



Photo by Cathy Yeuler/Stockxpert

Promoting mental health in schools



Catherine Scott is a Senior Research Fellow in ACER's Teaching, Learning and Leadership research program

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and implemented by Principals Australia. MindMatters uses a whole school approach to mental health promotion based on the principles of the World Health Organization's Global School Health Initiative and the Australian National Health Promoting Schools Framework.

MindMatters aims to:

- embed promotion, prevention and early intervention activities for mental health and wellbeing in Australian secondary schools
- enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful
- develop the social and emotional skills required to meet life's challenges
- help school communities create a climate of positive mental health and wellbeing

- develop strategies to enable a continuum of support for students with additional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing, and
- enable schools to better collaborate with families and the health sector.

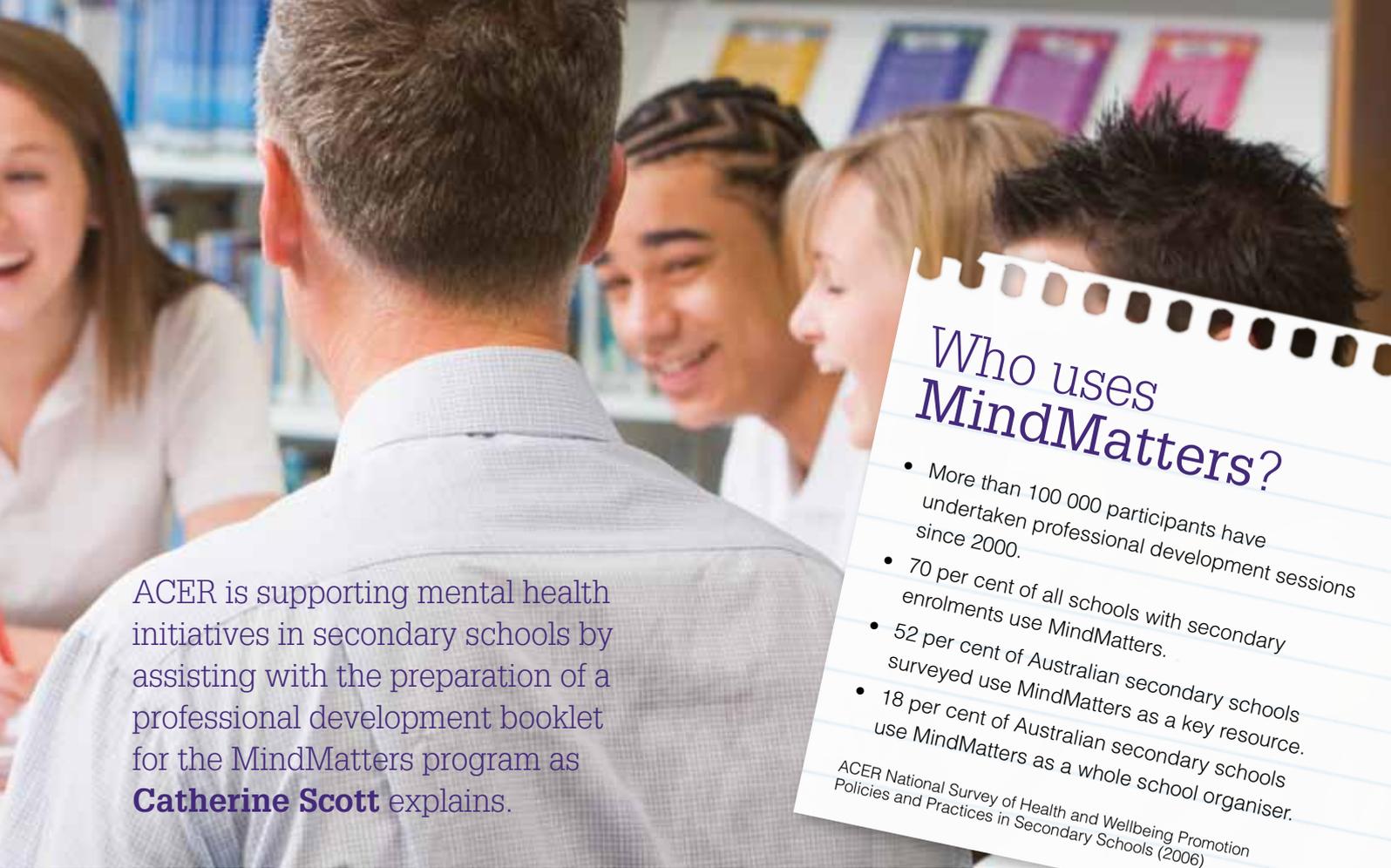
The whole school approach

MindMatters believes that every person who is part of a school community is a teacher for mental health and wellbeing. The actions and behaviours of all school personnel can make a positive contribution.

A whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing ensures that social and emotional learning and mental health are part of every classroom teaching and learning program. Effective classroom practice is essential to promote and protect the mental health and wellbeing of students.

Professional development

MindMatters offers professional development that explains and



ACER is supporting mental health initiatives in secondary schools by assisting with the preparation of a professional development booklet for the MindMatters program as **Catherine Scott** explains.

Who uses MindMatters?

- More than 100 000 participants have undertaken professional development sessions since 2000.
- 70 per cent of all schools with secondary enrolments use MindMatters.
- 52 per cent of Australian secondary schools surveyed use MindMatters as a key resource.
- 18 per cent of Australian secondary schools use MindMatters as a whole school organiser.

ACER National Survey of Health and Wellbeing Promotion Policies and Practices in Secondary Schools (2006)

explores the implementation of the whole school approach to mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention.

Over 18 months to three years, schools can become recognised as MindMatters schools. This involves two-day introductory workshops and planning workshops, followed by more detailed focus modules. The following focus modules are available as part of the MindMatters professional development program: leadership, staff matters, student empowerment, communities do matter, students experiencing high support needs in mental health, the whole student approach, teaching and learning for engagement, measuring progress and transitions.

Teaching and learning for engagement focus module

ACER staff are contributing to the production of the teaching and learning for engagement focus module. This module highlights the link between mental health and student

learning outcomes. It explores a range of methodologies designed to create positive relationships and safe environments to engage students in learning.

Teachers and curriculum learning area leaders will plan mental health curriculum content and pedagogy that expresses the MindMatters whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. Adolescent brain development, current pedagogies and reflective practices for teachers will also be examined.

The teaching and learning for engagement module covers areas such as beginning teaching, teaching social and emotional learning and changes in the role of teachers, teacher leadership, professional judgement, measuring good teaching and learning, reflective practice and teaching as a career.

As an example, the section about beginning teaching discusses how the majority of people who decide to become teachers do so for mainly

altruistic reasons. Teachers' work in response to these motivations needs to be nurtured and supported, especially when teachers are at the earliest stages of their profession. However, research has identified that the main issues that concern beginning teachers include lack of preparation for the realities of the classroom, high workloads, excessive paperwork, class sizes, bureaucratic demands and lack of peer/mentor support. Beginning teachers require support for, not impediments to, their deeply felt intrinsic desire to help young people learn. Continuing neglect of these issues is proving costly in terms of money wasted in high teacher attrition rates, but nobody really knows how costly it is in terms of preventable damage to the mental health of teachers and students, and the consequent failure of many students to learn.

Further information about the MindMatters program is available from www.mindmatters.edu.au ■