



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Raise Foundation
Submitting as a: Parent or community organisation
State: NSW

Summary

Raise Foundation is a non-profit, independent charity which has been delivering best practice mentoring programs to students in public high schools since 2009. Raise Foundation is a public benevolent institution with DGR and TCC accreditation from the Australian Taxation Office.

This submission addresses the question of what we can do to improve educational outcomes and support ongoing improvement over time. Whilst the definition of educational success can be debated, if we want to have any form of positive impact on learning outcomes for all students we need to first address the issue of disengagement.

The ability to engage at school is a key factor driving educational performance and yet too many of Australia's young people today remain disengaged from their education, training and employment due to factors outside the learning environment.

In order to develop academically students need to be in a frame of mind conducive to learning. However, not all students can leave behind the broader adversities they face outside the school environment.

International research and robust evaluations, like those produced by Raise Foundation, show that the improved wellbeing derived by students from best practice mentoring programs is essential to improving engagement and positive educational outcomes.

Best practice mentoring programs are a proactive measure that can be delivered by incumbent student wellbeing staff within schools, with the support of experienced mentoring organisations, to improve student resilience, self-worth and self-confidence and promote connectedness and reengagement at the individual level without increasing pressure on limited teaching resources.

In-school, best practice mentoring is therefore an effective complement to the delivery of successful, high quality teaching and learning strategies. The only barrier to incorporating best practice mentoring as a solution within every school is a lack of broader awareness of the benefits that can be derived. We are hopeful that the recommendations of this Review will overcome this barrier.

Main submission

Why Australian schools need mentoring programs

- The ability to engage at school is a key factor driving educational performance and yet too many (1 in 10) of Australia's young people today remain disengaged from their education, training and employment due to factors outside the learning environment.
- Example: Young people who experience marginalisation such as Indigenous young people, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) young people, young people who are carers, young people living with an intellectual disability and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are at a much greater risk of disengagement from education.
- Example: young people who are experiencing conflict at home are more likely to have poor school connectedness, increased conflict with teachers, poorer communication skills and lower self-concept.
- In order to develop academically students need to be in a frame of mind conducive to learning. However, not all students can leave behind the broader adversities they face outside the school environment. This is supported by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results which show that it is social and economic factors and correlations between Indigenous status, class, race, gender and geographical location that drive the difference in performance between states.
- There is a growing body of research demonstrating that resilience to these adversities and risk factors - by developing confidence (including academic confidence), a sense of wellbeing, motivation, an ability to set goals, relationships/connections, and stress management - is a critical component of education.
- State and Federal educational policy already widely recognises that student resilience and wellbeing are essential for both academic and social development.
- Improving educational outcomes in Australian schools therefore requires a wholistic solution which knits support for student wellbeing and re-engagement, particularly for those who are marginalised and at risk, into the fabric of every school.
- In-school student mentoring programs perform this fundamental role in addressing student resilience, self-worth and self-confidence and promote connectedness and reengagement at the individual student level without increasing pressure on limited teaching resources.
- In-school mentoring is therefore an effective complement to the delivery of successful, high quality teaching and learning strategies and the evidence and considerations in the remainder of this submission provide strong advocacy for the inclusion of in-school mentoring in the Review Panel's final recommendations.

Evidence that mentoring works

- There is a growing body of research that clearly demonstrates the benefit of mentoring for young people and its positive impact on their education journey.
- One of the largest longitudinal studies ever undertaken on the benefits of mentoring found that:
 - Young people with a mentor are significantly more confident in their academic abilities than those without a mentor;

- Young people with a mentor are significantly less likely to display behavioural problems;
- Girls with a mentor are 2.5 times more likely to be confident in their ability to be successful at school;
- Boys with a mentor are 3 times less likely to suffer peer related anxiety;
- Boys with a mentor are 2 times more likely to believe that school is fun, and that doing well academically is important.
- Research by other respected academics shows that young people who have a positive experience with either a formal or informal mentor are more likely to:
 - Finish high school and extend their expectations for educational achievement
 - Gain employment and be progressing in their career path
 - Have lower levels of depression and higher outcomes in wellbeing and emotional support
 - Have greater self-esteem, resilience and confidence
- In a comprehensive Longitudinal Study of Australian Children it was found that students who were meeting academic milestones during the transition to high school were more likely to have reported high levels of a sense of belonging at school. The research acknowledges that engagement, wellbeing and non-cognitive skills are important developmental areas as young people transition to high school, impacting on students' persistence, conscientiousness, and a sense of self-efficacy as a learner.
- This research also acknowledges that young people who are missing out can recover and gain ground and that being behind at any point need not be a life sentence, even for the disadvantaged.
- When the research shows that one confiding relationship with an adult that is one of the single best predictors of psychological health and vitality amongst children and adolescents and that the sense of wellbeing and reengagement derived from mentoring translates directly to educational outcomes, mentoring must be considered as essential to the solution.

Young people need their schools to provide access to mentoring

- Youth mentoring done well is a wholistic solution to re-engage young people facing a wide range of adversities because it gives them the opportunity to experience, often for the first time, a confiding and supportive relationship that is independent and trusted.
- Despite the evidence that mentoring works to reengage young people with education, it has been shown that the more risk factors there are in a young person's life, the less likely they are to have a natural mentor in their life.
- Many young people are not comfortable seeking information, advice or support from professional services. Barriers include wanting to solve the problems themselves, a lack of belief that anyone is able and willing to help them, not knowing where to get help from, fear of consequences and the perceived stigma associated with seeking that support.
- Despite these barriers, one of the places where young people frequently utilise services is within the school environment. Student wellbeing officers in schools also

report a growing group of young people not 'unwell' enough to access external mental health services, but who still require help and assistance in order to build resilience and decrease the risk of developing mental health problems in the future. This trend is reflected in the increasing level of commitment by Government to increasing student counsellor numbers and other support services.

- When the young people who are marginalised and most at risk of disengaging from education are the least likely to have, or seek access to, transformative support services like mentoring outside of school, it is essential that schools provide these services within the safe confines of the school if they want to improve their outcomes.
- What's more there is a robust body of research identifying the transition to high school as one of the riskiest phases for school failure, being characterised by significant social, emotional and behavioural changes. During this period students can develop the fundamental skills and self- concept as learners which form the foundations of subsequent learning and academic achievement. This provides further support for focusing the efforts of in-school mentoring on the early high school years.

A proven model for delivering mentoring programs within schools

- A model for successful delivery of best practice in-school mentoring by reputable, not-for-profit mentoring organisations already exists in Australia. For example under the NSW Government (FaCS) Youth Frontiers Program mentoring organisations have delivered in school mentoring programs across all 100 electorates in NSW 2015-2017. These programs involve weekly, one-hour mentoring sessions for targeted high school students with volunteer mentors from the community, for a minimum of twenty weeks each year.
- The results being achieved prove that delivery of best practice mentoring programs in schools is not only possible, it also works. For example evaluation of outcomes in 2016 for Raise Foundation in school mentoring programs include statistically significant improvement in student resilience and coping strategies, confidence and self-esteem, relationships and connections, and ability to set and achieve goals. Improvement in young people's engagement with education and employment also approached statistical significance with 96% of schools reporting an improvement in students' relationships with their teachers and, in space of a single year, 58% and 50% of schools reporting an improvement in student attendance and grades. It is not surprising that 100% of schools requested this particular mentoring program return the following year.
- The simplicity of this proven model of in-school mentoring lies in the school's ability to outsource all aspects of the program – including the evidence-based program design, the sourcing and verifying of volunteer mentors from the community, the provision of accredited training to all mentors, and on- site supervision of mentors by qualified counsellors – rather than placing further pressure on teachers.
- Nearly one in three teachers report being extremely stressed or very stressed by the challenges of disengaged student with teachers in low SES schools being most greatly impacted. When more than 10% of students are misbehaving, teachers

spend nearly 25% of their time just keeping order which is less time spent delivering quality teaching. When students are disengaged and teachers are stressed, everyone loses.

- One indisputable advantage of this proven model of in-school mentoring is the use of skilled volunteer mentors from the community to deliver 20 hours per annum of direct one-on-one support for students. That is not only 20 hours per annum less that teachers and student wellbeing officers need to spend addressing individual issues born from adversity, it equates to many more hours of quality teaching being delivered to the wider student population including those mentees who have become more engaged as a result of the mentoring. When students are more engaged and classrooms are less disrupted there are lowered levels of teacher stress and higher levels of quality teaching time, benefitting all students. Everyone wins.
- Another indisputable advantage of using skilled volunteer mentors is that it returns more time into the hands of student wellbeing officers for proactive measures. As a consequence, a nation-wide implementation of this proven model for best practice in-school mentoring may also involve the upskilling of incumbent student wellbeing officers to deliver and supervise the mentoring programs themselves, effectively utilising the staff hours liberated by the mentoring program itself.
- In short, best practice mentoring programs supported by student wellbeing officers in every Australian high school is an efficient allocation of resources towards a sustainable program which is essential to improving student educational outcomes.

Mentoring programs in schools have a long term positive return on investment

- International research and robust internal evaluations like those produced by Raise Foundation show that the wellbeing derived from mentoring is essential to improving engagement and positive educational outcomes and can therefore contribute to an improvement in Australian student performance and the dispersion of that performance.
- In-school mentoring should therefore be considered as one integral component to any recommendation for improving educational outcomes for young Australians.
- Delivering best practice mentoring programs within schools circumvents personal circumstances which may otherwise create a barrier to participation in mentoring for young people who need it the most.
- In-school, best practice mentoring programs are a proactive measure that can be delivered by incumbent student wellbeing staff with the support of experienced mentoring organisations.
- By incorporating best practice mentoring into the fabric of every school, the Government would be addressing outcomes for Australian high school students now so that they may contribute to supporting Australia economically, and socially, into the future. According to a 2013 study by The Boston Consulting Group on an international best practice mentoring organisation, an average social return on investment of \$18 was generated (\$23 for most disadvantaged) for every dollar

invested. In a 2012 study of Australia's preeminent indigenous mentoring organisation, for each \$1 spent on a program, \$7 in benefits was generated for the Australian economy.

- We invite further consultation on the facts presented in this submission and are very happy to engage as a subject matter expert for further investigation of this essential component to improving educational outcomes.
- We have included a number of letters from School Principals advocating for the in-school mentoring program as well as a number of referees including School Principals and members of Parliament.

We strongly support you contacting referees to hear the benefits from those that see them first hand.