b>	3.57	3.63	<b>4.32</b>
Classroom behaviour	2.48	2.72	2.94	2.90	<b>3.1</b>	2.48	2.74	<b>3.38</b>
Student Safety	3.14	4.02	4.01	4.42	<b>4.3</b>	3.93	4.19	<b>4.35</b>

