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## POSITIVE EDUCATION AT KNOX GRAMMAR SCHOOL, WAHROONGA, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

*“Great young boys growing into great men of integrity, compassion, wisdom and faith; where we honour our past and build our future.”*

### BACKGROUND

Founded in 1924, Knox Grammar School is a Uniting Church school for boys located in Wahroonga, Sydney, Australia.

Knox provides learning opportunities for more than 2,400 students from Kindergarten through to Year 12 across separate Preparatory and Senior School campuses.

Our school values are Faith, Wisdom, Integrity and Compassion.

We are a community which values its traditions while embracing new technologies, ideas and opportunities.

### POSITIVE EDUCATION – PHASE 1

In 2009, the Knox Grammar School School Council and school community went through a process of self-reflection. After an extensive search of pastoral care models lead by Headmaster John Weeks, Positive Psychology was selected as an evidence-based framework to underpin all aspects of school life.

Positive Education is a strand of Positive Psychology which aims to proactively increase mental fitness and wellbeing of school students and staff. It plays a crucial preventative role in reducing depression, anxiety and stress within the school environment.

Positive Education closely mirrors the purpose of Knox, as articulated by our founding Headmaster Neil MacNeil’s vision of ‘creating and living the purposeful life’.

In early 2010, Knox began the process of understanding what Positive Psychology is and how it might benefit students, staff and the wider school community. Knox engaged the

[Positive Psychology Institute](#), to consult and collaborate on creating a sustainable Knox Positive Education culture that:



- 1) Is underpinned by the Knox values;
- 2) Is aligned to and supports the Knox mission and vision;
- 3) Increases/supports student academic performance;
- 4) Increases student and staff mental fitness (decreases student and staff psychological distress and mental illness);
- 5) Enhances wellbeing of students, staff and the school community;
- 6) Assists students, staff and the whole school to live “the purposeful life”;
- 7) Creates a positive school culture and climate at Knox Grammar enriching and enabling positive relationships at all levels within the school community. For example, teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, student-to-student, mentor-to-parent;
- 8) Utilise coaching to create opportunities for solution-focused and strengths-based conversations that provide committed and caring feedback for the personal and professional growth of the individual;
- 9) Encourages Knox staff and students to learn, embed and live the principles of Positive Education.

## MEASUREMENT:

Knox realised the importance of a measurement strategy as part of any effective change program. A “**Measurement Matrix**” was created in conjunction with the University of Wollongong with a research timeline commencing in October 2010 (baseline measure) and continuing each year.

As a first step, and in the spirit of a positive approach to change across the whole school community, Appreciative Inquiry was adopted as a process to commence the process of positive change. All interviews were conducted in qualitative and quantitative formats with staff and online data was collected from students and parents.

Overall, the data collected from staff, parents and students suggested the need for changes in Pastoral Care including the need to:

- Define Pastoral Care in a way the students and parents can engage with.
- Clearly articulating the benefits for students by creating meaningful content within the Pastoral Care Program.
- The need for change to the structure and timing of the program.
- The need for training and development

Based on the results, a new mentor system is now in place:

- Every student has an individual mentor who has received expert training in Positive Psychology;
- The mentor helps students to identify their strengths and set academic and personal goals;
- All staff, including sports coaches, receive expert training in Positive Psychology;
- Positive Psychology is implemented into all aspects of school life, for example, in the classroom and in sport, the boarding house, music, drama, debating and cadets.

The Mentor relationship has been central to our Positive Education journey. Our Mentors, who are Knox teachers who have received specialist training in Positive Psychology, provide pastoral care and support to a group of about 20 students.

The Mentors stay with the same students throughout their schooling at Knox, overseeing the overall wellbeing and mental fitness of each student in their care. This structure allows parents to form meaningful, long-term relationships with their son's mentor, their key contact at the school.

A team of School Psychologists also provide expert support and care to students who have this need.

### **OUTCOMES:**

- Vastly improved pastoral care, mental health and wellbeing programs;
- Positive school culture and climate, enriching and enabling positive relationships at all levels within the school community;
- Optimal functioning of students and staff with a 'solution focus';
- Students and staff expressing knowledge of their signature strengths and working to use these strengths;
- Improved working environment for staff, resulting in improved academic outcomes for students.

## **POSITIVE EDUCATION - PHASE 2 – KNOX TOTAL FITNESS**

As part of the current Knox Grammar strategic plan, it was crucial that Knox continue to adopt a dedicated strategy to build on the positive foundations already in place. Therefore, the Knox Grammar School team reached out to the students regarding their opinions of the program. What they discovered was that there was a problem with language used throughout the school. Words such as 'positivity' and 'wellbeing' were dismissed by students as 'psychobabble' and difficult to relate to.

The team decided they needed a more relatable way for the students to participate in the program that had an evidence base. The team opted for a physical fitness analogy to engage the all male student body based on Dr Paula Robinson's PhD research of the 'Mental Fitness' model. Dr Robinson devised her fitness approach to health and wellbeing out of a need for a more proactive, preventative and holistic approach to mental health. Dr Robinson has found that the term 'Mental Fitness' reduces the stigma associated with talking about mental health and develops and encourages regular psychological exercises to develop habits for sustainability (a similar approach to physical fitness).

Utilising Mental Fitness as a foundation, the Knox Team created its own Positive Education Model known as the Knox Total Fitness Model and rolled this out to the school in 2014. The Total Fitness model includes both explicit and implicit approaches to support academic performance and increase mental fitness with the goal of significantly increasing wellbeing for all stakeholders.



## THE FOUR PILLARS OF KNOX TOTAL FITNESS

- **Social Fitness:** *Nurturing each student's ability to develop strong relationships and develop attitudes to enhance their emotional wellbeing.*
- **Academic Fitness:** *Supporting each student's readiness and preparedness to be a passionate and effective learner.*
- **Spiritual Fitness:** *Providing each boy with opportunities to have a meaning and purpose in life, and an internal value system that informs how he lives and the decisions that he makes.*
- **Physical Fitness:** *Enabling each boy to perform to his potential, allowing him to look, feel and do his best.*

Knox Grammar School's Positive Education journey continues to grow and flourish under the banner of Knox Total Fitness. Below are examples of more recent initiatives:

- Updating of the design and delivery of the one day Positive Education Induction Program for new staff;
- Presented at the 5th World Congress on Positive Psychology (Florida);
- Presented at the 7th European Conference on Positive Psychology (Amsterdam) Presenting at the International Applied Psychology Conference (Paris);
- Keynote and Workshop Presentations for two years at Positive Schools National Conference (Australia wide and Singapore);
- Publication of numerous conference papers, articles and interviews;
- Initiated further links with industry experts; e.g., Professor Michael Bernard;

- Forming a partnership with Macquarie University to assess, design and deliver a PhD on Staff Wellbeing to inform best practice recruitment, retention and promotion;
- The successful design and delivery of the Practising Positive Education Conference now moving into its 3<sup>rd</sup> year (2016)
- Delivering training for the wider education community;
- Designing and delivering the Certificate in Positive Education;
- Acceptance of workshop presentations in 2016 at the 8<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Positive Psychology (Angers, France) and The International Positive Education Network Inaugural Conference (Dallas, Texas).

## TOTAL FITNESS COMMITTEE

Given this commitment and the introduction of a new model of Total Fitness, Knox recently formed a Total Fitness Committee. The Total Fitness Committee oversees the strategy, design, delivery and measurement of the Knox Total Fitness model. The Committee receive all internal and external requests/ideas relating to Positive Education and work as a team to reflect and decide what does/does not fit with the overall strategy and objectives.

This Committee comprises of Knox leaders, staff, students, parents, Dr Paula Robinson, community members and a selection of national and international expert advisors. This Phase 2 initiative will ensure:

- Self determination;
- Sustainability;
- An ongoing and rigorous evidence base;
- Best practice;
- Transparency;
- A collaborative approach;
- Regular communication to all stakeholders;
- Scope and sequence mapping across the whole school community;
- Sharing and partnering with other educational institutions.

The Committee will continue to guide Knox Grammar School in preparing students for their future by improving and promoting wellbeing. Knox Grammar looks forward to continuing the journey of Positive Education.

For more information about Positive Education at Knox Grammar School, contact Mr Scott James, Deputy Headmaster, [james@knox.nsw.edu.au](mailto:james@knox.nsw.edu.au) or +61 2 9487 0119.