

## Sustainable Sexuality & Relationships Education

*Building young people's knowledge to make informed and empowered decisions*



### School led sexuality education in a small rural town

With a population of 300 students, Mansfield Primary School<sup>1</sup> is located in the small rural town of Mansfield at the base of Mt Buller. While the Student Family Occupation Index (SFOI) of 0.45 falls within the “average” range, the school community is relatively isolated with families, children and young people disadvantaged in accessing school and community services.

### Building a safe, supportive school culture through respectful relationships

To improve service integration and access, Mansfield Shire, schools, health and community agencies meet regularly within the *Better Communities for Children Leadership Network*.<sup>2</sup> Chaired by Mansfield Shire's Family Services Coordinator, network meetings focus on improving communication, information and resource sharing and are attended by the Mansfield Primary School Principal and Student Welfare Coordinator (SWC). Leaders within the Network champion priority areas to better meet children's needs with Mansfield Primary School's SWC leading the promotion of respectful relationships through a whole of school and community approach to prevention of violence.

Mansfield Primary School's approach draws largely on the Victorian State schools' *Triple R* philosophy and aims to establish a safe, supportive school culture and environment where staff, students, parents and carers build, practise and promote respectful, non-violent attitudes and behaviours based on: *Respect for ourselves, Respect for others, Respect for our world*. This approach continues to overarch all aspects of school life, including expectations for student behaviour, staff/student relationships, Student Support Services and teaching and learning. The *Triple R* theme is supported by all public state schools in the Mansfield Cluster and provides a framework for discussion and sharing in local cluster meetings.

### Embedding sexuality education across the P-6 curriculum

Following their return to Mansfield four years ago, the Principal and SWC were dismayed by the incidence of aggressive and anti-social behaviours amongst students. With support from the Principal, post graduate studies in Special Education galvanised the SWC's decision to take a proactive approach by embedding protective behaviours into the primary school curriculum. At this time, just 3 sessions of “puberty education” were delivered by the Mansfield Secondary College Adolescent School Nurse to grade 6 students during term 4, in preparation for their transition to secondary school.

Concerned by the lateness of sexuality education, earlier onset of puberty and relationship issues amongst students, the SWC met with the Adolescent School Nurse to discuss approaches to embed comprehensive sexuality education across the P-6 curriculum.

**Phase 1** focussed on developing and practising respectful relationships through the *Better Buddies Program*, where students are matched to a 'Buddy' at a higher grade level within the school, so that stronger relationships and support are developed over 3 years.

**Phase 2** followed professional learning by the SWC in *Catching on Early* provided by DET in Benalla and further planning led by the SWC with support from the Adolescent School Nurse and *Benalla Health Community Health Nurse*. All staff including integration aides undertook 2 hours of sexuality education training on site, with leadership, resourcing and support provided by the SWC and nurses to class room teachers in 3 groups: **Prep to Year 2, Years 3 and 4** and **Years 5 and 6**. *Catching on Early teaching* resource kits were created for year groups to support classroom teaching and learning.

**Phase 3** *Catching on Early* teaching and learning activities delivered by school staff to students in P - 6 classes during terms 1, 2 and 4. Children with special needs included with strengths based resources and practices.



## Enablers for a whole school approach to sexuality education

- ❖ School leadership, support and commitment to establish a safe, supportive school culture through respectful relationships, behaviours and attitudes modelled and practised.
- ❖ School champion with specific knowledge to drive the process with leadership and staff support.
- ❖ School council and community support for prevention of aggressive behaviours through whole of school and community approaches based on respect.
- ❖ Regular planning, information and resource sharing with local schools and community agencies.
- ❖ Professional learning for *all staff* (including aides and Chaplain) provided on site with comprehensive teaching and learning resources packaged for year groups.
- ❖ Regular communication with parents and School Council through information sessions, letters, updates and surveys. Staff contacts available for parent queries and concerns.
- ❖ Leadership, mentoring and support from school and nurse leaders in regular staff and unit meetings with opportunities for co-facilitation and mentoring of new staff.
- ❖ Inclusive and flexible teaching and learning practices for children with special needs.

### More Information:

#### Paul Volkering

Principal  
Mansfield Primary School  
[volkering.paul.pc@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:volkering.paul.pc@edumail.vic.gov.au)

#### Nicole Commerford

Student Welfare Coordinator  
Mansfield Primary School

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<sup>1</sup> **Mansfield Primary School**  
<http://www.mansfieldps.vic.edu.au/>

<sup>2</sup> **Mansfield Better Communities for Children Leadership Network**  
<http://www.mansfield.vic.gov.au/councilservices/communityservices/family-youth-and-childrens-services/BCFCLN.aspx>