

Attention to mental health boosts academic performance

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Australian primary school students whose mental health and wellbeing improved through KidsMatter showed better academic performance equivalent to having up to six months extra schooling, an independent evaluation by Flinders University has found.

Researcher Dr Katherine Dix (pictured) used the NAPLAN data from the MySchool website and the KidsMatter Implementation Index to see if a [relationship](#) existed between how well a school implemented KidsMatter and academic performance.

Her analysis, published recently in the British journal Child and Adolescent [Mental Health](#), demonstrated that there was a significant positive relationship.

“There is strong evidence internationally that a child’s social and emotional wellbeing affects his or her academic performance,” Dr Dix, chief analyst of the KidsMatter Primary evaluation team from Flinders’ School of Education, said.

“Our study demonstrates that the application of school-wide mental health promotions similarly affects learning outcomes,” she said.

“The availability of the NAPLAN data, collected during the first KidsMatter implementation in 2007 and 2008, provided a well-founded basis for our analysis.

“It enabled us to directly compare the mental health outcomes and academic performance for each of the 100 schools which took part in KidsMatter.

“After controlling for differences in socioeconomic background, the study showed the difference between students in high- and low-implementing schools was equivalent to a difference in [academic performance](#) of up to six months extra schooling by Year 7.”

Dr Dix said that while many nations were mounting school-based mental health initiatives, the quality of program implementation needed to be sustainably monitored for the full benefit of the programs to be realised in the longer-term.

Provided by Flinders University

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