

Primary Welfare Officer Initiative

Governance

October 2013

Schools have the autonomy and flexibility to tailor the implementation of the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative to local needs, including service model, priorities and tailored outcomes, within the context of the Initiative's purpose and Government priorities.

Service Delivery Models

Schools choose a model for deploying a Primary Welfare Officer which best suits the needs of the school community and takes into consideration the amount of funding provided. In many instances, funding for the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative will only be for a time fraction, not a fulltime staff member. Schools may choose to supplement the funding for the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative to increase the time fraction available.

Options for Service Delivery models include:

- **Single school:** Primary Welfare Officers are embedded staff members within the school, concentrating on the wellbeing goals identified in the school strategic plan and in line with the Student Engagement Policy. The Primary Welfare Officer focuses on strengthening the school's capacity to engage more effectively with students, parents and community service partners. Strengths of this model include the co-location of the Primary Welfare Officer within the school, consistency of delivery through utilising a dedicated staff member, and resulting in-depth knowledge of the school community.
- **Cluster:** Primary Welfare Officers work across two or more schools with the time fraction at each school being dependent on funding allocations and availability of the appointee. It is important that there be a shared vision about the focus of the Initiative across the schools, as well as a mechanism for managing the Initiative and providing support for the Primary Welfare Officer, such as a committee of management. This model may be appropriate for schools which have similar student wellbeing needs and can achieve economy of scale by pooling their resources.
- **Network:** Primary Welfare Officers work together to support and further develop student wellbeing priorities established through their local school network. Under this model, schools networks must exercise a high degree of coordination and oversight to ensure effective service delivery by the Primary Welfare Officers that result in clear improvements to student wellbeing in schools.

- **Partnership with an external agency:** Schools may choose to establish a more formal partnership with a community agency, and buy time from the agency so that the worker can perform the Primary Welfare Officer role in the school. Under this model, it is important to establish clear guidelines between the agency and the school about the services that are being purchased, and establish regular formal meetings.

Alignment with the School Strategic Plan

The role of the Primary Welfare Officer should be aligned with the school strategic plan and the Primary Welfare Officer may be responsible for leading school efforts related to student wellbeing and engagement.

Recruitment

Schools receive funding for the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative as part of the Student Resource Package. This funding must be used to secure a dedicated person, or time fraction of a dedicated person, to undertake the role and will generally adopt the job title 'Primary Welfare Officer'. The successful applicant must be responsible for undertaking the Primary Welfare Officer role in addition to any other existing duties and for achieving the school and Initiative priorities and outcomes.

Line management of Primary Welfare Officers will vary between schools. Schools should ensure there are clear arrangements and delegations in place to provide a supportive and collaborative working environment for Primary Welfare Officers.

New or existing staff member?

Schools can choose to either employ a new staff member to the position or allocate the time of an existing staff member.

Schools also have the option to advertise internally, externally, or both, depending on local needs. Some schools utilise the Primary Welfare Officer funding as an opportunity to secure a new staff member and introduce new skills, knowledge and impartial perspective to the school and its health and wellbeing frameworks. Some schools may determine that it is of greatest benefit to fill the Primary Welfare Officer role with an existing staff member, as they already have knowledge of the school and its wellbeing strategies, a professional relationship with school staff and rapport with students and parents/carers.

Professional Pool

The professional pool from which schools can recruit Primary Welfare Officers includes (but is not limited to) teachers, principal class, social workers, psychologists, counsellors, youth workers, welfare agency workers, disability workers, family support workers, community liaison workers etc.

Schools can tailor the key selection criteria and position description for the Primary Welfare Officer to assist in recruiting the most appropriate person for the role, with the most appropriate qualifications, to address the particular health and wellbeing needs of the school community.

Professional Development and Learning

Professional development, supervision and support are critical to maintaining the service standards and expertise of the education workforce.

These processes are supported through the provision of appropriate training, supervision, support materials such as guidelines and toolboxes, leadership structures and collegiate affiliation.

All Primary Welfare Officers should have a performance plan which defines their role and accountabilities.

Professional learning opportunities

High quality professional learning (formal or informal) is one of the cornerstones of an effective school. It enables staff to develop the skills and knowledge they need to improve their practice and is central to improving student outcomes. All school staff, including Primary Welfare Officers, need to be continuous learners who see their own learning as being fundamental to membership of their profession.

High quality professional learning is:

- focused on improving student outcomes
- embedded in the everyday practice of educators
- informed by the best available research
- collaborative, involving reflection and feedback
- informed by data and evidence
- ongoing, supported and enabled by leaders
- an individual and collective responsibility

Individual professional learning for Primary Welfare Officers should be planned and implemented as part of the performance and development cycle. Planning for professional learning should take into consideration school, network and government priorities, so that staff are supported in their efforts to achieve these priorities.

Support, Supervision and Networking

Professional supervision is an important component of Primary Welfare Officers professional development. Supervision provides a collaborative forum in which

supervisors and staff members can reflect on the content, process and progress of their work, creating a context in which collegiate professional learning can take place.

As part of the strategic planning process, schools may need to consider allocating resources for formal professional supervision for Primary Welfare Officers. This will depend on the Primary Welfare Officer's professional background as well as the role they play in the school.

Range of supervision

Primary Welfare Officers benefit from a range of supervisory arrangements that may be provided on a formal one-on-one basis, or more informal group basis that encourages team learning and collaboration:

- Day-to-day supervision by a line manager, including general advice and guidance, administrative support and facilitating participation in professional development and learning activities
- Peer supervision or mentoring by a senior staff member, such as an assistant principal or leadership staff, or other specialised health and wellbeing staff such as student support services officers. Peer supervision and mentoring provides valuable informal support including professional conversations, feedback, reflective practice and advocacy.

The three core functions of supervision¹ are:

- Administrative: planning, distributing, monitoring and evaluating staff work tasks and performance planning. In other settings, the administrative component of supervision may also be known as the managerial function.
- Educative: ensuring that staff members develop the knowledge and skills required for the role. This aspect of supervision is sometimes referred to as professional or clinical supervision, depending upon the work setting.
- Supportive: assisting staff to maintain positive working relationships and develop the skills to respond to challenges in the work environment.

Where can I obtain further information?

General information about the Primary Welfare Officer Initiative is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/welfareofficers.aspx>.

¹ Kadushin, A. (1992) Supervision in social work. Columbia University Press: New York