

CASE STUDY:

Building a positive outlook



Victorian Workplace
Mental Wellbeing
Collaboration

Geelong Grammar School

Geelong Grammar School's approach to employee health and wellbeing is aligned with the principles of Positive Education, which are embedded across the curriculum, employee and student management and pastoral support processes used at the school. Positive Education focuses on specific skills that assist students and staff to strengthen relationships, build positive emotions, enhance personal resilience, promote mindfulness and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Rather than having a specific mental health and wellbeing policy, Geelong Grammar incorporates mental wellbeing across a range of policies, such as the Employee Assistance Program, flexible work practices, respectful behavior in the workplace and supportive terms of employment.

This approach has been successful in creating high levels of work satisfaction among staff and consequent high levels of commitment and performance. The strong focus on health and wellbeing also reflects the school's core purpose of making a positive difference and inspiring both students and the wider community to flourish.

The Geelong Grammar School community

Geelong Grammar is an independent school providing education to students from Early Learning to year 12. It has four campuses with nearly 1600 students and employs approximately 400 permanent staff and up to another 300 casual support staff in any one year. More than 850 students are boarders at two campuses. Approximately 140 teaching and support staff live on boarding campuses with their families, creating small residential communities with extensive catering, cleaning and maintenance facilities. Geelong Grammar recognises that a range of support services are needed to successfully manage the diverse challenges of residing on campus with staff 'living and breathing' work, day and night, with their families.

Teachers develop a very full relationship with students, playing a significant role in their overall education; academic, physical, spiritual and moral. The school has high expectations of teachers and the various pastoral support staff regarding and the staff-student relationships, and this is reflected in the wellbeing support and relationship it develops with employees.

Tony Green, Head of Barwon House, shares his favorite thing about working at Geelong Grammar: 'Being a part of the community, and the support structures that are here. It's more than a school, it's just a great place to work. A lot of people look after each other which comes through in our community values and the philosophy of the school.'

Positive Education for better health and wellbeing

The school's approach to health and wellbeing is aligned with the field of positive psychology, an applied approach to the scientific study of human flourishing, on which the principles of Positive Education were developed. Staff are provided with induction and training in Positive Education through a three-day, intensive course and have access to regular opportunities to upskill. Geelong Grammar also supports employee mental wellbeing through:

- Generous terms of employment that incorporate wellbeing considerations, such as free income protection to remove financial stress in times of need
- Provision of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a counselling service, which supports employees with work and personal issues
- Policies that clearly define behavioural expectations of staff and encourage positive interactions between staff

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- A self-directed performance and appraisal process that includes goal setting and identification of support for professional development, which is separate from any performance management or improvement processes.

Increased work satisfaction and commitment

The school's efforts to support employee wellbeing have resulted in a thriving workforce with statistics that indicate either year on year improvement or measures of staff satisfaction and engagement or areas which may require improvement. For example, staff turnover is less than 3 per cent, sick leave is approximately two days per person per annum, and the school has had no work-related stress claims in the last eight years.

Feedback from staff is elicited via an annual staff satisfaction survey. The survey collects data on nine measures: leadership support (includes two measures), morale, peer support, engagement and understanding of the goals of the school, professional development, working together, working environment and perceptions of fairness.

Although variations occur from time to time between campuses and employment groups, there are consistently high levels of satisfaction on all scales that exceed the averages obtained from other independent schools using similar survey scales and techniques. Just as importantly, the school is able to compare results each year and more closely analyse the factors that enhance or hinder wellbeing, to develop strategies that are associated with high levels of satisfaction and therefore commitment and performance.

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The Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration is a partnership between SuperFriend, VicHealth and WorkSafe Victoria. We are working together to help workplaces create positive and supportive work cultures and environments by focusing on organisational leadership and encouraging workplaces to implement positive mental wellbeing strategies that enhance existing policies and processes.

For more information, please visit:

www.leadingwellvic.com.au

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