

## **Positive Education:**

### **Creating flourishing students, staff and schools.**

*The following adapted article was found in 'In Psych' magazine, written by Dr Suzy Green and associates. It's fantastic to have reinforced by experts in the field, that Altona P-9 College is definitely on the right path, working at addressing the whole child and developing the necessary skills for each child's academic success and wellbeing.*

In Australia and globally there is growing interest in positive education. Much of this interest has stemmed from the work of Professor Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania. Positive education has been defined as "education for both traditional skills and for happiness" (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive psychology itself has been defined as an umbrella term in relation to what makes life worth living (Noble & McGrath, 2008). We would argue that positive psychology is extremely relevant to the school setting to assist in the understanding and development of high levels of psychological wellbeing in students, staff and school.

Whilst the sub-field of positive education is relatively new, it has a long history. Helen McGrath (2009) claimed that positive education arose from a focus on self esteem in the 1970s, moved to social skills programs in the early 1990s, then to resilience programs in early 2000. From that time on it has become a focus on anti-bullying initiatives, values programs and student wellbeing initiatives, including social and emotional learning programs just to name a few.

#### **Why positive education?**

Whilst historically schools may have aimed for academic excellence as sole evidence for their success, there are growing numbers of schools who are now acknowledging the need to develop students in a more holistic way, with a stronger focus on wellbeing. Much of this is in recognition of the increasing statistics on psychological distress and mental illness in our children and adolescents, and the realisation of the need to take a more proactive rather than reactive approach to mental health.

Schools now are seen as institutions where their role extends beyond academic competence to further preparing the 'whole child' (Huitt, 2010). It would appear schools (need to) educate their students on the research and application of wellbeing and implement interventions aimed at increasing the optimal functioning of their students and staff, thus hopefully reducing the incidence of mental illness which often appears during the early stages of puberty.

There are also a growing number of schools embracing positive psychology interventions (PPIs). PPIs are intentional activities that aim to increase wellbeing through the cultivation of positive feelings, cognitions and behaviours (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Examples of PPI's include: identifying and developing strengths; cultivating gratitude; and visualising best possible selves (Seligman et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Research revealed that PPIs do significantly increase wellbeing and decrease depressive symptoms.