

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Supported Students, Successful Students

Evaluation of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services – final report

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

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Executive summary

Reform background

In 2015, the NSW Department of Education (the department) introduced the Supported Students, Successful Students (SSSS) funding package. A key initiative within this package was the commitment of \$51.5 million to Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services for the period 2016 to 2018. This funding enabled 381 schools to purchase wellbeing services specific to their school's varying needs. The funding allocation methodology took into consideration multiple indicators of need and the core school counselling service allocation.

Evaluation

This evaluation addresses the following eight questions:

1. What are the specific ways in which Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services has been spent by schools?
2. How has Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spending varied across schools?
3. Why did schools spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on particular services or activities?
4. Are schools satisfied with how they spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
5. Do schools intend to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on the same services and activities in the future?
6. Do schools believe the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services they received is sufficient to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities?
7. What are schools' perceptions about the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing?
8. What is the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing and engagement as measured via the department's *Tell Them From Me* survey?

Methodology

We conducted a survey and follow up in-depth interviews at two points in time to gather school perspectives and information on 2017 and 2018 expenditure. We invited principals (or a delegate) of all schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to complete the surveys and we achieved response rates of 61% and 48% in rounds 1 and 2 respectively. We completed 20 follow up interviews in total. Finally we developed statistical models to measure the mean (average) change over time in student wellbeing measures captured in the department's *Tell Them From Me* student survey (TTFM), comparing Flexible Funding and non-Flexible Funding schools.

Findings

What are the specific ways in which Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services has been spent by schools?

Schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on up to eight separate services or resources. The two most popular were whole of school wellbeing programs (40%) and employing a Student Support Officer (SSO, 37%). Other popular options were targeted wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support (35%), professional learning in wellbeing approaches (34%) and employing wellbeing executive/staff (32%). Schools used the funds for new services or resources, or for topping up existing ones, or a mix of both.

Schools had difficulty identifying the specific amounts of funding spent on services, but larger amounts were generally spent on employing staff members. In addition to their Flexible Funding, nine in ten schools (88%) also allocated some of their Resource Allocation Model (RAM) funding to support student wellbeing.

Approximately 1% of schools pooled their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services with other schools. More schools would be interested to do this if they knew which other schools had received funding.

How has Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spending varied across schools?

We compared spending patterns across school type, school size, school location and the Flexible Funding eligibility categories. There are many commonalities in spending patterns across these sub-groups, but a few key differences are noted below.

On average, primary schools spread their funds across more services than did secondary schools and were more likely to choose professional learning in wellbeing approaches.

We found that schools with less than 850 students were more likely than schools with 850+ students to spend their funds on employing an SSO and on professional learning in wellbeing approaches.

Of the three broad funding eligibility categories, schools in the '1.0 full time equivalent (FTE) counselling allocation' category and the 'high targeted needs' category more commonly employed wellbeing executive/staff than did schools in the 'unique profile' category.

Why did schools spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on particular services or activities?

We consistently heard in interviews that schools made decisions about how to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services according to their student profile and the additional needs of specific sub-groups of students.

Schools that spent their funds on employing staff members did so to access specialist support or to extend the effective support provided by existing staff members. Schools that employed an SSO wanted to continue to employ, or top-up the funding of, an existing SSO. Schools that funded whole school wellbeing programs did so to support the social and emotional aspects of student wellbeing. Schools that selected professional learning highlighted a desire to build staff capacity in implementing whole of school wellbeing initiatives.

Decisions about expenditure almost always involved the principal and school executive and more often than not included learning and wellbeing staff. Roughly one in four schools involved parents in the decision-making process. A small number of interviewees also described consulting students via focus groups, surveys and/or interviews.

Are schools satisfied with how they spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?

Schools are typically very satisfied that the services they invested in met the wellbeing needs of students as intended. Satisfaction levels were particularly high in relation to employing a wellbeing staff member.

Do schools intend to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on the same services/activities in the future?

Half of the schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services changed the way they spent their funding from 2017 to 2018. The two most common reasons were to meet the changing or emerging needs of a specific sub-group of students, or to shift focus to whole school needs. The decision processes described in interviews indicated that the changes were well considered.

While satisfaction levels are high, schools want the option to adapt their services to meet the needs of the student population as priorities change over time.

Do schools believe the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services they received is sufficient to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities?

Schools believe that Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services, combined with other funding, allows them to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities. They also strongly support the flexible nature of the funding. However, schools also identify additional appropriate services they would like to fund.

Beyond funding, schools would like additional information to enhance their provision of appropriate services. In particular they seek information on evidence-based wellbeing programs, a list of wellbeing providers, and examples of successful initiatives used in other schools. Schools also seek ongoing access to expert-led professional learning and mental health support.

What are schools' perceptions about the impact of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing?

The large majority of schools perceived the services they had funded to have improved student wellbeing at a whole school level. Perceived improvements to wellbeing were generally greatest when a staff member had been employed. We heard in interviews that staff judged the impacts on wellbeing via multiple data sources and indicators, such as increased attendance and engagement, reduced behaviour referrals and/or suspensions and increased numbers of students seeking support. Staff also emphasised the influence of student wellbeing on staff wellbeing and vice versa.

Schools reported even stronger positive impacts on the wellbeing of student sub-groups that were specifically targeted for particular types of support. Interviewees most commonly described impacts of increased access to support for students with specific needs, and improvements in students' self-esteem and confidence in the classroom.

What is the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing and engagement as measured via the *Tell Them From Me* survey?

Our outcome analyses found no meaningful differences between Flexible Funding and non-Flexible Funding schools in the mean (average) change over time in self-reported student wellbeing measures captured in the TTFM survey. However, we identify a number of limitations that make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups.

Limitations

Our survey response rates were 61% and 48% for rounds 1 and 2 respectively. The latter is lower than we would like, but not unexpected given it took place in Term 4 and was the second survey round of the year. We applied survey weights to minimise potential biases introduced by minor differences in the school characteristics of survey participants and the total population of schools that received funding.

Our outcome analyses are limited by: having to use whole school measures of wellbeing when many schools used their funds for targeted initiatives; not being able to control for existing wellbeing activities and initiatives; the Flexible Funding amount representing a small proportion of a school's investment in wellbeing initiatives; not being able to tailor outcome measures according to specific services funded, and the opt-in nature of the TTFM survey.

Conclusion and future considerations

The department invested \$51.5 million in Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services over the period 2016 to 2018. The funding was distributed to 381 schools, averaging approximately \$45,000 per school per calendar year. Consistent with the flexible nature of the initiative, schools spent their funding in many different ways depending on their circumstances. Many also changed how they spent their funds over time. Principals are strongly supportive of the Flexible Funding concept, are highly satisfied with their funded services, and report positive impacts on student wellbeing. Our in-depth interviews indicate that spending has been well considered, enabling schools to provide effective support that has been tailored to the specific needs of their student population at that time, while taking into account existing supports available.

Our outcome analyses found no meaningful difference between Flexible Funding schools and non-Flexible Funding schools in changes to whole school student wellbeing measures captured via the student TTFM survey. However, we identify a number of limitations that make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups. In particular, only 40% of schools used the funding for whole school wellbeing initiatives, and we cannot isolate TTFM results for the subgroups of students that received targeted support.

If this funding initiative continues, thought could be given to providing schools with a set of more specifically defined or recommended options with a strong evidence base from which to choose. This would retain the flexibility that schools find so valuable, while providing them with additional support in their decision-making. Schools would also welcome information on evidence-based wellbeing initiatives, third party providers and examples of successful initiatives in other schools. Other considerations are whether to set more specific reporting requirements on expenditure and whether to encourage schools to pool their funding. These issues are discussed in more detail in the final chapter of the report.

With regard to measuring impact we note that flexible initiatives are less suited to impact evaluation than are initiatives with set features. This is because it is harder to identify specific outcomes that are suited to all circumstances and because there is less opportunity for controlling for external variables. To improve our ability to measure the impacts of a flexible initiative of this nature, we could collect detailed information regarding existing wellbeing activities and initiatives, given sufficient lead time prior to the distribution of funds. Also, having a single formula for identifying schools that are eligible for funding would provide better options for an analysis approach, as we could then establish a rank order and cut-off point for eligibility.

1. Introduction

Supported Students, Successful Students funding package

In 2015, the NSW Department of Education (the department) introduced the Supported Students, Successful Students (SSSS) funding package, which commits \$167 million over four years to counselling and wellbeing services as part of the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA)¹. SSSS aims to support schools to promote student character and wellbeing, help create safer school environments, counter inappropriate behaviours, and more effectively engage with vulnerable students. New resources under the initiative include:

- \$80.7 million to employ an extra 236 full-time equivalent (FTE) school counsellors and/or school psychologists.
- \$51.5 million of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services equivalent to an additional 200 Student Support Officers (SSOs).
- \$15 million to support schools to implement a comprehensive and inclusive whole school approach to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) – funding that will employ an additional 36 PBL executive positions including 4 deputy principal PBL positions and 32 PBL coach mentors.
- \$8 million to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.
- \$4 million to support refugee students and their families.
- \$8 million for graduate scholarships to boost the recruitment of staff for the school counselling service (SCS).

SSSS is complemented by the Wellbeing Framework for Schools², which articulates how the department will support and improve student wellbeing through the interconnected themes of Connect, Succeed and Thrive.

SSSS extends the range of services and initiatives that the department provides to support wellbeing in schools, such as Learning and Wellbeing Coordinators, Liaison Officers, Student Wellbeing Support Officers, Schools as Community Centres projects, the National School Chaplaincy Program and Healthy Canteens.

The Learning and Wellbeing Directorate (Learning and Wellbeing) has responsibility for administering initiatives funded through SSSS.

SSSS funding for Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services

The SSSS initiative committed \$51.5 million to Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services for the period 2016 to 2018. These funds were allocated to 381 targeted schools to enable them to purchase additional wellbeing services depending on their specific needs³. Targeted schools received the same amount of funding each year.

Learning and Wellbeing sent a letter in Term 4 2015 to principals of the 381 targeted schools, advising them of the school's Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services allocation (and the school's core school counselling allocation), for the period 2016 to 2018. The letter outlined a range of services that could be funded, including employment of additional Student Support Officers⁴ (SSOs), school counselling staff, teachers to support wellbeing, or community liaison officers. The funds could also be used to support the capacity of teachers to meet the wellbeing needs of their students (for example, to implement PBL, MindMatters, KidsMatter) or to engage external providers to deliver wellbeing services.

The letter also noted that the school plan should reflect the way in which funds are to be spent, and that accountability for expenditure of the funds occurs through the annual report.

¹ For details on the NERA, see: http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/national_agreements/past/national-education-agreement.pdf

² For details on the Wellbeing Framework, see: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/student-wellbeing/whole-school-approach/wellbeing-framework-for-schools>

³ The funds are included in the new Resource Allocation Model (RAM).

⁴ SSOs work in partnership with the learning and support team and the school counselling service to implement interventions and collaborate with external agencies to enhance student wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services allocation methodology

Learning and Wellbeing established a stakeholder advisory committee to oversee the development of a methodology to allocate Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to a wide range of schools with varying needs. The methodology resulted in 381 schools receiving funds ranging from \$33,067 to \$82,667 per year from 2016 to 2018 inclusive.

The methodology comprised three categories of eligibility:

1. Schools that would have received a core school counselling allocation greater than 1.0 FTE (2016-2018), had the allocation not been capped⁵.
2. Schools with unique profiles including residential schools, larger schools for students with emotional and behavioural disorders, and a small number of academically selective schools.
3. Schools with high need according to four indicators: the number of students who are refugees, the number of students in out-of-home care, number of contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit, and relatively low Resource Allocation Model (RAM) funding.

The Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services allocation methodology included 50 schools that had previously received funding for an SSO.

⁵ The 2016-2018 SCS allocation methodology took into consideration enrolment, disadvantage, remoteness and students impacted by disability and additional learning and support needs. It set a minimum allocation of 0.05 FTE and a maximum allocation of 1 FTE (for schools with enrolments of 850 or more).

2. Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services evaluation

Learning and Wellbeing invited the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) to evaluate elements of the SSSS funding package. CESE developed the evaluation scope collaboratively with Learning and Wellbeing.

This evaluation focuses on Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. There are concurrent evaluations taking place of Positive Behaviour for Learning, the expansion to the school counselling service and the Refugee Student Counselling Support Team.

Evaluation questions

The primary aims of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services evaluation are to:

- understand how the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services has been spent by schools and how the spending has varied across schools
- describe the reasons schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on particular services or activities.

Specifically, the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services evaluation addresses the following questions:

1. What are the specific ways in which Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services has been spent by schools?
2. How has Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spending varied across schools?
3. Why did schools spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on particular services or activities?
4. Are schools satisfied with how they spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
5. Do schools intend to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on the same services and activities in the future?
6. Do schools believe the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services they received is sufficient to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities?
7. What are schools' perceptions about the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing?
8. What is the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing and engagement as measured via the department's *Tell Them From Me* survey?

Method

We collected data through surveys and interviews to answer the first seven evaluation questions. To answer the last question we analysed the department's *Tell Them From Me* student survey that provides information about student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices in NSW public schools.

Surveys

We distributed two surveys (refer to Appendix A) to the principals of all 381 schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services.

- **Survey about 2017 expenditure.** In Term 1 2018, we invited principals (or a designated staff member) from all 381 schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to complete a survey about how they spent their 2017 funding. The survey examined which types of services they funded, the amounts spent on those services, their satisfaction with the services and the perceived impacts on student wellbeing.

- **Survey about 2018 expenditure.** In Term 4 2018, we invited principals (or a designated staff member) from all 381 schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to complete a survey about how they spent their 2018 funds. We modified the survey by removing questions about dollar amounts spent on specific services (which respondents had difficulty answering), and adding questions about who was involved in deciding how to spend funds, whether schools spent funds differently over time, and whether schools pooled their funding with other school(s).

Survey response rates

To maximise survey response rates we sent two reminder emails and held the surveys open for three weeks. We designed the survey to take five to ten minutes to complete and communicated this clearly in the invitation.

- **Survey about 2017 expenditure.** We received responses from 232 schools⁶, a response rate of 61%.
- **Survey about 2018 expenditure.** We received responses from 184 schools⁷, a response rate of 48%.

Characteristics of survey sample

Table 1 presents the school type, school location and Flexible Funding eligibility category for the population of Flexible Funding (FF) schools, as well as the two survey samples. The majority of survey respondents were from secondary schools and were located in major cities.

Table 1:

School type and location of survey respondents

	Population of schools receiving FF	Respondents to survey about 2017 expenditure	Respondents to survey about 2018 expenditure
School type			
Primary (N = 1,592)	149 (39%)	86 (37%)	68 (37%)
Secondary (N = 399)	206 (54%)	126 (54%)	103 (56%)
Central (N = 67)	8 (2%)	7 (3%)	4 (2%)
School for Specific Purposes (SSP; N = 115)	19 (5%)	13 (6%)	9 (5%)
School location			
Major cities (N = 1,207)	261 (68%)	152 (66%)	115 (63%)
Inner regional (N = 592)	91 (24%)	63 (27%)	53 (29%)
Outer regional (N = 352)	25 (7%)	14 (6%)	14 (8%)
Remote & very remote (N = 52)	5 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)
School eligibility category			
Schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation ⁸	140 (37%)	95 (41%)	77 (42%)
Schools with unique profiles ⁹	30 (8%)	17 (7%)	14 (8%)
Schools with targeted high needs ¹⁰	212 (55%)	120 (52%)	93 (51%)

Representativeness of the survey sample

We examined whether schools that responded to survey rounds 1 and 2 were representative of the population of schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. To do this, we ran a logistic regression analysis using survey participation as the binary outcome variable, and key school characteristics as predictive variables (Flexible Funding eligibility category, school type, FOEI, total enrolments, mean NAPLAN, and school income).

⁶ 256 schools started the survey but only 232 responded beyond the first question.

⁷ 194 schools started the survey but only 184 responded beyond the first question.

⁸ Schools that would have received a SCS allocation greater than 1.0 FTE (2016-2018), had the allocation not been capped.

⁹ Schools with unique profiles (including residential schools, larger special schools for students with emotional and behavioural disorders, and a small number of academically selective schools).

¹⁰ Schools with high need according to four indicators: the number of students who are refugees, the number of students in out-of-home care, number of contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit, and relatively low RAM funding.

For both the round 1 and round 2 surveys, schools in the first eligibility category (schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation) were more likely to participate in the survey than schools in the targeted high needs eligibility category. Additionally, for the round 2 survey, schools in major cities were less likely to participate than schools in inner regional areas. Consequently, we calculated and applied probability weights (the inverse of each school's predicted probability of responding) to both the round 1 and 2 surveys so that the survey samples were more closely aligned to the population of Flexible Funding schools.

Refer to Appendix B for further technical details.

Interviews

We conducted 20 follow-up interviews across the two surveys that explored in depth how schools used their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services, the reasoning behind their decisions, and their experiences and perceptions of impacts on student wellbeing.

To select schools for interview regarding 2017 funding expenditure we identified the sub-sample of schools from our survey that had agreed to be recontacted for an interview. We then stratified this sample according to school type and location type and randomly selected 48 schools from these categories. We checked that this reflected a good mix of types of services funded and then invited these schools to interview by email. We made two follow up attempts.

To select schools for interview regarding 2018 funding expenditure we followed the same process as above. In addition we purposively invited five schools that provided negative survey ratings of the initiative as well as eight schools that had previously received funding for an SSO. In total we invited 36 schools to an interview.

Our final interview sample included:

- 14 schools (6 primary, 7 secondary; 1 SSP) represented by 13 principals and 1 learning and support team co-ordinator – regarding 2017 expenditure
- 6 schools (5 primary, 1 secondary) represented by 5 principals and 1 assistant principal – regarding 2018 expenditure.

We analysed interview transcripts with NVivo 11 software to identify common themes.

Analysis of *Tell Them From Me* survey data

We examined six subscales of the department's *Tell Them From Me* (TTFM) student survey that provides information about student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices in NSW public schools. We developed statistical models to measure the mean (average) change over time (pre Flexible Funding compared to post Flexible Funding) in student wellbeing measures captured in the department's TTFM student survey, comparing schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services with schools that did not. Refer to Chapter 10 and Appendix D for full technical details of the methodology¹¹.

¹¹ We also considered examining attendance and suspensions data as proxy measures of student wellbeing, but we did not proceed with this analysis given that many of the initiatives funded by schools did not specifically address issues with attendance or suspensions.

3. What are the specific ways in which Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services has been spent by schools?

Schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on up to eight separate services or resources

Schools were given the flexibility to use their funding for a range of different types of services, resources or initiatives that would support student wellbeing. They also had the option of investing all of their funds into one type of service or into multiple types of services.

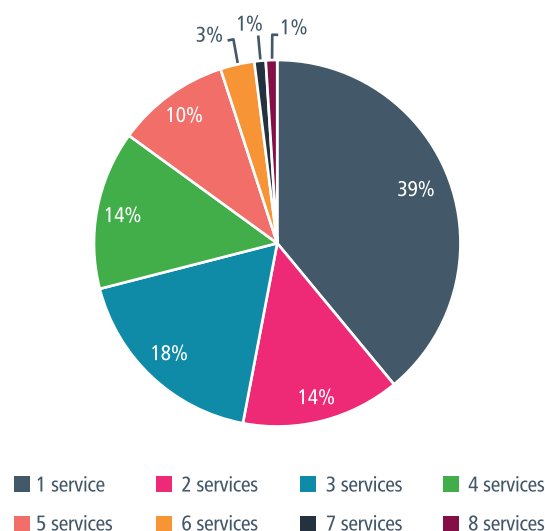
In our survey we presented respondents with a list of types of wellbeing services or resources and asked them to indicate which of these they had invested their funds in. In Figure 1 below we show the number of different types of services or resources on which schools spent their 2018 funding. This number ranged from one through to eight different types of services, with the majority (61%) spending their funds on two or more different types of services. Specifically, 39% of schools spent their funds on a single type of service or item, 14% on two different types of services, 18% on three different types, 14% on four different types and 10% of five different types. Small numbers of schools also spent their funds on six (3%), seven (1%) and even eight (1%) different types of services.

Results from the 2017 survey show a similarly dispersed pattern of expenditure and are presented in Appendix C.

Figure 1:

Number of separate services on which schools spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services

Weighted proportion of 2018 FF expenditure



Note. These weighted proportions are based on 183 respondents.

The two most popular uses of funds were for whole of school wellbeing programs and employing an SSO

As noted above, schools were given the flexibility to spend their funds on one or more different types of services or resources. In our survey we asked respondents to indicate the services or resources on which they spent their funding. Figure 2 shows the proportion of schools that spent their 2018 Flexible Funding (or part of their funding) on particular types of services and resources.

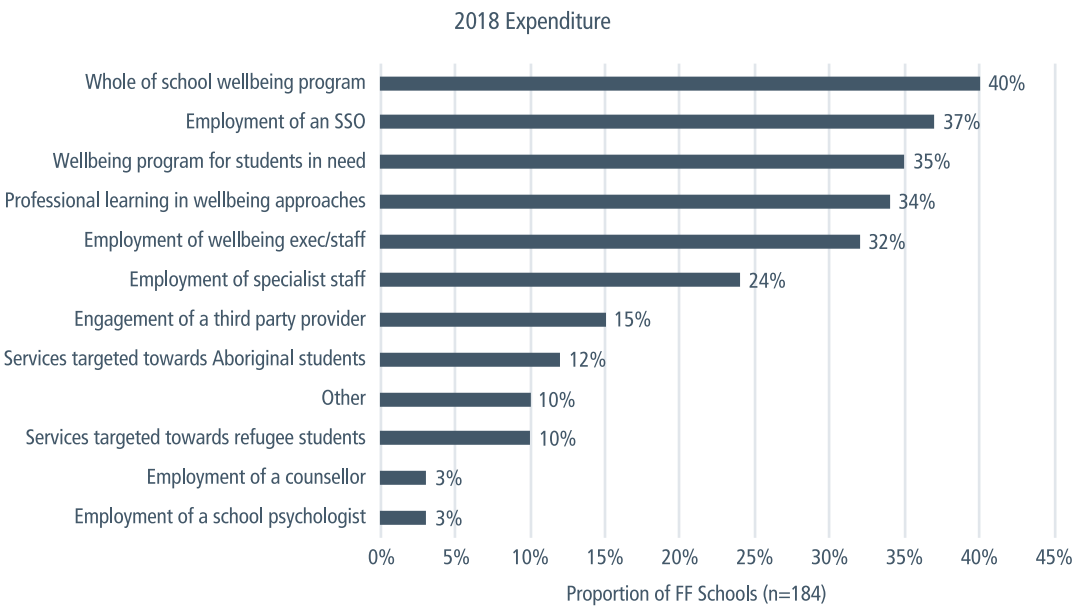
Four in ten schools (40%) used their funding for a whole of school wellbeing program, and nearly this many spent their funds on employing an SSO¹² (37%). Other popular uses were targeted wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support (35%), professional learning in wellbeing approaches (34%) and employing wellbeing executive/staff (32%).

Only 3% of schools used these funds to employ a school counsellor or a school psychologist. This probably reflects the shortage of school counselling staff during this time due to the extensive concurrent recruitment activity that was taking place as part of the expansion to the school counselling service.

Results from the 2017 survey tell a consistent story and are provided at Appendix C.

Figure 2:

How schools spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note 1. This base size is unweighted.

Note 2. The response options in the survey have been truncated in this and later figures in the report. The exact wording of these options in the survey is: 'Whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches', 'Employment of an SSO', 'Wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support', 'Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., PBL)', 'Employment of wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff', 'Employment of other specialist student support staff (e.g., Community Liaison officer)', 'Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s)', 'Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students', 'Services targeted specifically towards refugee students', 'employment of a school counsellor', 'employment of a school psychologist'.

¹² SSOs (Student Support Officers) work in partnership with the learning and support team and the school counselling service to implement interventions and collaborate with external agencies to enhance student wellbeing and academic outcomes. They provide both whole-of-school wellbeing initiatives and targeted strengths-based supports for students requiring personalised assistance.

Table 2:

Examples of wellbeing services and activities

To supplement our survey data we conducted follow-up interviews with schools to learn more about the ways in which they had spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. We provide further details and examples of different services in Table 2.

Wellbeing service/activity	Examples
Whole of school wellbeing programs	Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL), KidsMatter, Bounce Back.
Employment of an SSO	- To continue employment of an existing SSO. - To top up the funding of an existing SSO to extend their hours.
Wellbeing programs for students who need additional support	Rock and Water, Life Skills, programs for disengaged students, specialised mentoring programs, and leadership camps for Aboriginal students.
Employment of wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff	- Wellbeing mentors who worked with students in areas such as nutrition, social skills, attendance, and friendships. - Welfare teachers who worked with classroom teachers and executive staff to support students with emotional or social needs, follow up behavioural issues with students, liaise with family members and, with permission, refer families to local agencies for support. - Head Teachers Wellbeing who coordinated the school's wellbeing program and/or supported students in need. - A stage five deputy principal who implemented programs to prevent disengagement and programs to re-engage students in Year 9. - Teaching staff who supported individual students and their families, and implemented intervention programs for particular groups (for example, social skills for students having difficulties with friendships). - Community engagement/liaison officers. - English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EALD) teachers.
Other specialist support staff	- Community Liaison Officers who established community connections, provided wellbeing support for students and their families, and built cultural understanding. - Occupational therapists who observed and identified students with additional needs, provided strategies and resources to classroom teachers, and liaised with external providers for more intensive case management. - Youth workers who supported the re-engagement of students, particularly those who had been suspended. - Student Learning and Wellbeing Support Officers who implemented whole school wellbeing initiatives, aimed to improve student resilience and established greater connections with the community.
Engagement of a third party provider	- Speech therapists who provided speech assessment services. - The Life Skills Group who provided services targeting mindfulness and resilience. - Stymie online anti-bullying program. - PCYC and Relationships Australia who provided family referral services. - A wellbeing hub that included 22 different service providers. - A functional behaviour analyst.
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	- Student Learning and Support Officers (SLSOs) - Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs). - Programs that targeted Aboriginal language skills, student engagement and cultural appreciation.
Other services	- Casual teaching relief for the learning and support team. - Wellbeing teaching resources including playground resources. - Payment for staff to allow the Library to remain open for an additional six hours per week, along with teachers to support students with homework and assignments.
Services targeted towards refugee students	- Engagement activities for students and parents (for example, networking events and new arrivals programs). - Language support (for example, employment of EAL/D teachers).

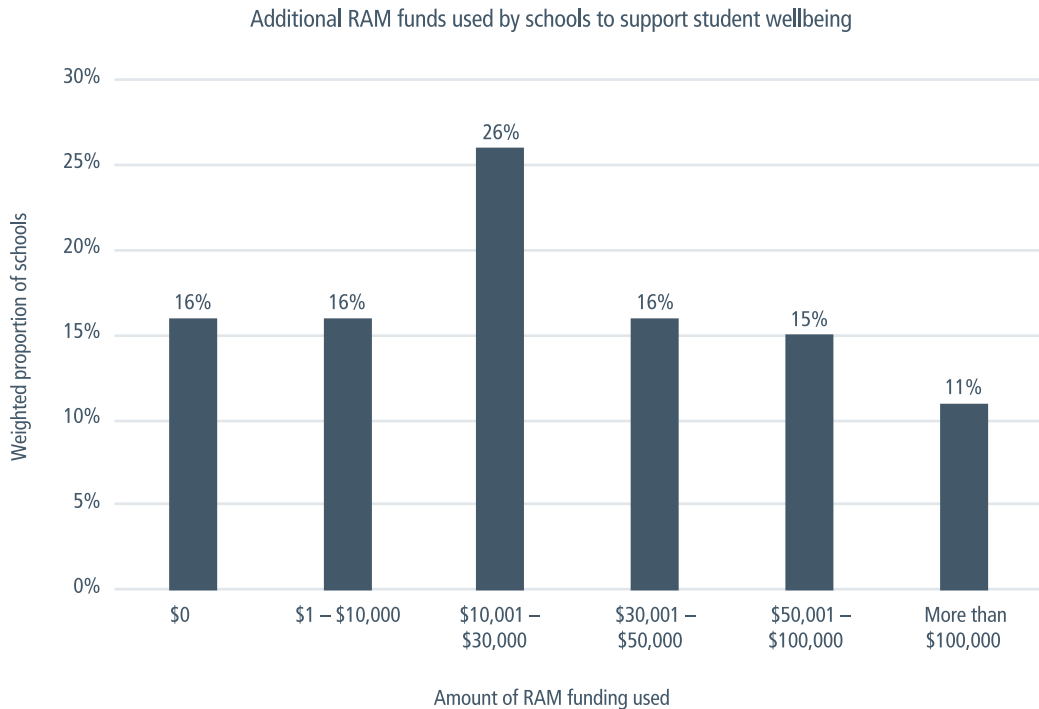
School camps targeted towards Aboriginal student wellbeing

A regional high school used a portion of their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to fund a girls camp and a boys camp for Aboriginal students. The camps were collaboratively run by the school’s Aboriginal teachers, School Learning and Support Officers, and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. These camps gave Aboriginal students the opportunity to participate in traditional Aboriginal practices in an environment that aligned to the positive psychology framework implemented within the school.

The great majority of schools allocated additional RAM funding to further support student wellbeing

In the 2017 survey, we asked respondents whether their school had allocated any additional funds from their RAM to support student wellbeing, and the large majority (88%; weighted n = 273)¹³ reported that they had done so. The specific amounts reported ranged from \$1,576 to \$600,000, with half of the schools allocating less than \$30,000. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of additional RAM funding that schools used to support wellbeing.

Figure 3:
Additional RAM
funds used by schools
to support student
wellbeing



Note. These weighted proportions are based on 167 respondents.

13 This is based on a weighted total of 311 respondents who answered this question.

We learned from interviews that schools used additional RAM funding to supplement the salary of specialist support staff, fund professional learning for staff, fund third party programs, provide equal access for disadvantaged students, and provide a more diverse range of elective subjects.

“It was to make sure she’s [specialist support staff] here three days because we were \$8,000 short for the year.” (Primary school principal)

“We spend a lot of money on funding our students to make sure every student feels that they are connected. I was on playground duty this morning and I saw a student who had a tear in her uniform and I said, “Guess what? We’ve got some samples and if you go up to the office you can get a new sample uniform.” It isn’t really a sample uniform, it’s a new uniform ... and ongoing funds to make sure students will get to go on incursions, participate in the excursions and swimming and whatever ... It all comes into their wellbeing so they don’t miss out.” (Primary school principal)

Schools did not pool their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services with other schools

In the 2018 survey we asked respondents whether they had pooled their funding with another school, and just 1% of schools indicated they had done so. Interview feedback suggests that many schools were unaware that pooling funding was an option, and unaware which other schools had received the funding.

“I don’t even know which other schools have it. So it’s a bit hard to know who to pool with if you don’t know who’s got it... So in philosophical terms, yes I’d be more than happy to, but I don’t know who they are. I can’t do that. But yes I’d be open to considering that.” (Primary school principal)

Some interviewees explained they did not pool the funding because they wanted to prioritise their own school and the wellbeing needs of their own students.

“Not for that bucket, no. And mainly because we’ve got enough to do here.” (Primary school principal)

We did, however, hear examples of schools that had shared the wellbeing resources they had invested in with their partner primary schools.

“We did share our resource with the primary schools to see if we could get that whole middle school approach and if we could get a K to 12 approach happening.” (Secondary school principal)

Schools had difficulty identifying specific amounts of funding spent on services, but it seems they spent the largest amounts on employing staff

In the 2017 survey, we asked respondents how much of their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services the school spent on each individual item. It appeared that many schools had difficulty extracting accurate figures. In many instances, the sum of the reported expenditure on individual services differed substantially from the amount of Flexible Funding the school had been given. For these reasons we chose not to include questions about specific funding amounts in the 2018 survey.

We excluded data from analysis that was clearly incorrect but we were unable to verify the accuracy of the remaining data as it is not captured centrally. With these caveats in mind, Table 3 provides the mean reported expenditure on specific services. It is important to note that expenditure is influenced by the number of different services that schools funded, and by the amount of funds allocated to individual schools.

Schools reported spending a larger amount (on average) when employing a staff member compared to other types of services or activities. The amount was greatest when employing a school counsellor (\$65,102), followed by a school psychologist (\$43,228), specialist student support staff member (\$34,758) and wellbeing executive or teaching staff member (\$30,659). It is worth noting that only five schools entered amounts for employment of a school counsellor and six schools entered amounts for employment of a school psychologist.

Table 3:

Average 2017
expenditure on specific
wellbeing services or
activities

Wellbeing service or activity	Mean expenditure (weighted) (for schools that provided an amount)
Employment of a counsellor (n=5)	\$65,102
Employment of a school psychologist (n=6)	\$43,228
Employment of specialist support staff (n=95)	\$34,758
Employment of wellbeing exec/teaching staff (n=71)	\$30,659
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students (n=16)	\$30,140
Other (n=17)	\$14,380
Engagement of a third party provider (n=33)	\$13,131
Wellbeing program for students in need (n=55)	\$12,036
Whole of school wellbeing program (n=67)	\$11,139
Services targeted towards refugee students (n=9)	\$9,698
Professional learning in wellbeing approaches (n=62)	\$7,018

The great majority of schools reported having reflected their Flexible Funding expenditure in their school plan and annual report

In the 2018 survey, we asked if Flexible Funding expenditure was reflected in the annual report and school plan. Almost all survey respondents (94%) said they had included their expenditure in the annual report. The great majority (86%) also reflected their spending intentions in the school plan. We note that schools may not be reflecting their expenditure in the school plan if wellbeing is not identified as one of the school's three focus areas.

Schools may need further guidance in how to reflect their Flexible Funding expenditure. We spot checked the annual reports of 10 randomly selected schools that said they had reflected their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services expenditure in their annual report. Of these 10 schools, five directly referenced their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services, although three of these reported amounts that were larger than the funds received. This suggests that some schools may have difficulty extracting accurate figures from their systems. The remaining five schools did not make explicit reference to Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services although four of them reported allocating funding to wellbeing related activities.

4. How has Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spending varied across schools?

This section examines differences in the way schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services according to school type, school size, geographic location and Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services eligibility category.

The categories are as follows:

- school type: primary, secondary, central, Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs)
- school size: enrolments of up to 850 enrolments, more than 850 enrolments¹⁴
- school geographic location: major cities, regional and remote areas (using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure from the Australian Bureau of Statistics)¹⁵
- Flexible Funding eligibility category: schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation¹⁶, schools with unique profiles¹⁷ and schools with targeted high needs¹⁸.

Primary schools spread their funds across more services than secondary schools and were more likely to choose professional learning

Figure 4 compares the services/items that primary and secondary schools funded in 2018. Information on spending amongst SSPs and central schools is presented separately because of the small sample sizes.

Primary and secondary schools differed in how they spent their funds. For example, professional learning was the most commonly funded type of service among primary schools but the fifth most common among secondary schools.

On average, primary schools split their funds between three services ($M = 3.04$, $SE = 0.22$), whereas secondary schools did so between two ($M = 2.28$, $SE = 0.16$). Consistent with a more dispersed pattern of spending, primary schools funded the following types of services more commonly than secondary schools:

- professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (50% vs 22%)
- targeted wellbeing approaches for students who need additional support (42% vs 32%)
- employment of a specialist staff member who was not an SSO (31% vs 20%)
- services targeted towards refugee students (18% vs 6%)
- employment of a counsellor (6% vs 1%).

Spending in 2017 followed a similar pattern so these results are provided in Appendix C.

¹⁴ We segmented schools at $n=850$ students because 850 was a feature of the first eligibility category for Flexible Funding.

¹⁵ The five groups within this structure are Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia. Due to small sample sizes, we merged the latter four groups into a single category called Regional and Remote Areas.

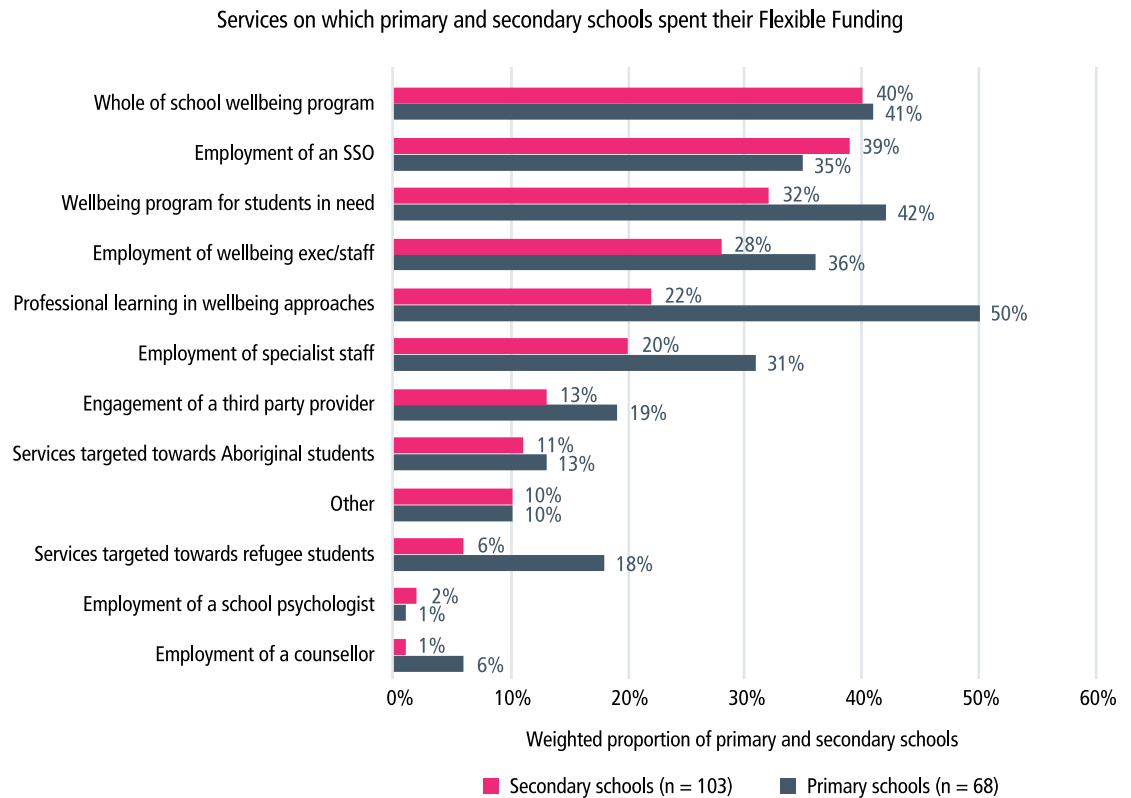
¹⁶ Schools that would have received a SCS allocation greater than 1.0 FTE (2016–2018), had the allocation not been capped. This was typically schools larger than $n=850$ students.

¹⁷ Schools with unique profiles (including residential schools, larger special schools for students with emotional and behavioural disorders, and a small number of academically selective schools).

¹⁸ Schools with high need according to four indicators: the number of students who are refugees, the number of students in out-of-home care, number of contacts with the Child Wellbeing Unit, and relatively low RAM funding.

Figure 4:

Services on which primary and secondary schools spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Schools for specific purposes most commonly spent funds on employing an SSO, while none of the four central schools did so

There are nine SSPs and four central schools in the 2018 survey sample. We present their responses separately to the primary and secondary school responses because of the small sample sizes.

As shown in Figure 5, SSPs most commonly used their funds for:

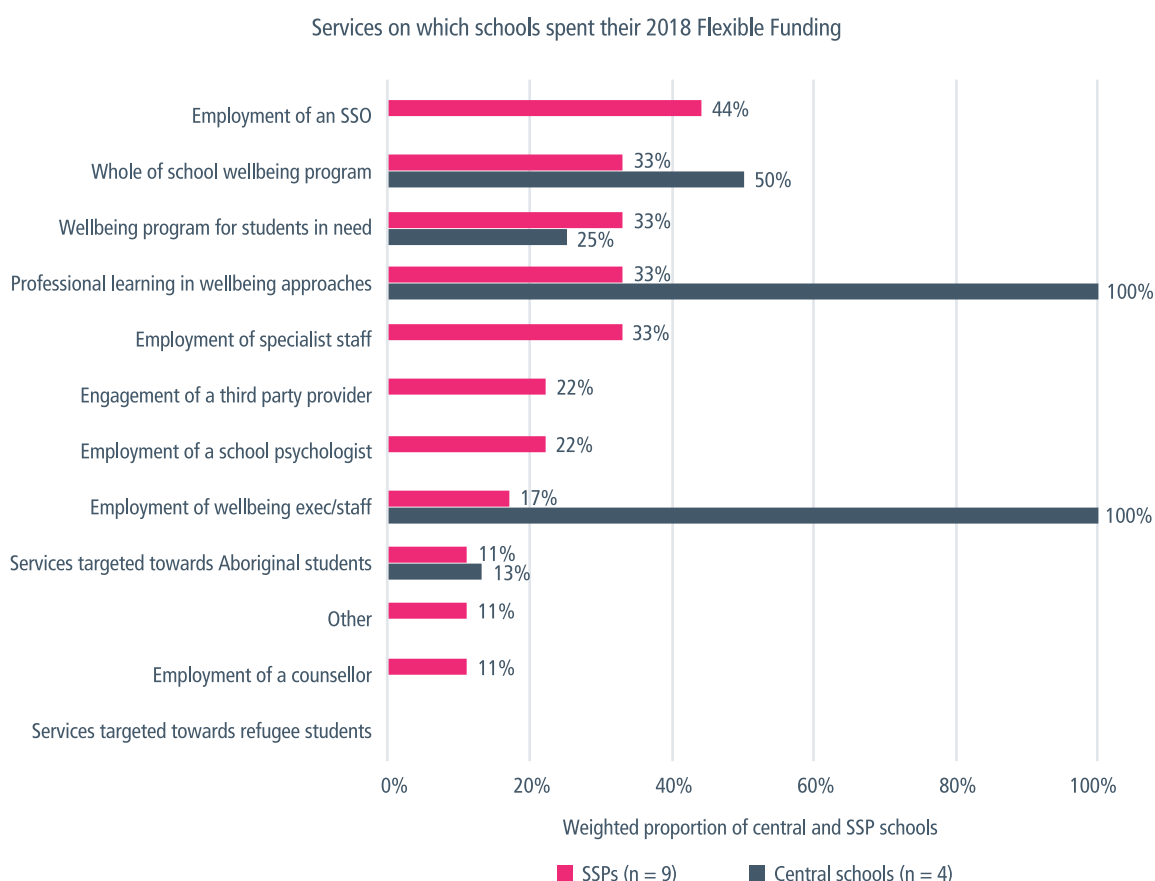
- employment of an SSO (44%)
- a whole of school wellbeing program (33%)
- wellbeing programs for students who need additional support (33%)
- employment of specialist staff (33%)
- professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (33%).

All four central schools spent funds on professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches and employing wellbeing executive/staff, and two out of four spent funds on a whole of school wellbeing program. None used their funds to employ an SSO (see Figure 5).

The results for 2017 are provided in Appendix C.

Figure 5:

Services on which central schools and SSPs spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Schools with less than 850 students were more likely than schools with 850+ students to spend funds on employing an SSO and on professional learning in wellbeing approaches

Figure 6 shows the 2018 expenditure patterns of schools with up to 850 enrolments and schools with enrolments of 850 and more. Key differences are that schools with less than 850 students more commonly spent their funds on:

- employment of an SSO (40% vs 29%)
- professional learning in wellbeing approaches (38% vs 27%)
- services targeted towards refugee students (13% vs 4%).

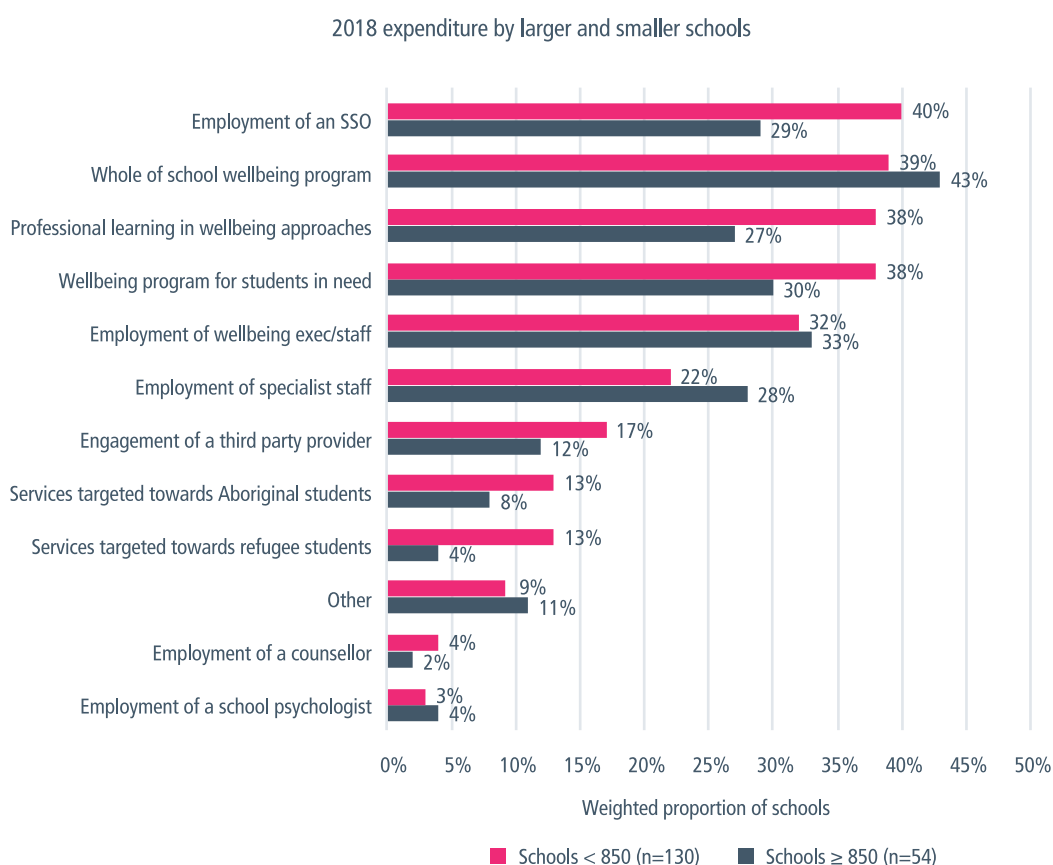
In 2017 the pattern was slightly different.

- There were no meaningful differences in the proportion of schools with less than 850 students and schools with 850+ students that spent funds on services targeted towards refugee students (5% vs 7%).
- Schools with less than 850 students more commonly used funds to engage a third party provider than schools with 850+ students (21% vs 8%).

The 2017 survey did not itemise employment of an SSO so this item cannot be directly compared. Refer to Appendix C for further details on 2017 results.

Figure 6:

2018 expenditure of Flexible Funding by schools with less than 850 students and schools with 850+ students



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

One of the contributing factors to decisions to employ an SSO was previous departmental funding. In 2015, 50 schools received departmental funding for an SSO. In 2016 this funding was superseded by Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services which was allocated to a larger number of schools. This meant a decrease in funding for 44 of the 50 schools that had previously received SSO funding. Of these 44, 23 participated in our Flexible Funding survey about 2018 expenditure and 14 indicated they had used their Flexible Funding to employ an SSO. Of these 14 schools, 12 were schools with less than 850 students whereas only two were schools with 850+ students. This may explain why schools with less than 850 students were more likely to employ an SSO with their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services than schools with more than 850 students.

Schools in major cities more commonly spent their funds on programs targeting Aboriginal students and refugee students, compared to schools in regional and rural locations

There are many similarities in the ways that schools in major cities and schools in regional and remote locations spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services (refer to Figure 7). However, two differences are that schools in major cities were more likely to spend their funds on wellbeing programs targeted towards:

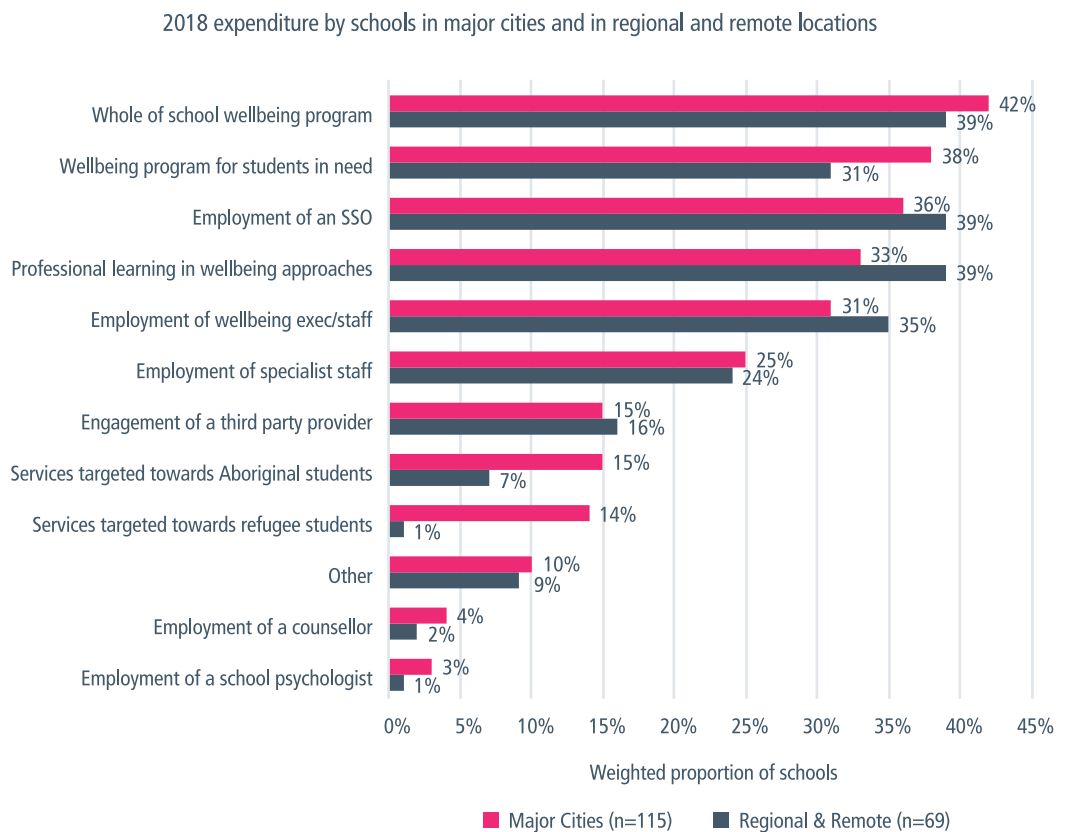
- Aboriginal students (15% compared to 7%)
- refugee students (14% compared to 1%).

In 2017 it was also the case that schools in major cities more commonly spent their funds on wellbeing programs targeted towards refugee students (8% compared to 0%). However, unlike 2018, there was no meaningful difference in the proportion of funds spent on programs targeting Aboriginal students (9% vs 8%).

In this instance, results are particularly dependent on individual school populations and existing programs that are in place – and which schools participated in the survey.

Figure 7:

2018 expenditure of Flexible Funding by schools in major cities and in other locations



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' and the 'high targeted needs' eligibility categories more commonly employed wellbeing executive/staff than did schools in the 'unique profiles' category

Figure 8 shows that popular choices for schools in all three funding eligibility categories were whole of school wellbeing programs, professional learning and employment of an SSO.

A key difference in spending, however, was that schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' and 'high targeted needs' categories more commonly employed wellbeing executive/staff than schools in the 'unique profiles' category. Other differences include:

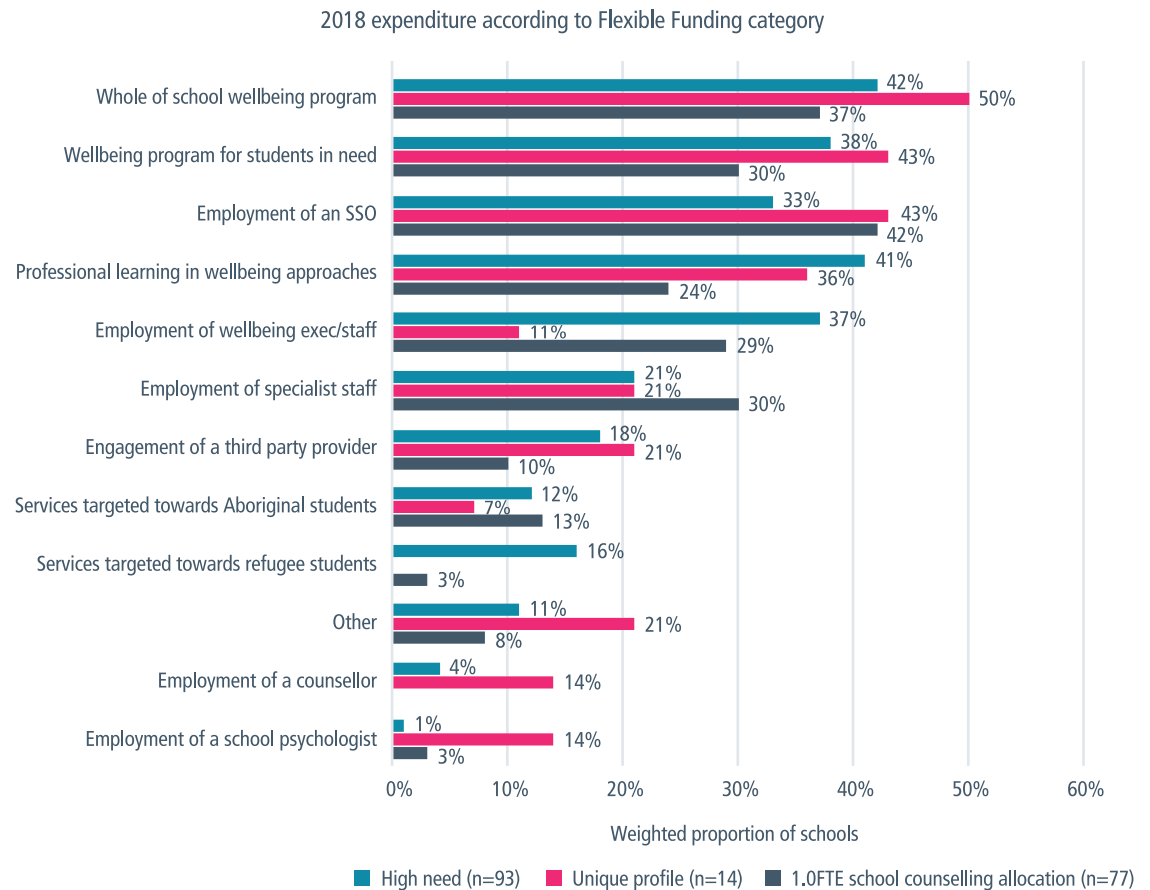
- Schools in the 'high targeted needs' category more commonly chose professional learning than schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' category (41% compared to 24%).
- Schools in the 'unique profiles' category more commonly chose whole of school wellbeing programs than schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' category (50% compared to 37%).
- Schools in the 'unique profiles' category more commonly chose wellbeing programs for students who need additional support than did schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' category (43% compared to 30%).

In 2017, the pattern of expenditure was slightly different:

- Schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' category more commonly employed specialist staff (62%) than schools in the 'high targeted needs' (44%) and 'unique profiles' (31%) categories.
- Schools in the 'unique profiles' category more commonly chose whole school wellbeing programs (62%) than schools in the 'high targeted needs' (38%) and schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' (35%) categories.

More details about the results for 2017 are provided in Appendix C.

Figure 8:
2018 expenditure of Flexible Funding by schools in each Flexible Funding category

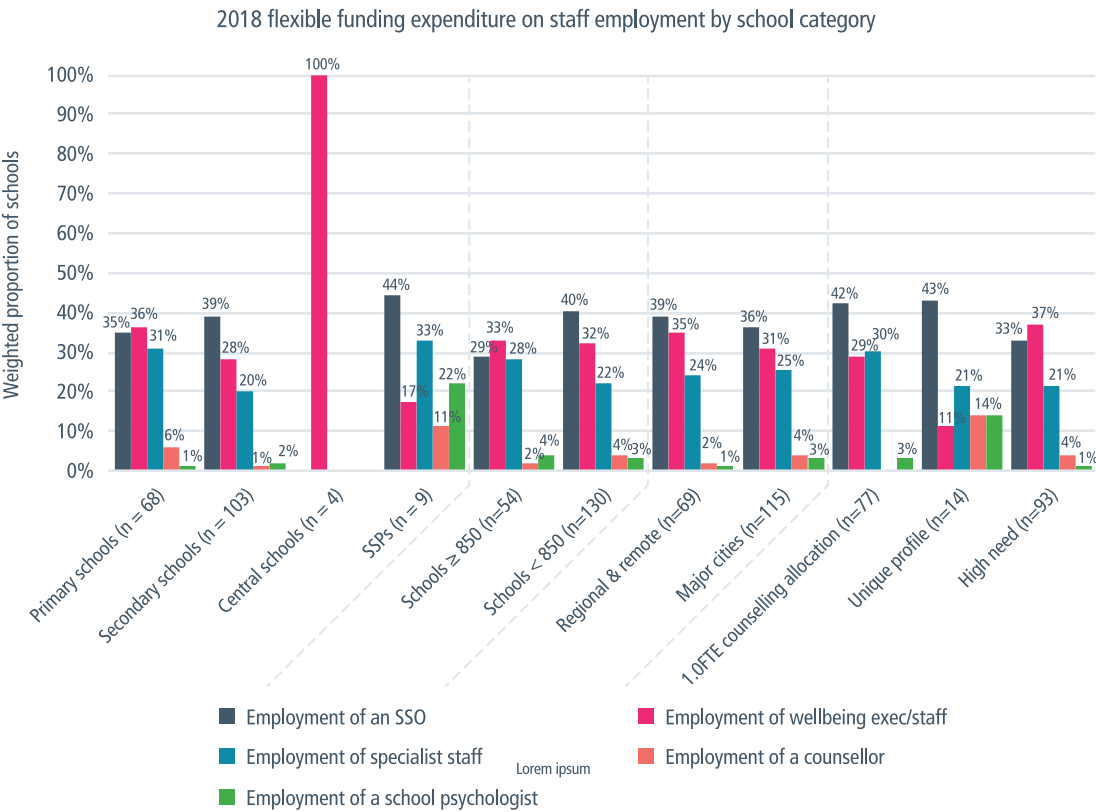


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Similar proportions of schools across different school categories chose to spend funds on additional staff to support student wellbeing

Similar proportions of schools across different school categories allocated funds to the employment of staff to support student wellbeing in 2018. Proportions were typically highest for the employment of SSOs, followed by wellbeing executive/staff and specialist staff. Following a slightly different pattern to the other school categories, each of the four central schools in our sample employed wellbeing executive/staff. Chapter 5 explores reasons why schools spent their funds on particular services or initiatives. The results regarding 2017 expenditure are provided in Appendix C.

Figure 9:
Proportion of schools
expending 2018 flexible
funding on staff
employment – by school
category



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The large majority of schools used additional RAM funding to support student wellbeing, regardless of type, location, size and funding category

We consistently found across all school types, sizes, locations and Flexible Funding eligibility categories that the large majority of schools used additional RAM funding in 2017 to support student wellbeing. Proportions ranged from 80% to 90%, with the exception of 75% of schools in the ‘unique profiles’ eligibility category and 100% of the six central schools. Refer to Appendix C for further details.

5. Why did schools spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on particular services or activities?

Schools made decisions about particular wellbeing services according to their student profile and the additional needs of specific student sub-groups

During interviews we asked school representatives to explain why they chose to fund particular services. Their feedback indicates that decisions were based primarily on the student profile and the additional needs of specific student groups at the school. For example, a school with a student population that was primarily from a non-English speaking background chose to spend their Flexible Funding on a community liaison officer. The principal explained:

“Engaging with the community has been a really big thing, because many of our community don't have extended family in Australia because they've migrated, and so the school becomes the community...Parents would go to her [community liaison officer] when they didn't want to come to me ... Not that they didn't want to come to us, but it's out of respect, cultural respect sometimes ... and she was just terrific. And then my deputy and community liaison officer did a great community mentor program...when there's an enrolment, they will match up a new family with someone from the school community who will be that welcoming person.” [Primary school principal]

A collaborative approach to supporting disengaged students

One secondary school principal described a targeted wellbeing program that they had developed collaboratively with an external provider. The program was aimed at a sub-group of students who were thought to be at risk of not completing school.

“We've also created an additional program that's in connection with Southern Cross Business Education for at risk students and they – we actually hire a small facility off campus for up to 12 kids in year 9 and 10 that are at risk of falling out of school to provide a completely different learning and working environment to what the mainstream school setting is.... And Southern Cross Business Education, because it's a joint venture, they actually supply the teacher.”

The principal indicated that this program, which is based on a non-authoritarian structure, was highly successful and had led to a substantial increase in student engagement.

The student wellbeing officer at a primary school explained that their school had used their Flexible Funding to employ a youth worker who specialised in supporting students who had been exposed to trauma.

“They’ve seen so much trauma in their lives, and we saw a need that an SLSO really couldn’t give. We needed someone that was going to specialise in knowing how to help these little trauma or traumatised children, and how to relate to them, and [name of youth worker] is that person that can do that.” [Primary school principal]

In another example a school chose to fund two wellbeing programs that were targeted at specific subgroups of at-risk students, specifically a mentoring group for Aboriginal girls and services from an out of home care agency for students in foster care.

Schools that spent their funds on employing staff members did so to access specialist support or to extend the effective support provided by existing staff members

Among schools that used their Flexible Funding to employ staff, interviewees explained that their main reasons for doing so included:

- To top-up funding of wellbeing support positions where staff were perceived as having a positive impact – to enable them to spend more time at the school.
- To employ specialist staff who support whole of school wellbeing and the wellbeing of specific sub-groups.

For example, one primary school principal noted that they used their Flexible Funding to increase the time that the school counsellor could be at the school:

“One of the things that we’ve spent significant funds on is employing our school counsellor for additional days ... what that’s allowed us to do is to assess children in a more timely manner and then for him to be able to write the corresponding reports and to triage those kids into follow up services.” [Primary school principal]

Another primary school principal commented that they used their funds to hire a speech therapist to assist K-2 students with their communication:

“She came in one day a fortnight for the last I guess two years. She targeted our Kindergartens, Year 1s and Year 2 students whose communication skills were very low, or for a couple of students practically non-existent ... and now we’ve seen that their academic progress has clearly improved because they’re able read or they’re able to write, or they’re able to speak, or able to join in discussions, able to ask questions if they didn’t understand anything.” [Primary school principal]

One principal of a secondary school described their need for an additional EAL/D teacher:

“We’ve employed an additional EAL/D teacher, so whilst we have a small number of students, we only get about eighteen thousand in the SBAR to support six or eight EAL/D students, we’ve been able to increase that so there’s really targeted support for EAL/D students. So the teacher meets with them every Wednesday at lunch and then she goes in to classrooms and supports them.” [Secondary school principal]

Men's Shed to support student behaviours

A primary school partnered with a local Men's Shed to set up a workshop in the school hall for boys with behavioural issues. The primary school allocated a portion of their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to fund a staff member to supervise the Men's Shed sessions. The boys attended the Men's Shed for two hours a week for four weeks, during which time the men worked with the boys to build a personalised toolbox. Since introducing the Men's Shed, school staff have noted that they are able to spend more time on the curriculum and less time on classroom behaviour management, and the number of playground incidents reported per week has dramatically reduced.

Schools that employed an SSO wanted to continue to employ, or top-up the funding of, an existing SSO

Interviewees that used their Flexible Funding to employ an SSO, typically reported doing so in order to continue to employ, or top up the funding of, an existing SSO. In some cases this was linked to the funding changes that took place in 2016 when Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services superseded funding for an SSO that 50 schools had received in 2015.

"We were one of the schools to be given a student support officer...Then that funding was ceased, and we decided as a school to continue that over through our wellbeing funding." [Secondary school principal]

Schools that funded whole school wellbeing programs did so to support social and emotional aspects of student wellbeing

In interviews with representatives of schools that had used their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to implement whole of school wellbeing programs, interviewees explained that they had selected programs that focused on social and emotional aspects of student wellbeing.

"A lot of those 21st century skills that we want kids to have, like collaboration and responding to social challenges and what resilience looks like, how you practice being resilient, how can you use humour to get you through dark times, how you can cultivate optimism, explicitly learning about emotions and relationships, explicitly learning about what bullying is, and what you can do about it, so it's a very explicit social and emotional program." [Primary school principal]

The wellbeing programs that interviewees mentioned most frequently were PBL, Bounce Back, and Kids Matter. When deciding which programs to implement, some school staff highlighted the importance of a strong evidence-base.

"We did a whole school implementation of an evidence based wellbeing program – Bounce Back ... and as I said, it is evidence based program and it does cover core learning and strategies around those social and emotional or non-cognitive skills." [Primary school principal]

"Basically all of these programs are all presented as professional programs. They are data driven. They are evaluated ... Attendance rates are higher. The connection is higher. The participation in the programs that are being run for the students is higher whilst at the same time meeting their class requirements." [Secondary school principal]

Sometimes schools had used their own data and evaluation activity to determine which programs to implement.

“We actually had three teachers go to Sydney to do the Bounce Back training...every class got a manual to make sure the program was implemented in a reliable way... We actually had the committee look at a number of programs and evaluate about three or four programs ... They just saw the ‘Bounce Back’ program was perhaps the one that would suit [school name] better than the other ones they evaluated.” [Primary school principal]

Schools that selected professional learning highlighted a desire to build staff capacity in implementing whole of school wellbeing initiatives

During interviews, the majority of schools that spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on professional learning described wanting to build staff capacity in whole of school wellbeing initiatives. For some schools this meant training teachers in a wellbeing program that was new to the school and for others, this meant follow-up training for an initiative that was already in place within their school context.

“The long-term view I've had of wellbeing is building capacity in staff ... my view is professional learning needs to be across the whole school. So Kids Matter wasn't just the opt-in who wanted to do it. It was everybody. We were all doing it.” [Primary school principal]

“We had two staff trained as ‘Kids Matter’ facilitators and they came and ran a few of the staff meetings as well last year and the year before with the lead-up to do the groundwork to reproduce the program to develop the resilience of students and their general health and wellbeing under the department’s thrive and succeed - the wellbeing program.” [Primary school principal]

“When I came into the school it was very strong, the PBL and it’s well established. It was important to continue and just continue to monitor, make changes when needed but continue it. We can’t just think we’re a PBL school now and that’s it... It’s really important that the training is updated so building staff capacity is so important.” [Primary school principal]

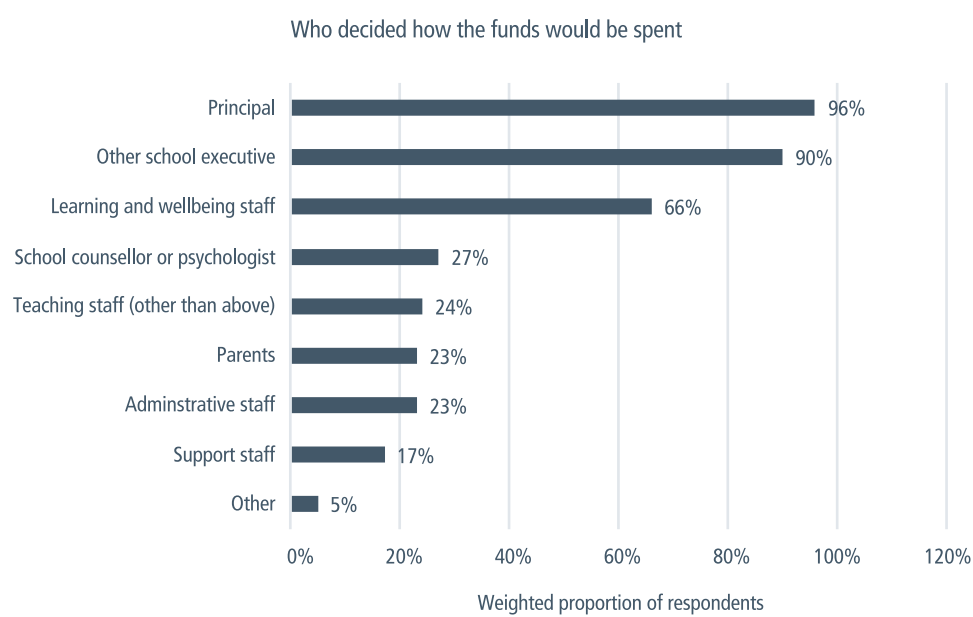
Decisions about expenditure almost always involved the principal and school executive and more often than not involved learning and wellbeing staff

In the 2018 survey, we asked who was involved in deciding how the school’s Flexible Funding would be spent. Figure 10 shows that decisions almost always involved the principal (96%) and other member(s) of the school executive (90%). In two thirds of schools (66%), learning and wellbeing staff were involved in the decision making process, while around one in four schools involved school counselling staff (27%), other teaching staff (24%) and administrative staff (23%). Support staff¹⁹ were less commonly involved. Nearly one in four schools (23%) also reported involving parents in decisions.

19 We did not define the term “support staff” in the survey instrument and so survey participants may have interpreted this in different ways.

Figure 10

Decision-makers regarding how the funds would be spent



Note. These weighted proportions are based on 184 respondents.

A small subset of interviewees said that they conducted focus groups, surveys and/or interviews with their students to inform their decision-making about how to spend the Flexible Funding. These schools said that this provided them with valuable insight into their students’ wellbeing needs. One school described using data from student interviews in conjunction with school administrative data, TTFM survey data and NAPLAN data to inform decision-making.

“The school executive were involved in that decision ... We also interviewed a large number of students to find out what their backgrounds, their needs were and what their future aspirations were, to get a snapshot of where we’re at. We collected quite a lot of data and we also used baseline data such as attendance, engagement, *Tell Them From Me* survey for example, academics. We looked at academic performance ... and NAPLAN testing. It was quite a rigorous baseline if you like.”
[Secondary school principal]

6. Are schools satisfied with how they spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?

Schools are typically very satisfied with the services they invested in, particularly if they employed a staff member

We asked survey respondents to rate how satisfied they were that each of the services or items they had spent their Flexible Funding on had met the wellbeing needs of students as intended. Figure 11 shows that the great majority of schools were very or somewhat satisfied, and in most instances they were very satisfied. Satisfaction levels were particularly high in relation to employing a staff member. Consistent with these survey responses, high levels of satisfaction were also reported during interviews.

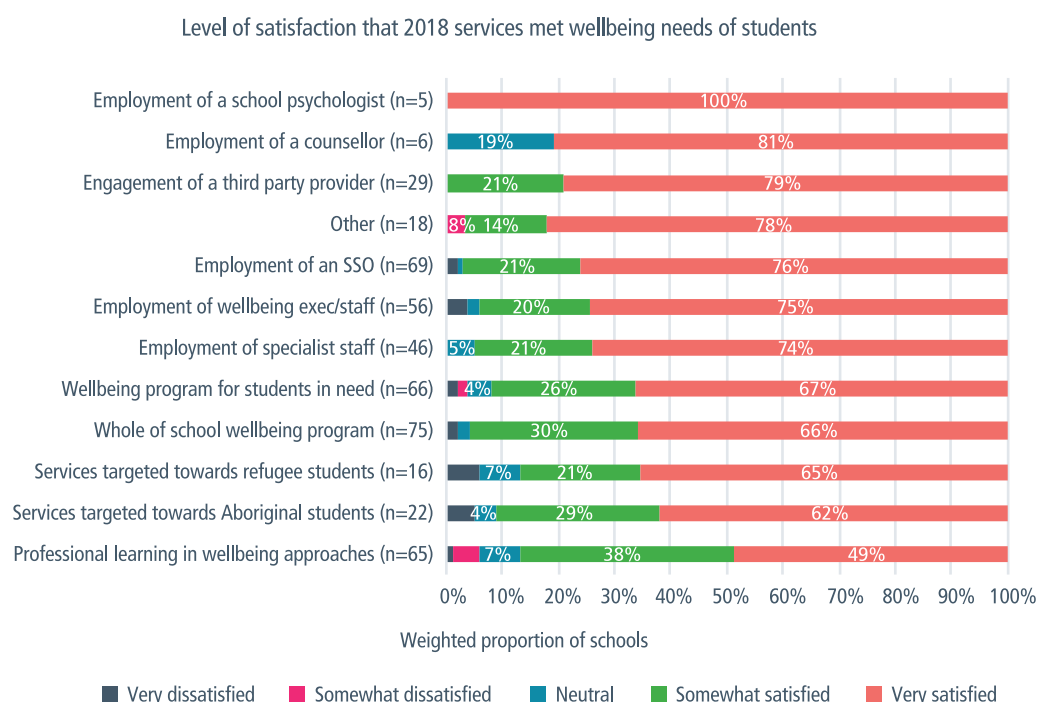
“I’m absolutely delighted, and it’s making a really big difference to our students. And as the program continues .. I can see other needs that need to be met ... I guess it’s that whole idea of continuous improvement, and being able to reprioritise the funds to the programs that have worked. Does that make sense?” [Primary school principal]

“Just having that expertise with the referral process with the different agencies. It’s quite complex because I’m a teacher so that was not something that I was familiar with at all until [name of SSO] starting working with me and we realised that we could look outside our school system and bring other people in ... the student support officer is really crucial. I think that it’s been a huge advantage to the school and the community.” [Secondary school learning and support coordinator]

Compared to other services, fewer schools reported being very satisfied with professional learning in wellbeing approaches. One primary school principal that we interviewed who had selected somewhat satisfied with professional learning in wellbeing approaches, said that she was uncertain about being able to access departmental support for long-term implementation.

Figure 11:

Level of satisfaction that 2018 services met the wellbeing needs of students

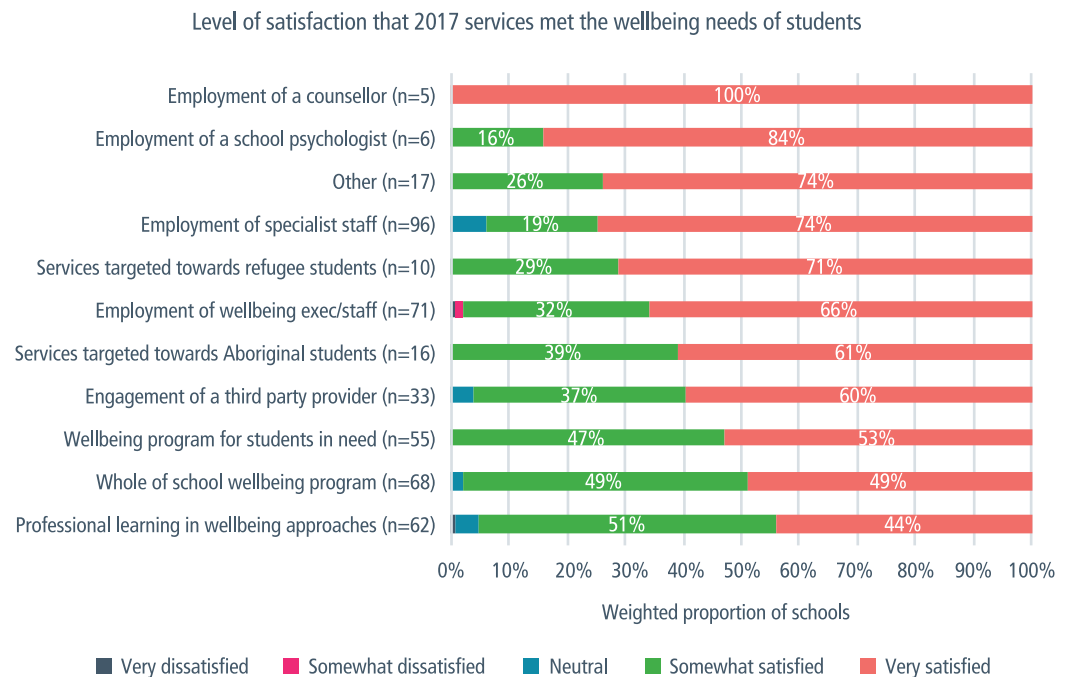


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

In 2017, the great majority of schools were similarly very or somewhat satisfied that the services they used met the wellbeing needs of their students (refer to Figure 12). Schools that invested in a school counsellor and psychologist were particularly satisfied with this service (although only a small number of schools reported doing this). Results in 2018 are marginally more polarising than 2017, with more ratings of very satisfied and more ratings of dissatisfied.

Figure 12:

Level of satisfaction that 2017 services met the wellbeing needs of students



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

7. Do schools intend to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on the same services and activities in the future?

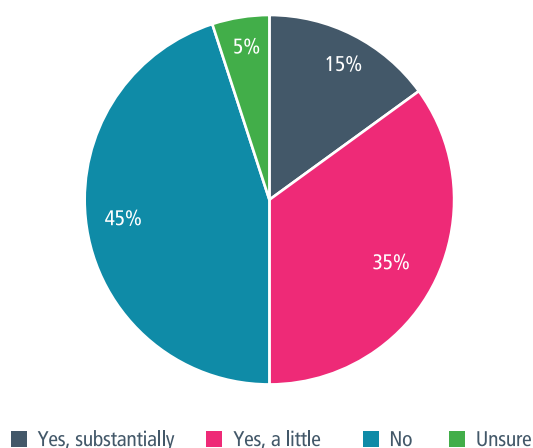
Half of the schools that received Flexible Funding changed the way they spent the funding in 2018, compared to 2017. Changes appear to have been well-considered.

Half of our survey respondents indicated that they had changed the way they spent their Flexible Funding in 2018, compared to 2017 (see Figure 13). This is made up of 15% of schools that reported changing spending substantially and 35% of schools that reported changing spending a little.

Figure 13:

Proportion of schools that changed the way they spent their Flexible Funding in 2018, compared to 2017

Proportion of schools that changed the way they spent their flexible funding in 2018, compared to 2017



Note. These weighted proportions are based on 183 respondents.

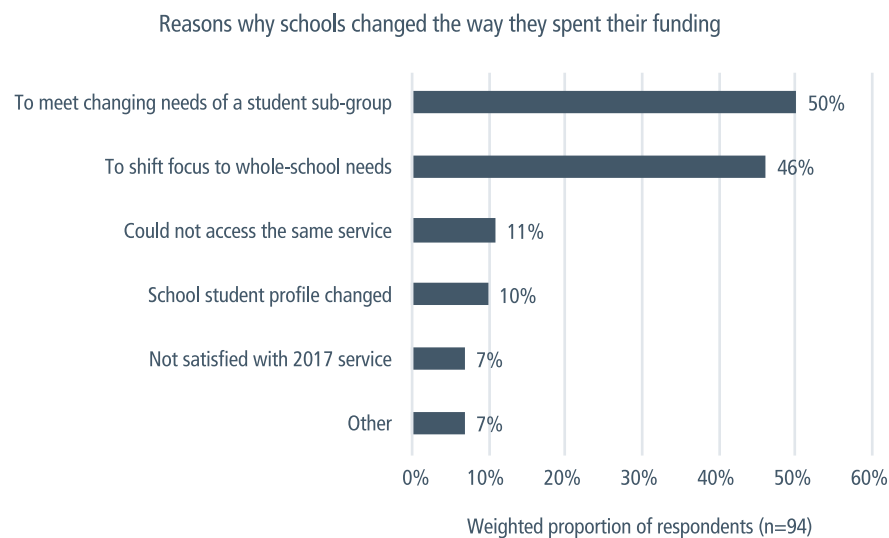
We asked respondents why they had made a change, and as shown in Figure 14, the two most common reasons were:

1. To meet changing or emerging needs of a specific sub-group of students.
2. To shift focus to whole-of-school needs rather than the needs of a specific sub-group of students.

This suggests that schools are adapting their services as they aim to balance meeting the wellbeing needs of the whole school and the needs of specific sub-groups of students.

Figure 14:

Reasons why schools changed the way they spent their Flexible Funding from 2017 to 2018



Note. This base size is unweighted.

The discussions we had with school representatives during follow-up interviews indicated that the changes they had made were considered and thoughtful. Schools had examined whether their existing wellbeing initiatives were addressing areas of need and attempted to identify any emerging needs. Some schools had also examined their data (for example, TTFM survey data, attendance, suspensions) to inform their decisions about how to use the Flexible Funding over time.

“Well, I think it’s become more targeted. I think that we’ve had the tier one intervention of Bounce Back, and we’ve maintained the mentoring and the chaplaincy and everything, but we’ve looked at how those programs have – the efficacy of those programs and identified gaps, then filled those gaps.” [Primary school principal]

A novel approach to increasing student engagement

A regional school’s success with a pilot breakfast club led them to use a portion of their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to employ their SLSO to run the breakfast club three mornings a week for the whole school year. The breakfast club serves between 80 and 120 students each day that it operates, many of whom are not eating breakfast at home due to a lack of time prior to travelling on the bus for up to 1 hour to attend school. Staff across the school have noticed an increase in productivity in the morning curriculum sessions as the students are focused and ready to learn when the bell rings.

Schools want the option to change what they fund, as factors beyond satisfaction with existing services are also relevant to their decision.

In the round 1 interviews, we asked interviewees if they would continue to spend their Flexible Funding on the same services if the funding continued in the future²⁰. They expressed mixed views. Where a staff member had been employed, schools were typically keen to continue that funding. For example:

- One secondary school said the school would continue to fund their social workers because they were very having a positive impact and represented good value for money.

“Definitely the social workers in school. We would continue that program and continue that relationship... for the money we spent we got two people.” [Secondary school principal].

- One SSP had topped up the salary of their school psychologist so that he was at the school for an extra day each week. The school principal said that they would use their Flexible Funding in the same way in future because of the complex mental health issues amongst their student population.

“Of course ... we think it's an essential thing for a school with mental health [concerns] that I have a school psychologist ... We do the best that we can but we're not psychologists.” [SSP principal].

- One regional high school initially wanted to employ a school counsellor but due to a shortage of school counselling staff, they had employed a wellbeing coordinator instead. The wellbeing coordinator was responsible for supporting students beyond the role of the year advisor and for running specific wellbeing days and activities across the school. They were very happy with this wellbeing coordinator and said they would probably continue to use their Flexible Funding for the same purpose in the future.

Other schools, however, noted they would continue to review their needs, staff expertise and any new programs to make sure the funding was used most effectively. For example:

- One secondary school said that they expected to vary the way they spent their funding over time, depending on staff expertise.

“It depends how it becomes embedded in your school and if something is sustainable, you mightn’t need to spend as much money on it as you have spent previously. It depends on your staff also and the expertise. You might need to buy expertise in an area if your current staff in the school do not have that expertise. But you won’t need that when they build that expertise. [Then] you can move on to something else that you might not have.” [Secondary school principal]

- One primary school said that they would make decisions about expenditure following consultation with parents and the wider school community. This school also wanted to ensure that their use of the funding was consistent with the wellbeing framework.

“I would look at the needs of the students in the school and once again revise it with our community, school community again ... there are always new people coming in with different programs ... I would then look at the wellbeing framework ... We want to be able to implement the wellbeing framework and have the anti-bullying plans and have the best plans possible to make sure our students are able to transition to school, to transition to high school, able to be engaged. [Primary school principal]

²⁰ We intentionally did not ask this direct question in the surveys as it was important not to give the impression that funding would be granted to schools beyond the Flexible Funding time period. Instead we explored this question through interviews where we could explain that future decisions on funding had not yet been made and that this was a hypothetical scenario.

8. Do schools believe the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services they received is sufficient to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities?

Schools believe that Flexible Funding, combined with other funding, allows them to provide appropriate wellbeing services. Naturally, some identify more services they would like to fund.

As we saw in Chapter 6, schools are satisfied with the services or resources they have funded. During interviews, many school staff spoke of the beneficial impact that the Flexible Funding had on their staff and students, including:

- students having more access to specialist staff
- staff feeling supported by the presence of specialist staff
- increased wellbeing due to the introduction or revamping of whole school and/or targeted wellbeing programs.

“It has allowed us to upskill all our staff ... it allowed us to have children assessed and then referred to appropriate services in a more timely manner. It’s allowed very complex trauma kids to be case managed ... It’s been hugely beneficial for our students. For our teachers as well.”
[Primary school principal]

“It’s been terrific because you’ve just got more hands on deck and it takes the workload or reduces the workload off year coordinators, year advisers. Year advisers are on nearly a full teaching load and they’re expected to be the go-to for hundreds of kids so they really struggle. This has been a huge help to our counsellor and to our year advisers.” [Secondary school principal]

“The Flexible Funding has been fabulous because we’ve been able to use it from K to 6, across the entire school, targeting a different variety of students. I’ve been able to target boys, girls, students with language, students with communication, with behaviour, students with self-esteem.”
[Primary school principal]

We also know from Chapter 3 that the large majority of schools (88%) allocated additional RAM funding to support wellbeing services. Interviewees often talked about Flexible Funding being used to supplement or complement existing wellbeing activities and/or personnel. Some also commented that while they were very grateful for the additional funding, it was not substantial enough to completely fund an initiative and in many cases, RAM funding was needed. Further, a subset of interviewees noted that there were additional wellbeing services they felt that their students required that they were unable to fund.

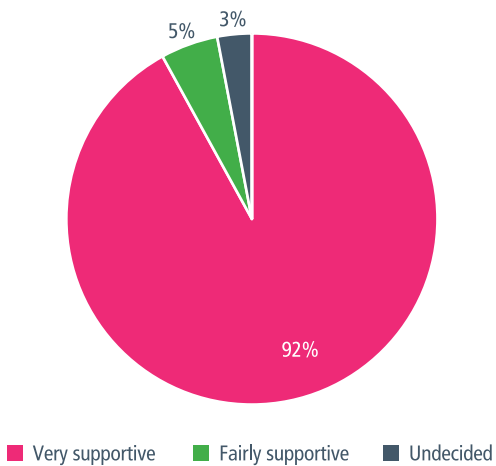
“I’d like to have a lot more to actually put into the areas that I find that the students need. This supplements a small amount of some of the programs that we run in the school and it enables me to keep some of those programs running but it doesn’t supplement them all.”
[Secondary school principal]

Schools strongly support the concept of Flexible Funding and report it has allowed them to target wellbeing services to address their specific needs

In the 2017 survey we asked participants how supportive they were of the concept of Flexible Funding, as opposed to targeted funding. As shown in Figure 15, almost all schools (97%) were fairly or very supportive, and more than nine in ten (92%) were very supportive.

Figure 15:
Support for the concept of Flexible Funding as opposed to targeted funding

Support for concept of flexible funding (as opposed to targeted funding)



Note. These weighted proportions are based on 163 respondents.

Interviewees articulated the key reason for their strong support of the flexible nature of funding being the capacity this gives them to judge where the needs are, and how best to address those needs with the available funding.

“We know what it’s like on the ground. We know our community, and we know the needs across the school.” [Primary school principal]

“The satisfaction is having that flexibility around the funding and also being able to modify the way you spend the money every year as a response to the data you are getting about what you are doing.” [Primary school wellbeing officer]

“Obviously with our school and our community it’s got very, very complex needs, so we would need to really be able to mould our funding and our allocations according to the need and according to the services that are relevant and we’ll support our programs and our community.” [Secondary school principal]

Other reasons included ease of allocation, and the ability to use the funding proactively in tandem with targeted funding.

“Targeted funding at the end of the day is reactive. Don’t get me wrong. You can’t not have that because there are some very complex kids in schools but if you can get enough of a team together, the proactive stuff eventually has an impact ... My strongest recommendation is that they keep this program going but I wouldn’t want that to be at the expense of targeted funding.” [Secondary school principal]

We interviewed two survey respondents who had reported being “undecided” or “not supportive” of the concept of Flexible Funding in the 2017 survey and learned that they were in fact very supportive, but answered the survey question incorrectly at the time.

Separate to funding, to enhance their approach to wellbeing, schools would like more information about evidence-based wellbeing programs, a list of wellbeing providers and examples of initiatives used in schools

The 2017 survey asked respondents what kind of support/information or resources would be needed to enhance planning and implementation of a planned approach to wellbeing. The main resource requested by schools was information about wellbeing. This included:

1. Information about wellbeing programs, initiatives and resources, especially those that were evidence based. Suggestions included:
 - “A database of the types (or examples) of flexible wellbeing programs in operation across the state” [Primary school principal]
 - “Information of the efficacy of targeted wellbeing programs for students with intellectual disability, mental health problems and autism” [SSP principal].
 - “Tried and tested wellbeing programs that target developing resilience in students” [Secondary school principal].
2. Information about wellbeing providers such as a list of approved providers and those that are based in the local community. Examples included:
 - “A directory of DoE screened professionals and services, a current directory of support services in government schools, professional learning advertised at a local level” [Primary school principal].
 - “Information of local agencies and support networks, explaining their function, cost and availability” [Primary school principal].
 - “What services and supports are available to access in the local community” [Secondary school principal].
3. Greater sharing of wellbeing information between schools (for example, examples of wellbeing approaches that have been used successfully in other schools). Suggestions included:
 - “Perhaps a wellbeing conference or session around how schools utilised the funds in their current setting” [Primary school principal].
 - “Case studies of successful strategies/programs used by other schools” [Primary school principal].
 - “We asked around for how different schools support students, receiving some feedback about the different roles and programs. Some schools provided a calendar of wellbeing activities, highlighting the goals and mechanisms for support for students which was useful” [Secondary school principal].

Schools also emphasised the need for ongoing access to expert-led professional learning and for mental health support

Another theme that emerged when schools were asked what additional support or resources they required was the importance of accessing professional learning delivered by experts. Professional learning was considered important for all types of staff including specialist support staff. Comments included:

“Adequate funds to develop and maintain a carefully planned and expertly implemented wellbeing plan with the professional expertise and appropriate professional learning to deliver it”
[Secondary school principal].

“Access to DoE funded training for specialist support staff employed in schools”
[Secondary school principal].

“Professional learning for staff always is important for them to understand the program they are implementing and relevant strategies to meet needs of all students in their classes”
[Secondary school principal].

Another theme was additional support for student mental health. A number of survey respondents were concerned about the demands placed upon schools to address mental health, and the over-burdened mental health services in the community. Some schools had attempted to fund additional school counsellor or psychologist support but had been unsuccessful due to the shortage of supply.

“All schools require more support with mental health as this area is our biggest challenge ... the continued increase / demands on schools to fill these gaps not only leave students needing wellbeing intervention but also our staff. External mental health services are over worked and demand exceeds supply” [Secondary school principal].

9. What are schools' perceptions about the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing?

Both the 2017 and 2018 surveys examined the perceived impact of the Flexible Funding on the wellbeing of students at a whole school level as well as a targeted sub-group level.

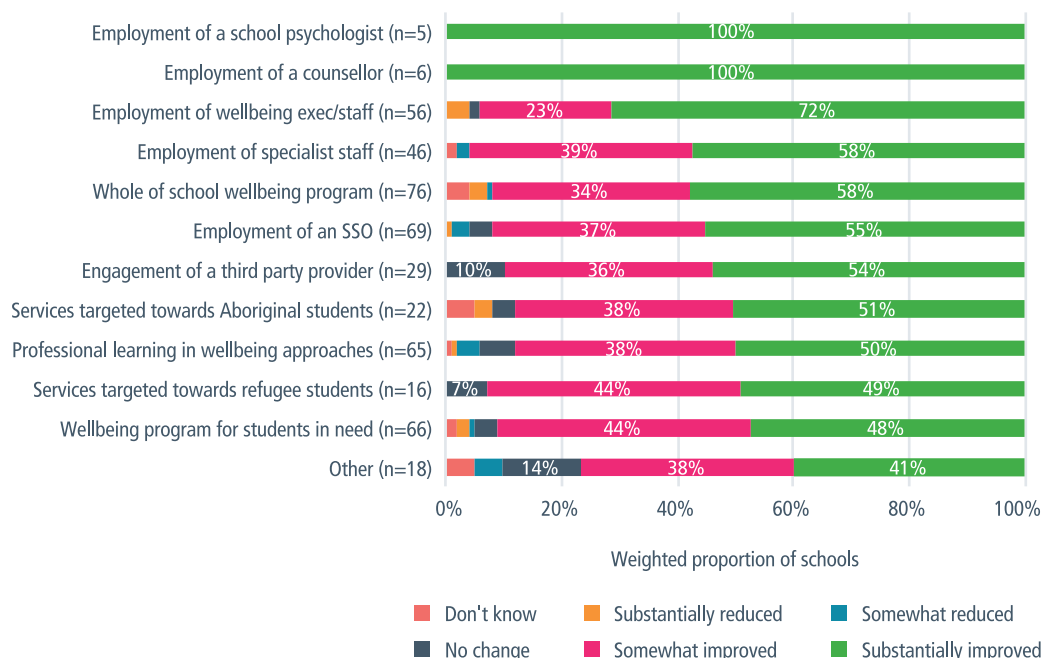
The large majority of schools perceived the services they had funded to have improved wellbeing at a whole school level. Ratings were highest for employing a staff member.

We asked survey respondents to rate the impact of each service they had funded on student wellbeing at a whole school level. Figure 16 shows that the large majority of schools perceived each of their 2018 services to have substantially or somewhat improved student wellbeing at a whole school level. Satisfaction levels were generally highest when a staff member had been employed. In particular, schools unanimously rated school counsellors and psychologists as having made substantial improvements at a whole school level (although the number of schools who spent their funding in this way is small).

Figure 16:

Impact of services on wellbeing of students at a whole school level in 2018

What impact do you think the following services had on the wellbeing of students at a whole school level (2018)?

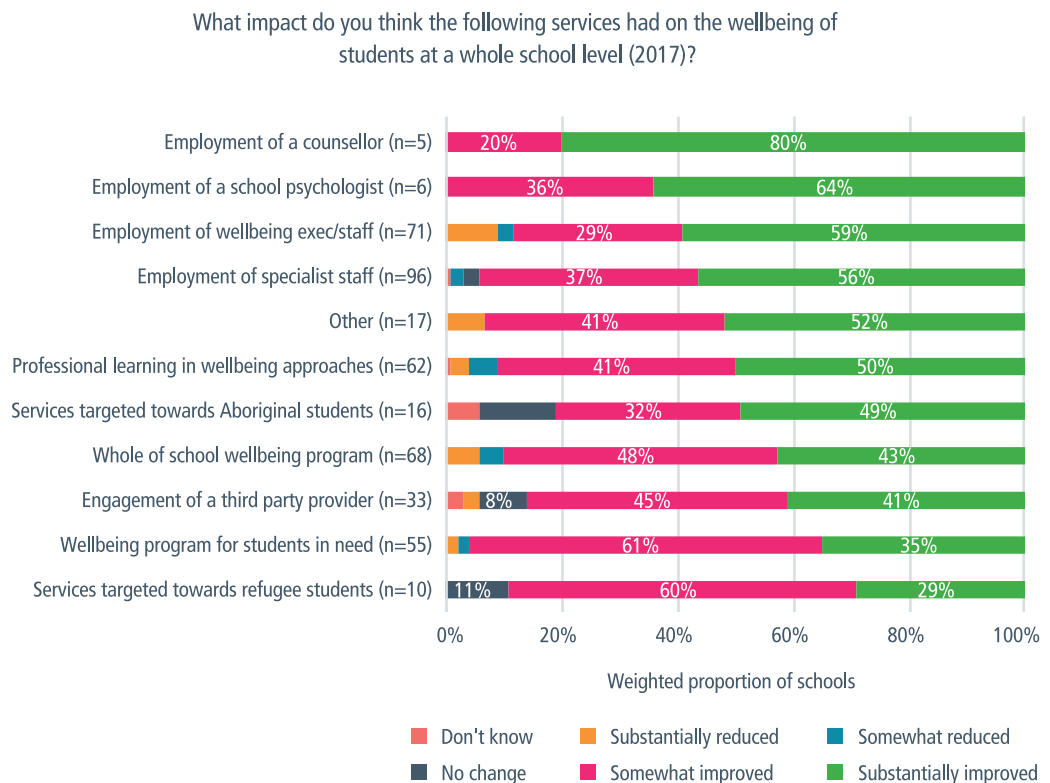


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

A notable difference between 2017 and 2018 results is the change in the proportion of schools that reported that employment of wellbeing executive/staff had reduced student wellbeing (substantially or somewhat) at a whole school level (refer to Figure 17). In 2017 this proportion was 12% but in 2018 it was just 4%. This change over time may reflect the actions taken by schools to change the way they spent their funds in 2018.

Figure 17:

Impact of services on wellbeing of students at a whole school level in 2017



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Partnering with universities to support wellbeing

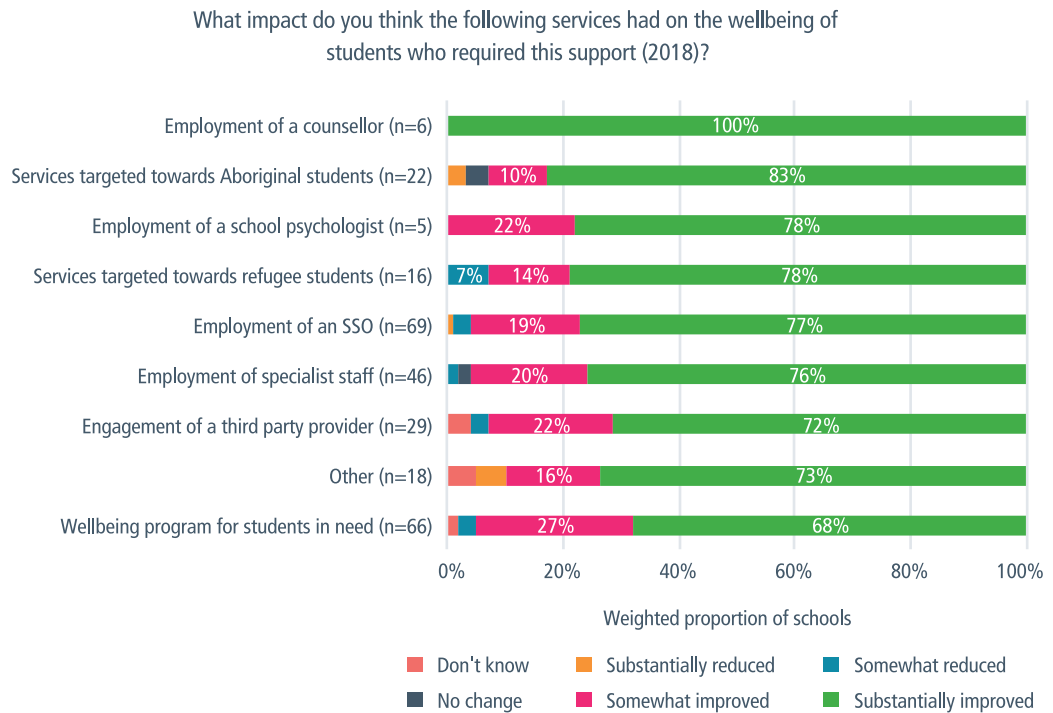
Noting the shortage in specialist support staff in their area, one regional school formed a partnership with a local university to offer school placements to the university social work students. It is a requirement for the social work students to complete 500 hours of placement at the end of their degree which provides the school with approximately two terms of additional support per year. The school noted that their students were more willing to seek out support directly from the social work students than school staff members. Further, the pressure on staff had been somewhat alleviated by having the placement students on site to assist with supporting wellbeing.

Schools reported even stronger positive impacts on the wellbeing of student subgroups that specifically required that type of support

We also asked survey respondents about the impact of each service on the wellbeing of students who specifically required that type of support. The perceived impacts in this instance were even more positive than the perceived impacts at the whole school level. As shown in Figure 18, the majority of schools said that each of the 2018 services and resources they had funded had substantially improved student wellbeing, and almost all schools rated services as substantially or somewhat improving wellbeing.

Figure 18:

Impact of services on wellbeing of students who required these types of support in 2018

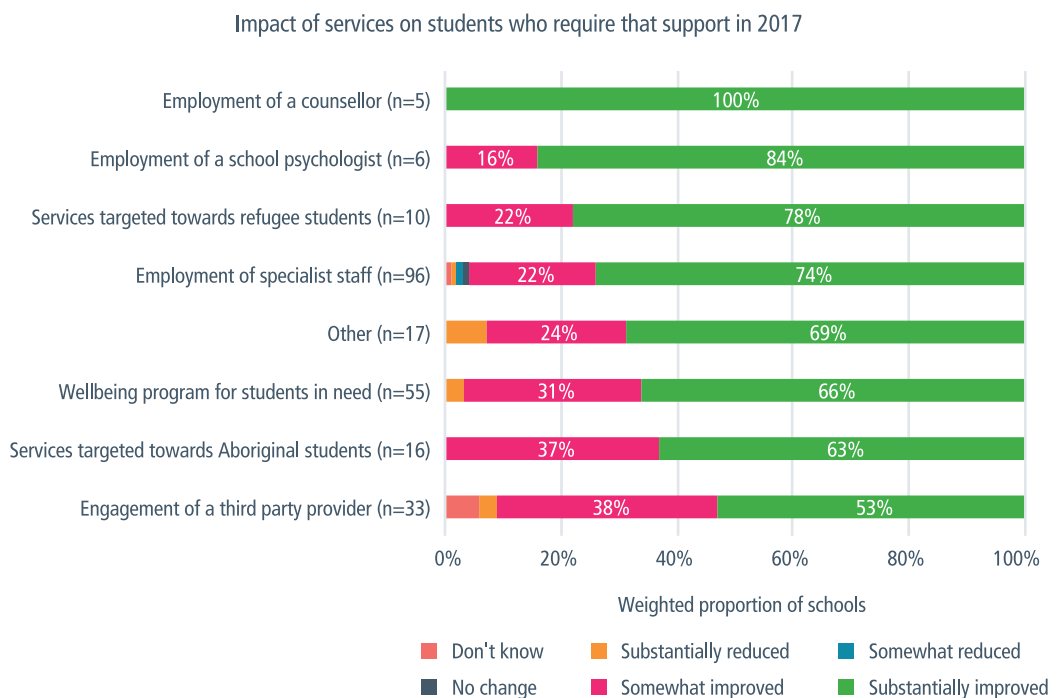


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

In 2018, a small proportion of schools (7%) reported that services targeted towards refugee students had, in fact, somewhat reduced the wellbeing of students who required that support. This was not observed in the 2017 survey findings (see Figure 19).

Figure 19:

Impact of services on wellbeing of students who required these types of support in 2017



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Weaving group to support female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

A regional high school used a portion of their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to establish an Aboriginal girls weaving group as a mentoring opportunity. The SSO organised for Aboriginal Elders within their community to attend the group and assist the girls in learning the traditional practice of weaving while discussing any issues that they may have been having at school or in their personal lives. The Elders also supported the school with any mediation that the girls may have needed. School staff were invited to attend the group and the Learning and Support Coordinator explained that the girls had built positive relationships with the staff who attended. The girls also reportedly developed the confidence to seek out support from those staff members, as needed. This allowed staff members to intervene early by referring students to the appropriate personnel or school service, which ensured support was provided in a timely manner.

School staff judged the impacts on wellbeing via multiple data sources and indicators, and emphasised the connection between staff and student wellbeing

During interviews we sought detailed feedback on the impacts of specific types of services as well as how staff gauged these impacts. Interviewees talked about using administrative data, school-based surveys, student interviews and/or staff observations to gauge impacts at both the whole school level and among targeted sub-groups. The impacts they described included increased engagement, increased attendance, reduced behaviour referrals and/or suspensions and increased numbers of students seeking out support.

“If you look at the analysis and our 2017 annual school report for PBL and also our analysis of I guess even the parent, teacher and staff and community surveys and our analysis that we did through our external validation, it was quite evident that the wellbeing of our students, we’re catering for those needs. We’ve been able to differentiate and we’ve been able to have an impact. We had increased student engagement and a huge reduction in referrals.” [Primary school principal]

“So with *Tell Them From Me*, we’ve been involved in that for several years. That’s been really useful data for us to look at the impact of what we’re doing in the focus of making a difference. The evidence is clear over three years the data is saying yes it is... And even staff have said they have seen the difference in the children. The quiet ones who would never say boo to a goose are now speaking up and sharing. It’s exciting.” [Primary school principal]

Schools that had employed or topped up the salaries of specialist support staff explained that their school was able to take a more proactive approach to student wellbeing, which had positive impacts at the whole school level. Some also commented that having increased access to specialist support staff reduced the stigma associated with seeking out support. They believed this had led to a notable increase in the number of students approaching specialist support staff of their own accord or at the request of their parents.

“Now we get kids coming up saying I think I need to go and see the counsellor or mum’s asked me to ... So it’s getting that information out to the communities that there’s that help out there and there’s support out there and it’s not so taboo.” [Secondary school principal]

One school said that their specialist support staff had built important connections with parents, which helped parents see the value in supporting student wellbeing across the whole school.

“Because of the ability to be able to connect and work with the families a little bit more closely. There’s a bit more trust there. The parents are seeing the value and supporting their students more so that actually gives you a wellbeing connection.” [Secondary school principal]

Interviewees also described improvements to staff wellbeing which had flow-on effects to student wellbeing at the whole school level. They attributed improvements in staff wellbeing to specialist support staff relieving the pressure that other staff members felt to address wellbeing matters. The specialist support staff also acted as a sounding board for other staff and, in some cases, provided counselling as well.

“So they’re not fighting an uphill battle as such. They’ve got support for the kids and for them too. The teachers’ relationship with the kids are actually improving as well because then the kids are feeling supported so they’re not narking at teachers so much and vice versa.” [Secondary school principal]

To explain impacts at the targeted sub-group level, those that had employed a specialist staff member explained that this provided more opportunity for their students experiencing cyberbullying, self-harming behaviours, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns, to access support.

“So a number of our students last year had mental health issues and self-harming things. So the wellbeing coordinator was able to spend a fair bit more time with them.” [Secondary school principal]

Other wellbeing impacts among targeted sub-groups that interviewees observed included better behavioural choices, improved relationships (with other students and staff) and improvements in self-esteem leading to increased confidence in the classroom.

“It all comes back down to the trust and the kids willing to make those relationships that were made with the staff that are involved in those programs have used them when things are not going so great or more particularly about in the playground when things are starting to escalate they actually go up and seek some support from staff members that they’re comfortable with.” [Secondary school principal]

“And as I say, that’s how we’ve viewed using this money is to improve their self-esteem and self-worth and what they feel about themselves. And I guess the pay-off for that is improved behaviour both in the playground and in the school community and in the classroom. Better communication and friendship groups, being able to make more informed decisions and choices, better choices, and academic improvement.” [Primary school principal]

10. What is the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing and engagement as measured via the department's *Tell Them From Me* survey?

We used the department's TTFM student survey to investigate whether measures of student wellbeing changed after the introduction of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. The survey measures student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices in NSW public schools. It was first piloted in NSW in 2013 and 2014 and became available for all schools to opt-in from 2015 onwards. Student participation in the survey is voluntary (managed via an opt-out process) and principals can also select which year groups and classes are invited to participate.

Population of interest and sample properties

Of the 557 secondary schools that were open in 2016 and 2018, 277 (49.7%) participated in both waves of the survey. Of the 366,168 students who attended these schools in these calendar years, 244,294 (66.7%) completed the student survey. To minimise selection bias, we used a two-stage procedure to calculate inverse probability weights²¹. We used these weights to reconfigure the sample data so that it better represented the populations of interest. Of the students that were included in the analysis, 129,568 attended secondary schools that received Flexible Funding for student wellbeing while 114,726 attended secondary schools that did not.

Of the 1,722 primary schools that were open in 2016 and 2018, 781 (45.4%) participated in both waves of the survey. Of the 226,665 students who attended these schools in these calendar years, 191,267 (84.4%) completed the student survey. To minimise selection bias, we used a two-stage procedure to calculate inverse probability weights. We used these weights to reconfigure the sample data so that it better represented the populations of interest. Of the students that were included in the analysis, 25,389 attended primary schools that received Flexible Funding for student wellbeing while 165,878 attended primary schools that did not.

Outcome measures

The TTFM student survey consists of a number of measures of wellbeing and engagement. The measures we examined are detailed below. These measures are scored on a 10-point scale, except for bullying which is a categorical variable consisting of "victim of moderate bullying", "victim of severe bullying" and "not bullied". We converted all measures to binary variables, as follows:

- **Sense of belonging** measures whether students feel included and accepted at school and by their peers. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report a high sense of belonging.
- **Positive relationships** measures how students get along with, and relate to their peers. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report positive relationships.

²¹ We first used school-level information to model the probability that a school would respond to the survey. This first model included information regarding school type, selective school status, coeducational status, school remoteness, school size and school socio-educational advantage. We then used student-level information to model the probability that a student would respond to the survey, conditional on their school having participated that year. This second model included information regarding student gender, student socio-educational advantage, scholastic year level, whether the student had valid NAPLAN results and the attendance rate for their scholastic year. To calculate the sampling weights, the predicted probabilities from both these models were first inverted and then multiplied together.

- **Positive behaviour** measures how often students are not disruptive or do not break school rules. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report positive behaviours.
- **Bullying measures** whether students have experienced any physical, verbal, social, or cyber bullying. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who report being “bullied” and “not bullied.”
- **Attendance** (secondary schools only) measures self-reported attendance. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report high attendance.
- **Optimism** (secondary schools only) measures whether students feel good and whether they expect to have positive experiences. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report high levels of optimism.

Statistical analysis

We used a series of student-level regression models to estimate changes in the above outcome measures in the schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services (FF schools) and the schools that did not receive Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services (non-FF schools). The models can be written as:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot FF\ school_j + \beta_2 \cdot time_t + \beta_3 \cdot (time_t \cdot FF\ school_j) + \varepsilon_{ijt}$$

where Y_{ijt} represents the outcome for student i who attended school j in calendar year t ; $FF\ school_j$ is a dummy coded variable taking the value 1 when student i attended an FF school and 0 when student i attended a non-FF school; $time_t$ is a dummy coded variable taking the value 1 when the survey response was collected in 2018 (2 years after the roll-out of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services) and 0 when the survey response was collected in 2016 (at the commencement of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services initiative).

In the above equation, β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences); and ε_{ijt} represents the error term.

The error term ε_{ijt} in these models does not follow a normal distribution so we did not construct the 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the estimated regression coefficients in the usual way. Instead we used cluster bootstrapping to obtain percentile-based 95% confidence intervals²².

²² We resampled the dataset with replacement 1000 times using a clustered bootstrap method to account for school-level clustering of students. We obtained one estimate from each sample, and obtained the CIs from the percentile of the 1000 estimates.

Results

Sense of belonging

Primary schools

We present the estimated proportions of primary school students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF primary schools in Figure 20. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table 4. Our results show that, in 2016, about 80% (95% CI [79, 80]) of students in non-FF primary schools self-reported a positive sense of belonging, while the estimated proportion for FF primary schools was about 1 percentage point higher (95% CI [0, 2]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging in non-FF primary schools decreased by about 2 percentage points (95% CI [-3, -1]). This was about the same as the decrease in FF primary schools (95% CI [-1, 2]). Therefore, the change in self-reported positive sense of belonging within FF primary schools is no different to the change within non-FF primary schools.

Figure 20:

Estimated proportion of students with a positive sense of belonging in primary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

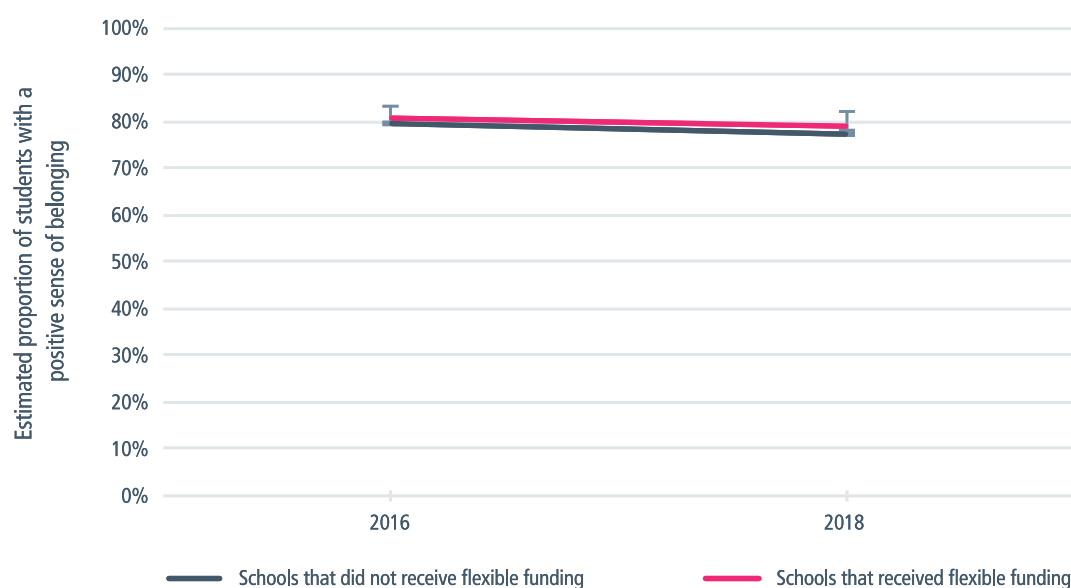


Table 4:

Results of regression analysis for sense of belonging TTFM data in primary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.80	0.79	0.80
β_1	0.01	0.00	0.02
β_2	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01
β_3	0.00	-0.01	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Secondary schools

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure 21. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table 5. Our results show that, in 2016, about 66% (95% CI [64, 68]) of students in non-FF secondary schools self-reported a positive sense of belonging. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about 2 percentage points lower (95% CI [-4, 0]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging in non-FF secondary schools decreased by about 3 percentage points (95% CI [-6, -1]). Over the same time period, the decrease in FF secondary schools was about 1 percentage point (95% CI [-2, 4]) less than non-FF schools. In other words, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging at FF schools decreased slightly less than at non-FF schools. However, this difference between groups is very small and therefore unlikely to be meaningful. The reduction in self-reported positive sense of belonging is also small for both groups.

Figure 21:

Estimated proportion of students with a positive sense of belonging in secondary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

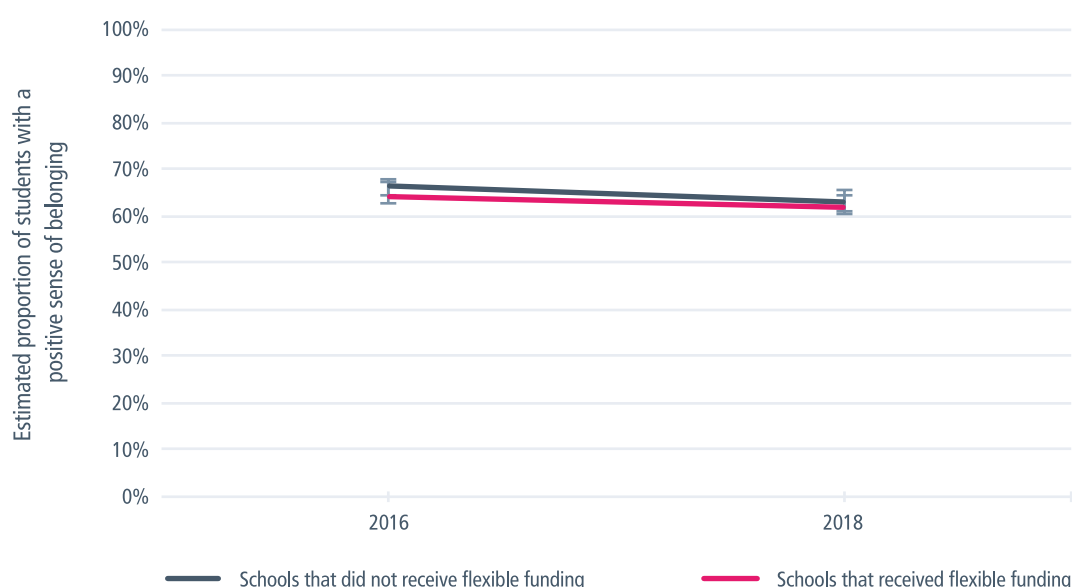


Table 5:

Results of regression analysis for sense of belonging TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.66	0.64	0.68
β_1	-0.02	-0.04	0.00
β_2	-0.03	-0.06	-0.01
β_3	0.01	-0.02	0.04

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Other measures

We also looked at the scales of self-reported positive relationships, positive behaviour, bullying, attendance (secondary schools only) and optimism (secondary schools only). In each instance we found no meaningful difference in the mean (average) change over time between FF and non-FF schools.

As shown in Table 6 below, the difference between the differences were mostly 0% and were never more than +/- 1%. Refer to Appendix D for more detail.

Table 6:

Estimates of the difference between the differences coefficients of TTFM student survey scales

TTFM scale	Observed coefficient	95% CI Lower Limit	95% CI Upper Limit
Primary Schools			
Sense of belonging	0.00	-0.01	0.02
Positive relationships	0.00	-0.02	0.02
Positive behaviour	-0.01	-0.03	0.01
Bullying	0.01	-0.01	0.04
Secondary Schools			
Sense of belonging	0.01	-0.02	0.04
Positive relationships	0.00	-0.02	0.02
Positive behaviour*	0.00	-0.02	0.03
Bullying	0.00	-0.03	0.02
Attendance	0.01	-0.01	0.03
Optimism	-0.01	-0.03	0.02

Note. The observed coefficient represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding. The estimates and confidence intervals are on a standardised scale.

Limitations

We identify five limitations to these analyses.

1. TTFM is designed to provide schools with data that they can use to inform their school self-assessment, planning and monitoring. Data from the survey should be used cautiously in a research context because the survey's purpose is not to compare one group of schools with another. As a voluntary survey, schools can elect whether or not to participate and those schools that choose to participate can also select which year groups and/or classes complete the survey, and this potentially introduces selection biases. We applied a weighting procedure to minimise these biases to the extent possible.
2. Traditional difference-in-differences models have an assumption of common trends. This assumes that in the absence of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services, schools that received this funding would have the same average change over time as schools that did not receive this funding. We do not have historical TTFM data or information about any other wellbeing programs that schools are implementing, so we cannot say with certainty that the trends would be similar in the absence of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. For this reason, our difference-in-differences models are not estimates of causal effects, and are better conceptualised as models for the mean change over time.
3. The amount of Flexible Funding provided to individual schools ranged from \$33,067 to \$82,667 per year. This is a relatively small amount of money in comparison to the total amount of money that an individual school spends on initiatives and activities that impact on student wellbeing. We know from our survey results that the great majority of schools topped up their Flexible Funding with other sources of funding. This makes it harder to detect a difference between FF and non-FF groups. It also makes it harder to attribute any changes in the outcomes to Flexible Funding.
4. TTFM provides a measure of whole school or whole-year student wellbeing. Our survey results indicate that many Flexible Funding schools used their funding on initiatives that targeted a subset of students rather than whole school initiatives. This makes it harder to detect an effect at a whole school level.
5. Our survey results show that schools spent their Flexible Funding on a diverse range of services. Our chosen TTFM outcome variables will likely be more relevant to some services than others. It was not possible to tailor our analyses to subgroups of schools as the sample size would be too small. This situation makes it more difficult to detect differences between the two groups.

Summary

Our outcome analyses found no meaningful differences between FF and non-FF schools in the mean (average) change over time in self-reported student wellbeing measures captured in the TTFM survey. However, we identify a number of limitations that make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups.

11. Summary and future considerations

Summary of key findings

1. What are the specific ways in which Flexible Funding has been spent by schools?	Schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on up to eight separate types of services or resources. The two most popular of these were whole of school wellbeing programs (40%) and employing an SSO (37%). Other popular options were targeted wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support (35%), professional learning in wellbeing approaches (34%) and employing wellbeing executive/staff (32%). In addition to their Flexible Funding, around nine in ten schools (88%) allocated some of their RAM funding to support student wellbeing.
2. How has Flexible Funding spending varied across schools?	There are many commonalities in spending patterns across different sub-groups of schools, but key differences are that: • On average, primary schools spread their funds across more services than did secondary schools and were more likely to choose professional learning in wellbeing approaches. • Schools with less than 850 students were more likely than schools with 850+ students to spend funds on employing an SSO and on professional learning in wellbeing approaches. • Schools in the '1.0 FTE counselling allocation' and the 'high targeted needs' eligibility categories more commonly employed wellbeing executive/staff than did schools in the 'unique profiles' category.
3. Why did schools spend their Flexible Funding on particular services?	Schools made decisions about particular wellbeing services according to their student profile and the additional needs of specific student sub-groups. • Schools that spent their funds on employing staff members did so to access specialist support or to extend the effective support provided by existing staff members. • Schools that employed an SSO wanted to continue to employ, or top-up the funding of, an existing SSO. • Schools that funded whole school wellbeing programs did so to support social and emotional aspects of student wellbeing. • Schools that selected professional learning highlighted a desire to build staff capacity in implementing whole of school wellbeing initiatives. Decisions about expenditure almost always involved the principal and school executive and more often than not involved learning and wellbeing staff.
4. Are schools satisfied with how they spent their Flexible Funding?	Schools are typically very satisfied with the services they invested in, particularly if they employed a staff member.
5. Do schools intend to spend their Flexible Funding on the same services and activities in the future?	Half of the schools changed the way they spent their funding from 2017 to 2018. Changes appear to have been well considered. While satisfaction levels are high, schools want the option to adapt their services to meet the needs of the student population as priorities change over time.
6. Do schools believe the Flexible Funding they received is sufficient to provide appropriate wellbeing services?	Schools believe that Flexible Funding, combined with other funding, allows them to provide appropriate wellbeing services. They also strongly support the Flexible Funding concept. However, they identify additional appropriate services they would like to fund. Beyond funding, schools would like additional information to enhance their provision of appropriate services. In particular, they seek information on evidence-based wellbeing programs, a list of wellbeing providers, and examples of successful initiatives used in other schools. Schools also seek ongoing access to expert-led professional learning and mental health support.
7. What are schools' perceptions about the impact of the Flexible Funding on student wellbeing?	The large majority of schools perceived the services they had funded to have improved wellbeing at a whole school level. Perceived improvements were highest for employing a staff member. Schools reported even stronger positive impacts on the wellbeing of student subgroups that were specifically targeted for particular types of support. School staff judged the impacts on wellbeing via multiple data sources and indicators, and emphasised the influence of student wellbeing on staff wellbeing and vice versa.
8. What is the impact of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on student wellbeing and engagement as measured via the department's TTFM Survey?	Our outcome analyses found no meaningful differences between FF and non-FF schools in the mean (average) change over time in self-reported student wellbeing measures captured in the TTFM survey. However, we identify a number of limitations that make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups. This is discussed in more detail below.

Limitations of the evaluation

We undertook surveys and interviews with principals and other school representatives to capture their perspectives, experiences and reflections of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services initiative. All self-report methods are limited by reliance on memory, the potential to elicit socially desirable answers, or be understood and interpreted differently by respondents. Our survey questions may have been more difficult for those schools that spent funds on multiple services. Certainly we observed that respondents had difficulty identifying or remembering the specific amounts they had spent on each service.

The survey response rate is an important feature in ensuring that the views of respondents are representative of the views of the total population of schools. Our survey response rates were 61% and 48% for rounds 1 and 2 respectively. The latter is lower than we would like, but not unexpected given it took place in Term 4 and was the second survey round of the year. We addressed minor differences in the school characteristics of survey participants and the total population of schools that received funding by applying survey weights.

Our outcome analyses are limited by: having to use whole school measures of wellbeing when many schools used their funds for targeted initiatives; not being able to control for existing wellbeing activities and initiatives; the Flexible Funding amount representing a small proportion of a school's investment in wellbeing initiatives; not being able to tailor outcome measures according to specific services funded, and the opt-in nature of the TTFM survey.

Future considerations

The department invested \$51.5 million in Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services over the period 2016 to 2018. The funding was distributed to 381 schools, averaging approximately \$45,000 per school per calendar year. Consistent with the flexible nature of the initiative, schools spent their funding in many different ways depending on their circumstances. Many also changed how they spent their funds over time. Principals are strongly supportive of the Flexible Funding concept, are highly satisfied with their funded services, and report positive impacts on student wellbeing. Our in-depth interviews indicate that spending has been well considered, enabling schools to provide effective support that has been tailored to the specific needs of their student population at that time, while taking into account existing supports available.

Our outcome analyses found no meaningful difference between Flexible Funding schools and non-Flexible Funding schools in changes to whole school student wellbeing measures captured via the student TTFM survey. This means that it is unlikely that Flexible Funding has had a measurable impact on those whole school indicators of student wellbeing. However, we know that approximately 40% of Flexible Funding schools used their funding to implement whole of school wellbeing initiatives, and that the funded initiatives implemented by other schools might only be relevant for a subgroup of students. We also know that the funding amount provided to individual schools is a small proportion of the funds that schools spend on activities and resources that impact on student wellbeing. Finally, we are unable to tailor our outcome measures to specific initiatives funded and our chosen outcomes will not be relevant in all instances. Together, these issues make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups.

If this funding approach continues, one question to consider is how flexible the funding should remain. While flexibility is the key benefit, feedback we received from schools highlights that they are seeking further support with their decision-making. In particular, they would like information on evidence-based wellbeing programs, examples of successes in other schools and information on third party providers. One option could be to maintain the same flexibility while providing schools with further information to support their decision-making. Another option is to provide schools with the flexibility to choose from a set of more specifically defined options (for example whole school wellbeing approaches that are deemed to have a strong evidence base). This approach would be consistent with the direction taken by Educational Services recently to quality assure all registered professional development offered or promoted by the division. It would also minimise the potential that schools spend funds on activities not directly for wellbeing purposes.

Another feature of the initiative to consider is whether to set more specific reporting requirements to provide better visibility of expenditure. Almost all schools claimed to report their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services expenditure in their annual report, but we observed inconsistencies and some errors in the way this was done. In answering our first survey, schools also struggled to provide accurate information on expenditure on different services. However, setting more specific reporting requirements would run contrary to schools' general financial reporting requirements, whereby they report on outcomes rather than initiatives and funding sources. Encouraging schools to pool their funding with other schools could be beneficial for schools in some circumstances. Only 1% of schools reported having done this. Sometimes this was due to lack of awareness that this was an option, other times because it was not deemed advantageous for the school. If pooling funds is to be encouraged, principals will require information on which schools have received funding and why (including their own school), as well as how pooling might work in practice while continuing to benefit individual schools.

With regard to measuring impact we note that flexible initiatives are less suited to impact evaluation than are initiatives with set features. This is because it is harder to identify specific outcomes that are suited to all circumstances and because there is less opportunity for controlling for external variables. To improve our ability to measure the impacts of a flexible initiative of this nature, we could collect detailed information regarding existing wellbeing activities and initiatives, given sufficient lead time prior to the distribution of funds. Also, having a single formula for identifying schools that are eligible for funding would provide better options for an analysis approach, as we could then establish a rank order and cut-off point for eligibility.

Appendix A: Survey instruments and interview guides

Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services survey questions regarding 2017 expenditure

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
0	Did you receive Flexible Funding that was intended to be spent in 2017?	Select one	Yes No	'No' answer skips to end of survey
1	Did you spend the 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on any of the following (Select any that are relevant):	Select any that are relevant (must select at least one)	Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., Positive Behaviour for Learning) Employment of specialist student support staff (e.g., Student Support Officer (Youth Outreach Worker), Community Liaison officer) Employment of a school counsellor Employment of a school psychologist Employment of Wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff (Please specify the role and function) <text box> Other whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches Wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students Services targeted specifically towards refugee students Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s) (Please specify who and the service provided) <text box> Other 1 <text box> Other 2 <text box> Other 3 <text box> Funding has not yet been spent (skips to end of survey)	
2	What services were targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students?	Open ended	<text box>	
3	What services were targeted specifically towards refugee students?	Open ended	<text box>	Only display if selected at Q1
4	How much of the 2017 Flexible Funding money was spent on each of the following (Please provide approximate dollar amounts): – XXXX – XXXX	Open ended	<text boxes>	Only display options selected at Q1
5	What impact do you think professional learning in evidenced based wellbeing approaches for staff had on overall student wellbeing?	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
6	What impact do you think Employment of specialist student support staff (e.g., Student Support Officer) had on the wellbeing of: – Students who required this specialist support – Students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
7	What impact do you think Employment of a school counsellor had on the wellbeing of: – Students requiring support from a counsellor – Students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
8	What impact do you think Employment of a school psychologist had on the wellbeing of: – Students requiring support from a psychologist – Students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
9	What impact do you think Employment of Wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff had on overall student wellbeing?	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
10	What impact do you think "Other whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches" had on overall student wellbeing?	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
11	What impact do you think wellbeing programs/ approaches for students who need additional support had on the wellbeing of: – students who need additional support – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
12	What impact do you think services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students had on the wellbeing of: – Aboriginal students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
13	What impact do you think services targeted specifically towards refugee students had on the wellbeing of : – refugee students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
14	What impact do you think Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s) (Please specify who and the service provided) <text box> had on the wellbeing of: – specifically targeted students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
15	What impact do you think 'Other 1' had on the wellbeing of: – specifically targeted students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
16	What impact do you think 'Other 2' had on the wellbeing of: – specifically targeted students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
17	What impact do you think 'Other 3' had on the wellbeing of: – specifically targeted students – students at a whole-school level	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q1
18	What impact do you think the following services had on staff wellbeing? – XXX – XXX	Answer all, select one response for each	Substantially reduced staff wellbeing Somewhat reduced staff wellbeing No change to staff wellbeing Somewhat improved staff wellbeing Substantially improved staff wellbeing Don't know	Only display options selected at Q1
19	How satisfied were you that the following services met the wellbeing needs of students as intended? – XXX – XXX	Answer all, select one response for each	Very dissatisfied Somewhat dissatisfied Neutral Somewhat satisfied Very satisfied	Only display options selected at Q1
20	Did your school allocate additional funds from within the RAM to support student wellbeing? – Yes – No	Select one		
21	How much additional funds did the school allocate?	Open ended	<text box>	Only display if yes at Q20
22	What impact did this additional allocation of funds from within RAM have?	Open ended	<text box>	Only display if yes at Q20
23	To what extent do you support the concept of flexible funding for schools to address student wellbeing (as opposed to targeted funding)?	Select one	Very supportive Fairly supportive Undecided Fairly unsupportive Very unsupportive	
24	What kind of support/information or resources do you think are needed to enhance planning and implementation of a planned approach to wellbeing?	Open ended	<text box>	
25	Would you be interested in taking part in a short phone interview in the near future to share your views on Flexible Funding for Wellbeing?	Select one	Yes No	
26	Please provide any additional feedback that you think would be useful	Open ended	<text box>	

Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services survey questions regarding 2018 expenditure

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
1	Our records show that you are at <school name>. Is this correct?	Select one	Yes No	If Yes, skip Q2.
2	What school do you currently work at?	Open ended		Show if answer to Q1 is No
3	What is your role within the school?	Select one	Principal Other school executive staff member School counsellor or psychologist Learning and wellbeing staff member Teaching staff member Administrative staff member Support staff member Other (please specify) <text box>	
4	Did you receive Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services that was intended to be spent in 2018?	Select one	Yes No	No' answer skips to end of survey
5	Who was involved in the decision making process of how the funds would be spent? Please select all that apply	Select any that are relevant (must select at least one)	Principal Other school executive staff member(s) School counsellor or psychologist Learning and wellbeing staff member(s) Teaching staff member (other than identified above) Parents Administrative staff member(s) Support staff member(s) Other (please specify) <text box>	
6	Did you share or pool funding with another school(s)?	Select one	Yes No	
7	Did you make any changes to the way you spent the funding in 2018, compared to 2017?		Yes, substantially Yes, a little No Unsure	
8	Why did you make that change?		The school student profile has changed since last year Was not satisfied with the service/ initiative(s) funded last year Could not access the same service/ initiative(s) as last year To meet changing or emerging needs of a specific sub-group of students To shift focus to whole-of-school needs rather than the needs of a specific sub-group of students Other reason (please specify) <text box>	Show if yes, substantially or yes, a little is selected at Q7

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
9	Did you spend the 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on any of the following (Select any that are relevant):	Select any that are relevant (must select at least one)	Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., Positive Behaviour for Learning) Employment of a Student Support Officer (SSO) Employment of other specialist student support staff (e.g., Community Liaison officer) (Please specify the role and function) <text box> Employment of a school counsellor Employment of a school psychologist Employment of wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff (Please specify the role and function) <text box> Whole of school wellbeing programs/ approaches Wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students Services targeted specifically towards refugee students Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s) (Please specify who and the service provided) <text box> Other 1 <text box> Other 2 <text box> Other 3 <text box> Funding has not yet been spent (skips to End of Survey)	
10	What impact do you think professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches had on overall student wellbeing?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
11	What impact do you think employment of a Student Support Officer (SSO) had on the wellbeing of: – Students who required this support? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
12	What impact do you think employment of other specialist student support staff (e.g., Community Liaison Officer) had on the wellbeing of: – Students who required this specialist support? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	
13	What impact do you think employment of a school counsellor had on the wellbeing of: – Students requiring support from a counsellor? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
14	What impact do you think employment of a school psychologist had on the wellbeing of: – Students requiring support from a psychologist? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
15	What impact do you think employment of wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff had on overall student wellbeing?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
16	What impact do you think whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches had on overall student wellbeing?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
17	What impact do you think wellbeing programs/ approaches for students who need additional support had on the wellbeing of: – Students who need additional support? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
18	What impact do you think services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students had on the wellbeing of: – Aboriginal students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
19	What impact do you think services targeted specifically towards refugee students had on the wellbeing of: – Refugee students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
20	What impact do you think engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s) had on the wellbeing of: – Specifically targeted students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
21	What impact do you think 'Other 1' had on the wellbeing of: – Specifically targeted students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
22	What impact do you think 'Other 2' had on the wellbeing of: – Specifically targeted students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9

Question no.	Question	Response type	Response options	Qualifiers
23	What impact do you think 'Other 3' had on the wellbeing of: – Specifically targeted students? – Students at a whole-school level?		Substantially reduced wellbeing Somewhat reduced wellbeing No change to wellbeing Somewhat improved wellbeing Substantially improved wellbeing Don't know	Only display if option selected at Q9
24	Is the expenditure reflected in: – The school plan – The annual report	Matrix – select one for each	Yes No	
25	How satisfied were you that the following services met the wellbeing needs of students as intended? – Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., Positive Behaviour for Learning) – Employment of a Student Support Officer (SSO) – Employment of other specialist student support staff such as a Community Liaison officer (Please specify the role and function) <text box> – Employment of a school counsellor – Employment of a school psychologist – Employment of wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff (Please specify the role and function) <text box> – Whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches – Wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support – Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students – Services targeted specifically towards refugee students – Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s) (Please specify who and the service provided) <text box> – Other 1 <text box> – Other 2 <text box> – Other 3 <text box>	Answer all, select one response for each	Very dissatisfied Somewhat dissatisfied Neutral Somewhat satisfied Very satisfied	Only display options selected at Q9
26	Would you be interested in taking part in a short phone interview in the near future to share your views on Flexible Funding for Wellbeing?	Select one	Yes No	
27	Please provide any additional feedback you think may be useful	Open ended		

Flexible Funding interview guide regarding 2017 expenditure

The Learning and Wellbeing branch has asked the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation to evaluate the Supported Students Successful Students initiative. This includes the allocation of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. The evaluation is investigating what is working well and what is not working well, and what is the impact on wellbeing. This interview follows on from the survey that you/the Principal recently completed.

Interview guide needs to be tailored to each school according to survey responses. Interview to be conducted with the survey responses and spreadsheet/briefing information at hand.

Service selection and context

1. Could you please tell me about the student profile and student needs at the school?
2. What wellbeing services or activities were in place at your school before you received any Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
3. Who was involved in the decision making process regarding Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
 - Were there any differences of opinion amongst staff?
 - Did you consult with parents and staff?
4. Did your school pool any of your Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services funds with other schools?
5. Were there any services that you had hoped to fund but could not?
6. I am just going to go through the items that you indicated in the survey you spent the flexible funding on and ask you a few questions about each.

Ask if	Question/Issue to explore
The school spent funds on other whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches OR spent funds on wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support	(regarding spending funds on other whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches) What was this program or approach? Why did you choose this particular approach? Did you consider implementing Positive Behaviour for Learning? What was your thinking about that?
Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches	What was this program or approach? Why did you choose this particular approach?
The school spent funds on wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff	What type of role is this? What kind of work does this staff member do? Has the school previously had a role like this?
Services targeted towards refugee students OR Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	What was this program or approach? Why did you choose this particular approach?
The school spent funds on specialist student support staff	Why did your school spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on this? What type of role was this? What kind of work did they do? Has the school previously had a role like this?
The school spent funds on wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support	Why did your school spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on this? What was this program or approach? Why did you choose this particular approach?
The school spent funds on engagement of an external wellbeing service (third party) provider	Why did your school spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on this? Why did you choose this provider in particular?
The school spent funds on employing a school counsellor or psychologist	How did you go about finding a school counsellor or psychologist? Did you experience any difficulties?

Service effectiveness

7. In the survey you indicated that <insert selected service> <insert survey response (substantially/somewhat improved/reduced or did not change)> the wellbeing of students who required this specialist support.
 - Why do you say that?
 - What evidence do you have to demonstrate this?
8. In the survey you indicated that <insert selected service> <insert survey response (substantially/somewhat improved/reduced or did not change)> staff wellbeing.
 - Why do you say that?
 - What evidence do you have to demonstrate this?

(Repeat questions 7 and 8 for each service funded)

9. In the survey you indicated that your school used additional funds of <insert amount if applicable> from within the RAM to support student wellbeing. You also indicated that this provided "<insert open-text response from survey if applicable>".
 - Could you please elaborate on this and tell me a bit more about how the funds were used?
 - Why did you choose to do this?
 - What were the impacts on student wellbeing?

Flexible Funding expenditure and school planning

10. How has your Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services expenditure been reflected in your school plan? (that is, milestones/strategies/change in practice/evidence?)
 - Probe on specific services
11. What has been the impact for ongoing implementation of the school plan?

Views on Flexible Funding model

12. The survey notes that you are <insert survey response (fairly/very supportive/unsupportive, undecided)> of the concept of having Flexible Funding as opposed to targeted funding?
 - Can you tell me more about that?
 - What have you been able to do that you wouldn't have been able to otherwise?
13. Were there any challenges associated with how to spend the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
14. Were there any drawbacks associated with the funding?
 - What might have made things easier for you?
15. If Flexible Funding was to continue, would you spend it on the same services or activities into the future?
16. Are there any additional wellbeing services, items, and activities that your school would like funding for?
17. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

Flexible Funding interview guide regarding 2018 expenditure

Learning and Wellbeing in the Department has asked the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation to evaluate the Supported Students Successful Students initiative. This includes the allocation of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. The evaluation is investigating what is working well and what is not working well, and what is the impact of this funding on wellbeing. The purpose of this interview is to elaborate on the survey responses that you/the Principal recently provided, so that we can better understand your school context and how the funding has been applied in that context.

PRINT OUT SURVEY RESPONSES BEFORE EACH INTERVIEW AND ASK ABOUT SURVEY RESPONSES.

1. Could you please tell me about the student profile and student wellbeing needs at the school?
2. What wellbeing services or activities were in place at your school before you received any Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
3. The next questions are about the way your school spent their 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services? I can see from your survey responses that you used this money to [Check against survey responses and remind interviewee of responses if necessary]
 - Please describe these initiatives in more detail
 - Tell me how you went about deciding how to spend the funding?
 - In the survey you noted that [insert survey responses] was involved in the decision making process. Were there any differences of opinion amongst those involved? Did you consult with parents and staff?
 - Why did you choose that particular initiative/program/approach?
 - What impact has that program/approach had on student wellbeing?
 - You indicated that you were [satisfied/dissatisfied] – can you tell me more about that?
 - [If expenditure targeted a subset of students] Why did you focus on this subset of students rather than a whole-school initiative?
4. [For schools who received SSO funding in 2015] Has the school ever had a Student Support Officer (SSO)?
 - [If yes] Did you use any of your 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to pay or top up the salary of an SSO?
 - Why did you make that decision?
5. Were there any changes from 2017 to 2018 in how the school spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
 - [If yes] Why did the school make that change?
6. What have been the benefits of having funding allocated to the school in this flexible way?
7. Did your school pool any of your 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services funds with other schools?
 - If so – how did that work?
 - If not – is this something you considered?
8. Were there any challenges associated with how to spend the 2018 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services?
9. To what extent has the funding enabled you to provide appropriate wellbeing services and activities?
10. Do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

Appendix B: Survey weighting procedure

Characteristics of survey sample

Before analysing the survey data we tested whether those schools that participated in our surveys were representative of the entire population of Flexible Funding schools, with respect to key school characteristics. It is possible that feedback from schools with certain characteristics may differ systematically from feedback from schools with other characteristics. If there is also a difference in response rate, the views conveyed in the survey sample will not be representative of the views of the total Flexible Funding population. To correct any distortions introduced by the non-response of certain subgroups, weights may be applied to the survey data. For example, if certain sub-groups are less likely to respond to the survey, we can up-weight their responses to make inferences to the entire population of Flexible Funding schools.

Construction of survey weights

We used logistic regression models to test whether certain student and school characteristics were related to the survey participation rates. Using survey participation as our binary outcome variable, we examined whether the following variables were predictive of survey responding:

1. Flexible Funding eligibility category
 - a. Schools with a 1.0 FTE counselling allocation
 - b. Schools with unique profiles
 - c. Schools with targeted high needs
2. School type
 - a. Primary schools
 - b. Secondary schools
 - c. Central schools
 - d. Schools for Specific Purposes
3. School location
 - a. Major cities
 - b. Inner regional
 - c. Outer regional
 - d. Remote and very remote
4. Family Occupation and Education Index (FOEI)
5. Total student enrolments
6. School-level National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reading and numeracy scores^{B1}
7. School income per student

^{B1} School-level NAPLAN scores represent the mean of the individual student reading and numeracy NAPLAN scores for that school. For primary and secondary schools, where missing, scores were replaced with the mean NAPLAN scores for the school type. Special and combined schools were given a zero NAPLAN score.

Round 1 survey

As shown in Table B1, one variable was significantly related to whether a school responded to the Round 1 survey. After adjusting for other variables in the model, results indicated that:

- Schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation were more likely to participate in the survey than schools in the targeted high needs category.

Table B1:

Logistic regression model results – Round 1 survey about 2017 expenditure

Variable		Estimate	SE	p-value
Flexible Funding Eligibility category	1.0 FTE counselling allocation	0.743	0.715	0.029*
	Unique profile	-1.164	0.278	0.190
School Type	Primary	-1.622	0.261	0.221
	Secondary	-1.729	0.207	0.139
	SSP	0.260	2.209	0.879
School location	Major cities	-0.436	0.280	0.120
	Outer regional	-0.692	0.497	0.120
	Remote & very remote	-0.981	1.145	0.391
FOEI		-0.006	0.005	0.190
Enrolments		-0.000	0.001	0.451
NAPLAN Score		0.000	0.005	0.991
Income per student		0.392	0.822	0.950

Overall, the model moderately discriminated between those who completed the Round 1 Flexible Funding Survey and those who did not ($AUC^{B2} = 0.622$).

Round 2 survey

As shown in Table B2, two variables were significantly related to whether a school responded to the Round 2 survey. After adjusting for other variables in the model, results indicated that:

- Schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation were more likely to participate in the survey than schools in the targeted high needs category.
- Schools in major cities were less likely to participate than schools in inner regional areas.

Table B2:

Logistic regression model results – Round 1 survey about 2017 expenditure

Variable		Estimate	SE	p-value
Flexible Funding Eligibility category	1.0 FTE counselling allocation	0.683	0.333	0.040*
	Unique profile	-0.138	0.894	0.877
School Type	Primary	0.364	1.030	0.724
	Secondary	0.122	0.800	0.878
	SSP	1.775	1.649	0.282
School location	Major cities	-0.511	0.267	0.055*
	Outer regional	-0.059	0.488	0.904
	Remote & very remote	-0.719	1.064	0.499
FOEI		-0.005	0.004	0.237
Enrolments		-0.000	0.001	0.754
NAPLAN Score		-0.000	0.005	0.961
Income per student		0.614	0.795	0.440

B2 The area under a receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) represents the extent to which a test correctly classifies different outcomes, in this case, participation in the survey or not. A value of 0.5 indicates that the test does not discriminate accurately, while a value of 1 represents a perfect test.

Overall, the model moderately discriminated between those who completed the Round 2 Flexible Funding Survey and those who did not (AUC = 0.606).

The AUC values in both models indicate that the probability of participation in both the Round 1 and Round 2 surveys was not random (Green & Swets, 1996)^{B3}. Consequently, we calculated and applied probability weights to both the Round 1 and 2 surveys. The weights were calculated using the inverse of each school's predicted probability of responding. Once the weights were applied, the logistic regression models indicated that none of the variables predicted responding to the survey. Therefore, applying the weights resulted in survey data that was more closely aligned to the population of Flexible Funding schools.

B3 Green, D. M. & Swets, J. A. (1996). Signal detection theory and psychophysics. Peninsula Publishing, Los Altos, California, USA

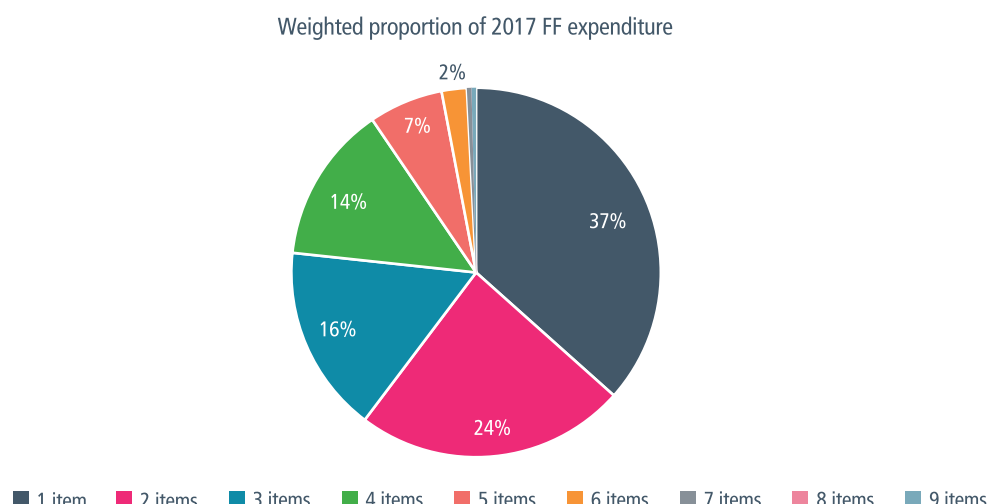
Appendix C: Additional 2017 survey results

Number and types of services funded

The number of separate services or activities on which schools spent their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services in 2017 is depicted in Figure C1. Similar to the 2018 results, the majority of schools allocated their 2017 funding to two or more items (63%), while 37% spent the entire amount on one item. The largest number of services or activities reported by an individual school in 2017 was nine, compared to eight in 2018.

Figure C1:

Number of individual services and/or activities on which schools spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services allocation

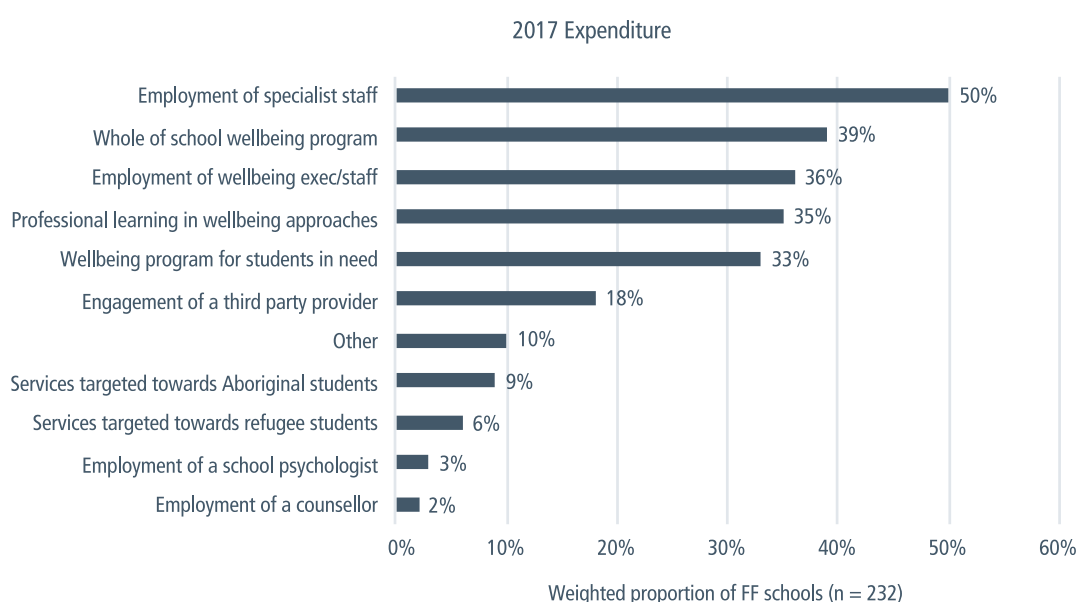


Note. These weighted proportions are based on 232 respondents

The pattern of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services expenditure was similar in 2017 as 2018 (Figure C2). However, there was a change to the way the survey response options were presented, with the option for Student Support Officer included as part of the broader category of 'Employment of specialist staff' in 2017.

Figure C2:

How schools spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for wellbeing expenditure



Note 1. The response options in the survey have been truncated in the figure above and others later in the report. The exact wording of these options in the survey is as follows (as ordered above): 'Employment of specialist student support staff (e.g., Student Support Officer (Youth Outreach Worker), Community Liaison officer)', 'Whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches', 'Employment of Wellbeing executive and/or teaching staff', 'Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., Positive Behaviour for Learning)', 'Wellbeing programs/approaches for students who need additional support', 'Engagement of external wellbeing service (third party) provider(s)', 'Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students', 'Services targeted specifically towards refugee students'.

Note 2. These weighted proportions are based on 232 respondents

Respondents who selected 'Engagement of a third party provider' were asked to specify the provider engaged. This type of service was funded by 18% of schools and specific examples included Life Skills groups, speech therapists and family referral services.

Approaches and activities specified in the 'Other' category (10%) included staff and/or consultants to support teaching and learning (27% of 'Other' responses), speech and occupational therapy support (20% of 'Other' responses) and mental health or related behaviour support (17% of 'Other' responses).

Fewer than one in ten schools funded 'Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students' (9%) and these schools most often specified employing staff such as Student Learning and Support Officers (SLSOs) or Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs). Other services and programs that schools reported funding for Aboriginal students targeted language skills, engagement and cultural appreciation.

Just over one in twenty schools allocated funds towards 'Services targeted specifically towards refugee students' (6%), with these schools specifying services such as engagement activities for students and parents (e.g., networking events and new arrivals programs) and language support (e.g., mentoring and employment of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) teachers).

School variation in the way Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services was spent

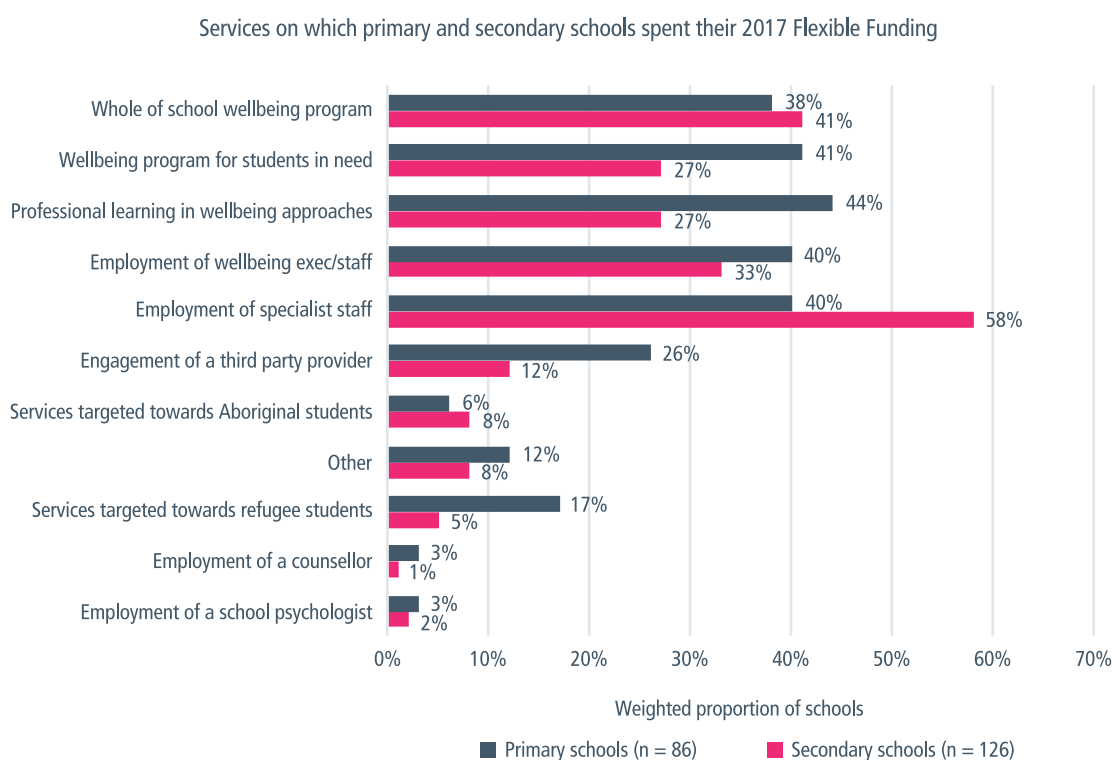
Primary and secondary schools

Similarly to 2018, the services that primary schools funded in 2017 differed to those that secondary schools funded (Figure 3). The most commonly funded services for primary schools were 'Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches' (44% vs 27% of secondary schools), 'Wellbeing programs for students who need additional support' (41% vs 27% of secondary schools) and 'Services targeted toward refugee students' (17% vs 5% of secondary schools).

Dissimilar to 2018, a particularly large proportion of secondary schools reported spending their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on 'Employment of specialist student support staff' (58% vs 40% of primary schools). This may be because in 2017 this category included the SSO position. When this position is given its own category in 2018, more primary schools selected 'Employment of specialist student support staff' than secondary.

Figure C3:

Services on which primary and secondary schools spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The average amount of Flexible Funding that primary and secondary schools spent on particular services in 2017 is shown in Table C1. This information is provided with the following caveats:

- Not all respondents provided answers to this question
- For some items, the number of respondents who provided amounts is small
- As noted in the main body of the report, it was evident that many schools had difficulty providing accurate expenditure data. For example, in many instances the sum of a school's reported expenditure on individual services was notably greater than the amount of funding that had been provided to that school.

Also note that the mean allocation of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services to schools was \$36,576 for primary schools and \$48,000 for secondary schools. This means that, in general, secondary schools are able to spend larger amounts on individual services than primary schools.

Table C1:

Mean 2017 expenditure on services by primary and secondary schools

Wellbeing service or activity	Mean expenditure (weighted) (for schools that provided an amount)	
	Primary	Secondary
Employment of a counsellor	\$84,135 (n=3)	\$35,000 (n=1)
Employment of a school psychologist	\$31,023 (n=2)	\$55,140 (n=3)
Employment of wellbeing exec/teaching staff	\$28,041 (n=31)	\$33,597 (n=33)
Employment of specialist support staff	\$21,735 (n=28)	\$42,595 (n=61)
Other	\$17,067 (n=10)	\$11,516 (n=4)
Wellbeing program for students in need	\$16,352 (n=24)	\$10,631 (n=22)
Engagement of a third party provider	\$12,751 (n=17)	\$18,292 (n=10)
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	\$11,654 (n=4)	\$44,655 (n=7)
Services targeted towards refugee students	\$10,901 (n=4)	\$11,024 (n=4)
Whole of school wellbeing program	\$7,891 (n=25)	\$14,667 (n=34)
Professional learning in wellbeing approaches	\$5,685 (n=31)	\$9,587 (n=24)

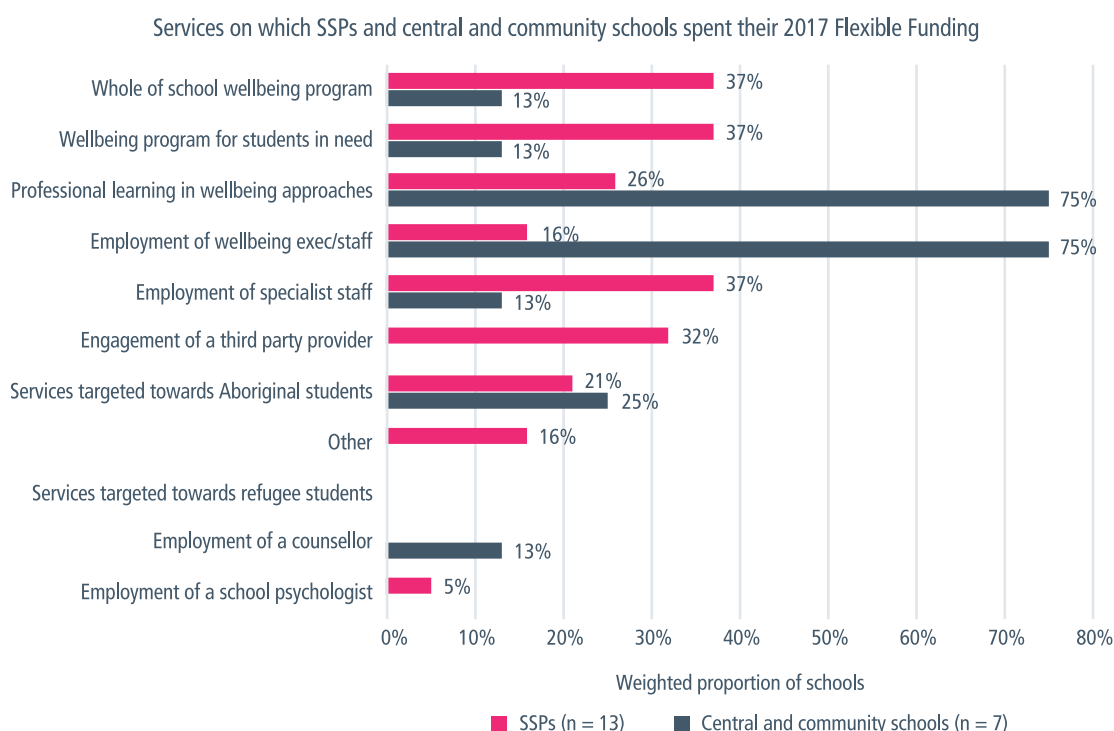
Schools for specific purposes (SSPs) and central and community schools

Consistent with the 2018 results, in 2017 SSPs most frequently spent their Flexible Funding on 'Employment of specialist student support staff', 'Whole of school wellbeing programs/approaches' and 'Wellbeing programs for students who need additional support' (n=5 for each).

Five of the seven central and community schools spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on 'Employment of wellbeing executive or teaching staff' and five spent it on 'Professional learning in evidence-based wellbeing approaches (e.g., Positive Behaviour for Learning)'. Two spent it on 'Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students' (Figure C4).

Figure C4:

Services on which SSPs and central and community schools spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The average amount of Flexible Funding that SSPs and central and community schools spent on particular services in 2017 has not been analysed because there were not enough respondents from these schools who provided amounts.

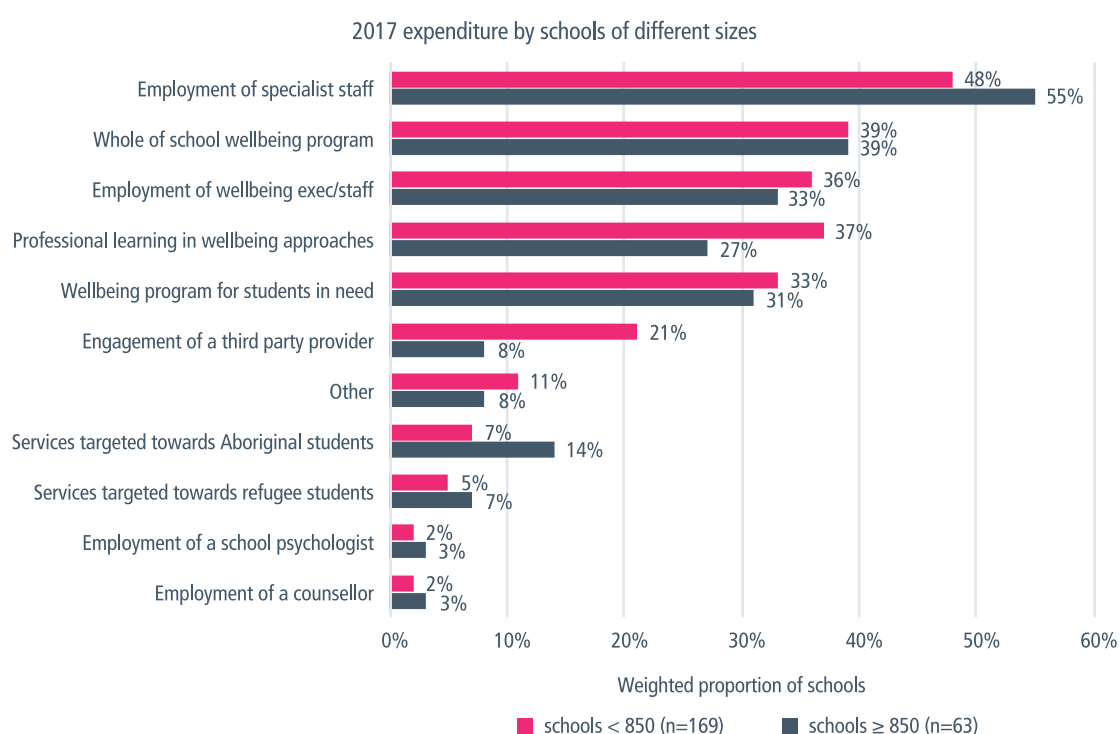
Schools with more than 850 students and schools with less than 850 students

In 2017, schools with less than 850 students more commonly spent their Flexible Funding on 'Services targeted specifically towards Aboriginal students' (14% compared to 7%) or 'Engagement of a third party provider' (21% compared to 8%) than schools with more than 850 students.

As shown in Figure C5, the most common use of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services across both groups was 'Employment of specialist student support staff' (55% amongst schools with more than 850 students and 48% amongst schools with less than 850 students).

Figure C5:

Services on which schools of different sizes spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The average amount of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spent by schools with less than 850 students and schools with more than 850 students on particular services is shown in Table C2. Only the 2017 survey asked respondents to specify these amounts.

Note that smaller schools with enrolments of less than 850 students received a mean Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services allocation of \$38,310 and schools with 850 or more enrolments received a mean allocation of \$55,854. This means that schools with more than 850 students are able to spend more than schools with less than 850 students on individual services.

Table C2:

Mean expenditure on services by schools of different sizes

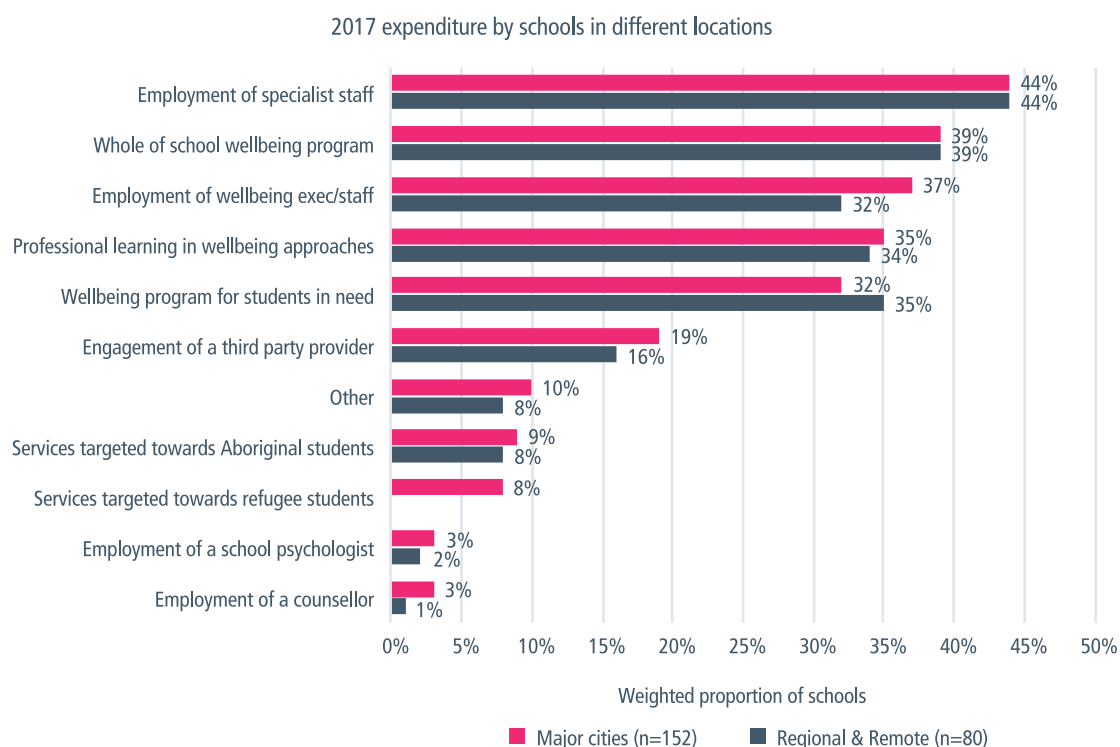
Wellbeing service or activity	Mean expenditure (weighted) (for schools that provided an amount)	
	< 850 students	≥ 850 students
Employment of a counsellor	\$84,135 (n=3)	\$31,145 (n=2)
Employment of a school psychologist	\$32,160 (n=4)	\$66,315 (n=2)
Employment of wellbeing exec/teaching staff	\$29,074 (n=54)	\$38,024 (n=16)
Employment of specialist support staff	\$29,238 (n=64)	\$50,557 (n=29)
Other	\$14,794 (n=13)	\$16,714 (n=3)
Wellbeing program for students in need	\$13,466 (n=37)	\$12,441 (n=13)
Engagement of a third party provider	\$14,006 (n=27)	\$18,921 (n=3)
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	\$15,934 (n=10)	\$54,738 (n=6)
Services targeted towards refugee students	\$9,075 (n=5)	\$14,503 (n=3)
Whole of school wellbeing program	\$8,315 (n=46)	\$21,660 (n=17)
Professional learning in wellbeing approaches	\$7,252 (n=47)	\$6,753 (n=14)

Schools in major cities and regional and remote schools

In 2017, schools in major cities and regional and remote schools most commonly chose to spend their Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services on 'Employment of specialist student support staff' (Figure C6). All 12 of the principals surveyed who allocated their Flexible Funding to 'Services targeted specifically towards refugee students' were from schools in major cities, which accounted for 8% of the services selected by schools in these locations. Other services were used to a similar extent despite location.

Figure C6:

Services on which schools in different locations spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The average amount of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services spent by schools in major cities and schools in regional and remote areas is shown in Table C3. Only the 2017 survey asked respondents to specify these amounts.

Note that the average amount of funding allocated to schools was very similar across groups. Schools in regional and remote areas received \$42,468 on average while schools in major cities received \$43,327 on average.

Table C3:

Mean expenditure on services by school location

Wellbeing service or activity	Mean expenditure (weighted) (for schools that provided an amount)	
	Major cities	Regional & remote
Employment of a counsellor	\$71,547 (n=4)	\$25,000 (n=1)
Employment of a school psychologist	\$47,747 (n=5)	\$20,000 (n=1)
Employment of wellbeing exec/teaching staff	\$31,138 (n=50)	\$30,781 (n=20)
Employment of specialist support staff	\$33,855 (n=59)	\$38,896 (n=34)
Other	\$12,844 (n=12)	\$25,589 (n=4)
Wellbeing program for students in need	\$16,501 (n=34)	\$5,731 (n=16)
Engagement of a third party provider	\$11,906 (n=22)	\$22,079 (n=8)
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	\$31,690 (n=11)	\$26,315 (n=5)
Services targeted towards refugee students	\$10,960 (n=8)	\$0 (n=0)
Whole of school wellbeing program	\$13,825 (n=42)	\$7,469 (n=20)
Professional learning in wellbeing approaches	\$6,504 (n=44)	\$9,010 (n=17)

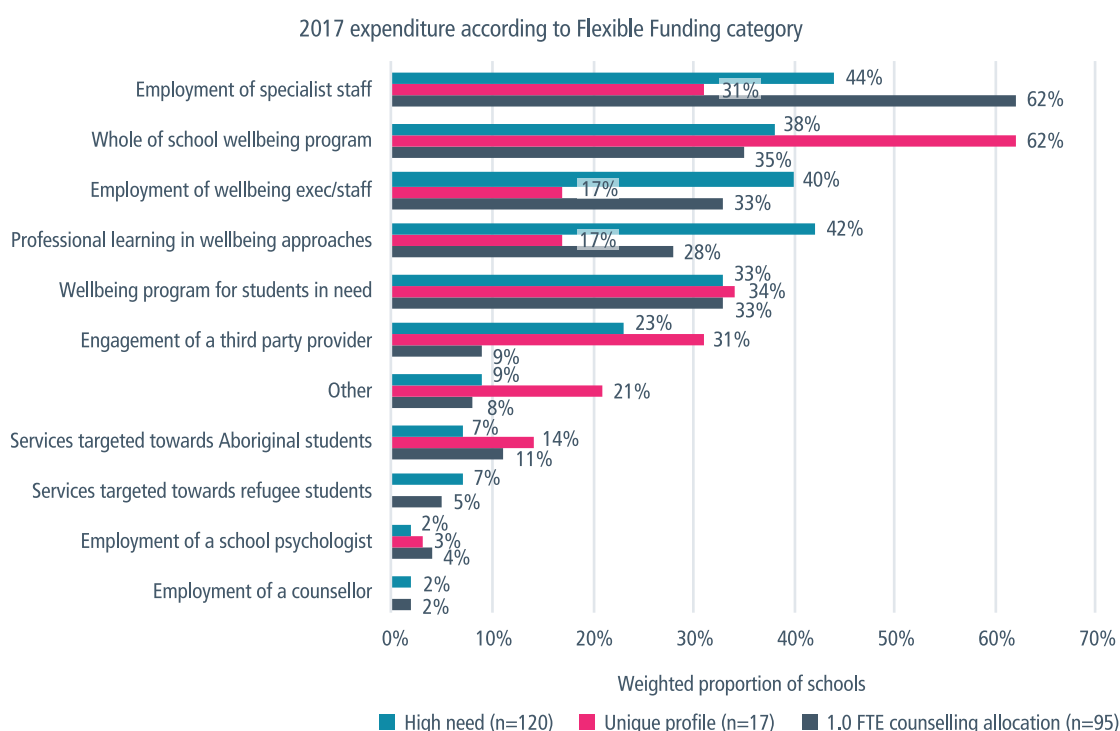
Schools as per the three Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services eligibility criteria

The way in which schools within each of the three funding eligibility categories spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services differed (Figure C7). Specifically:

- Schools that have a 1.0 FTE counselling allocation were more likely to spend their funding on 'Employment of specialist staff' than the other two categories.
- Schools with unique profiles were more likely to spend their funding on 'Whole of school wellbeing programs'
- Schools with high needs were more likely to spend their funds on 'Professional learning in wellbeing approaches' and 'Employment of wellbeing exec/staff.'

Figure C7:

Services on which schools within each eligibility category spent their 2017 Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The average amount of Flexible Funding that schools in each funding eligibility category spent on particular services in 2017 is shown in Table C4. Not all respondents provided answers to this question and for some services, the number of respondents who provided amounts is small.

Note that the mean allocation of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services was \$50,301 for schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation, \$41,967 for schools with unique profiles, and \$38,919 for schools with high targeted needs. This means that, in general, schools with 1.0 FTE counselling allocation are able to spend larger amounts on individual services than schools with unique profiles and schools with high targeted needs.

Table C4:

Mean expenditure on services by schools in each flexible funding category

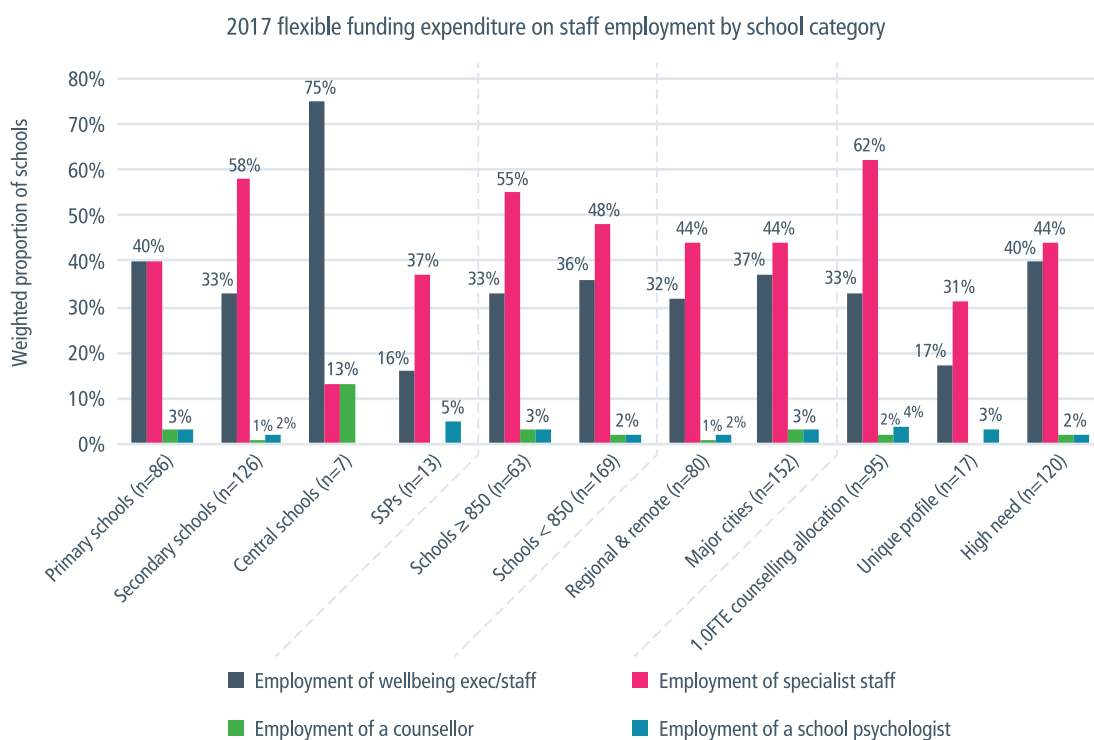
Wellbeing service or activity	Mean expenditure (weighted) (for schools that provided an amount)		
	1.0 FTE counselling allocation	Unique profile	High targeted needs
Employment of a counsellor	\$31,145 (n=2)	\$0 (n=0)	\$84,135 (n=3)
Employment of a school psychologist	\$55,140 (n=3)	\$34,000 (n=1)	\$31,023 (n=2)
Employment of wellbeing exec/teaching staff	\$29,210 (n=24)	\$25,959 (n=3)	\$32,258 (n=43)
Employment of specialist support staff	\$44,598 (n=45)	\$38,645 (n=4)	\$27,468 (n=44)
Other	\$14,958 (n=6)	\$11,862 (n=2)	\$15,901 (n=8)
Wellbeing program for students in need	\$10,934 (n=20)	\$6,202 (n=4)	\$15,562 (n=26)
Engagement of a third party provider	\$15,012 (n=6)	\$11,937 (n=3)	\$14,658 (n=21)
Services targeted towards Aboriginal students	\$52,987 (n=6)	\$13,297 (n=3)	\$18,387 (n=7)
Services targeted towards refugee students	\$14,503 (n=3)	\$0 (n=0)	\$9,075 (n=5)
Whole of school wellbeing program	\$16,598 (n=24)	\$10,733 (n=6)	\$9,124 (n=33)
Professional learning in wellbeing approaches	\$10,803 (n=20)	\$4,381 (n=3)	\$5,779 (n=38)

Similar proportions of schools across different school categories chose to spend funds on additional staff to support student wellbeing

Similar proportions of schools across different school categories allocated funds to the employment of staff to support student wellbeing in 2017 (Figure C8). Proportions were typically highest for the employment of wellbeing executive/staff and specialist staff.

Figure C8:

Proportion of schools expending 2017 flexible funding on staff employment – by school category



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

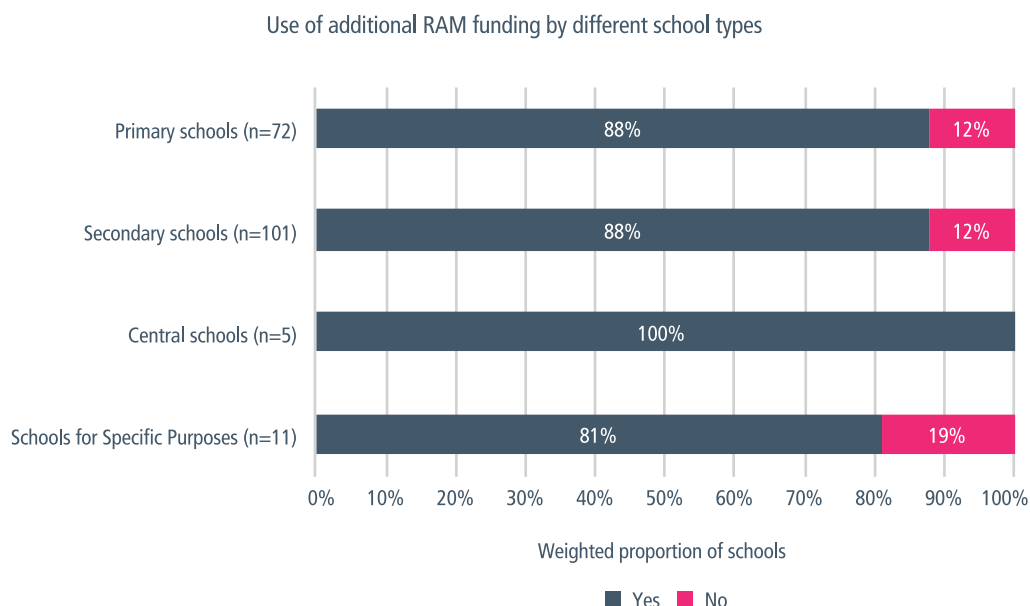
Using additional RAM funding to support student wellbeing

Approximately nine out of ten schools, across the different school types, chose to allocate additional funds from their RAM to support student wellbeing with the exception of central schools (Figure C9). The proportions were identical amongst primary and secondary schools (88%).

Note that several schools did not answer this question.

Figure C9:

Use of additional RAM funding in 2017 by different school types



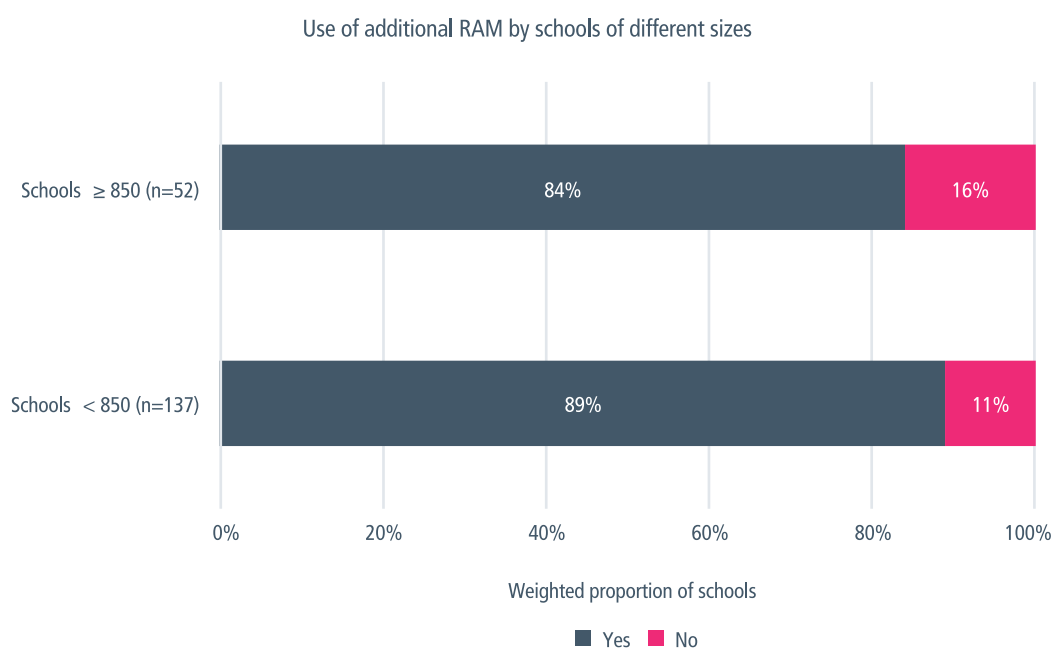
Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

The proportion of schools that chose to supplement Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services with additional RAM funds to support student wellbeing was similarly high in schools with less than 850 students (89%) and schools with more than 850 students (84%) ($\chi^2(1) = .69, p=.41$) (Figure C10).

Note that several schools did not answer this question.

Figure C10:

Use of additional RAM funding in 2017 by schools of different sizes

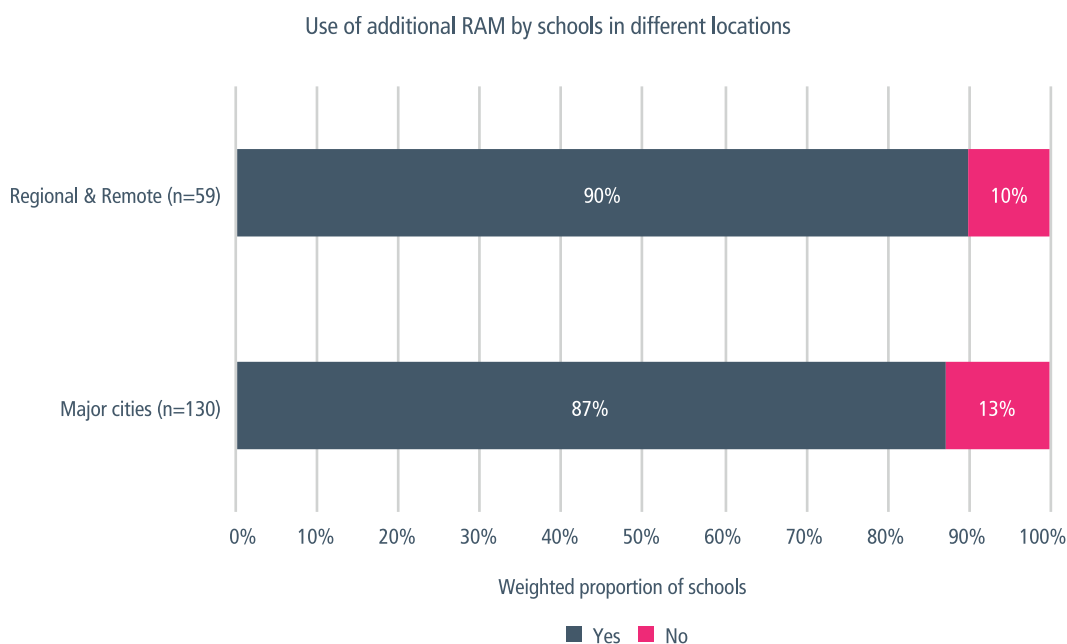


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Allocation of additional funds from within RAM did not vary by school location, with approximately nine in ten schools located in major cities (87%) and in regional and remote areas (90%) ($\chi^2(1) = .32, p=.57$) (Figure C11).

Figure C11:

Use of additional RAM funding in 2017 by schools in different locations

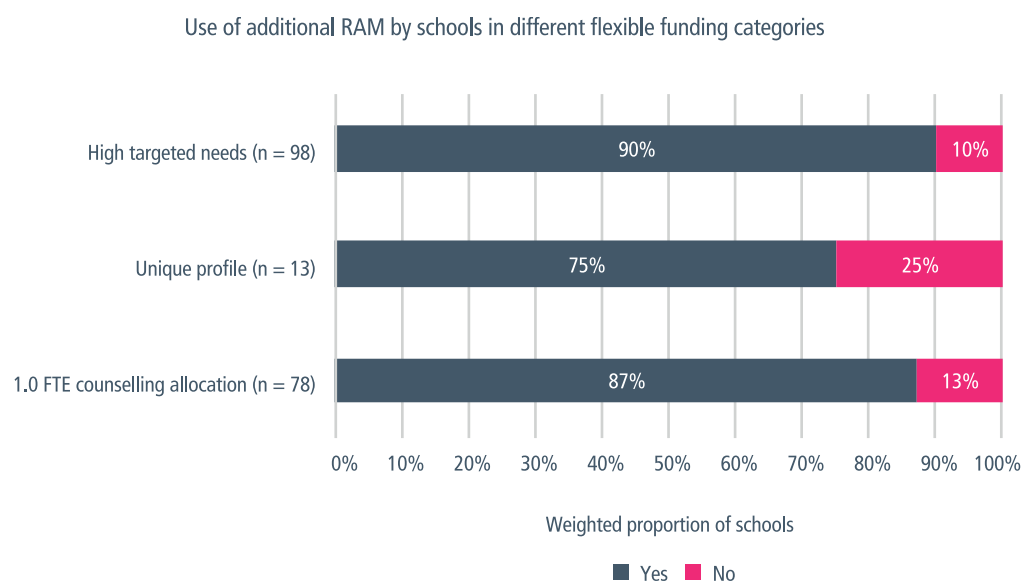


Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Approximately nine out of ten schools in the high targeted needs and 1.0 FTE counselling allocation funding eligibility categories and eight out of ten schools in the unique profiles funding eligibility category, chose to allocate additional funds from their RAM to support student wellbeing ($\chi^2(2) = 1.83, p=.40$) (Figure C12).

Figure C12:

Use of additional RAM funding in 2017 by schools in different flexible funding categories



Note. These base sizes are unweighted.

Appendix D: Technical details regarding the analysis of the *Tell Them From Me* student survey data

We used the department's *Tell Them From Me* (TTFM) student survey to investigate whether measures of student wellbeing changed after the introduction of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. The survey measures student engagement, wellbeing and effective teaching practices in NSW public schools. It was first piloted in NSW in 2013 and 2014 and became available for all schools to opt-in from 2015 onwards. Student participation in the survey is voluntary (managed via an opt-out process) and principals can also select which year groups and classes are invited to participate.

Population of interest and sample properties

Of the 557 secondary schools that were open in 2016 and 2018, 277 (49.7%) participated in both waves of the survey. Of the 366,168 students who attended these schools in these calendar years, 244,294 (66.7%) completed the student survey. To minimise selection bias, we used a two-stage procedure to calculate inverse probability weights⁴. We used these weights to reconfigure the sample data so that it better represented the populations of interest. Of the students that were included in the analysis, 129,568 attended secondary schools that received flexible funding for student wellbeing while 114,726 attended secondary schools that did not.

Of the 1,722 primary schools that were open in 2016 and 2018, 781 (45.4%) participated in both waves of the survey. Of the 226,665 students who attended these schools in these calendar years, 191,267 (84.4%) completed the student survey. To minimise selection bias, we used a two-stage procedure to calculate inverse probability weights¹. We used these weights to reconfigure the sample data so that it better represented the populations of interest. Of the students that were included in the analysis, 25,389 attended primary schools that received flexible funding for student wellbeing while 165,878 attended primary schools that did not.

Outcome measures

The TTFM student survey consists of a number of measures of wellbeing and engagement. The measures we examined are detailed below. These measures are scored on a 10-point scale, except for bullying which is a categorical variable consisting of "victim of moderate bullying", "victim of severe bullying" and "not bullied". We converted all measures to binary variables, as follows:

- Sense of belonging measures whether students feel included and accepted at school and by their peers. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report a high sense of belonging.
- Positive relationships measures how students get along with, and relate to their peers. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report positive relationships.
- Positive behaviour measures how often students are not disruptive or do not break school rules. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report positive behaviours.
- Bullying measures whether students have experienced any physical, verbal, social, or cyber bullying. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who report being "bullied" and "not bullied."

⁴ We first used school-level information to model the probability that a school would respond to the survey. This first model included information regarding school type, selective school status, coeducational status, school remoteness, school size and school socio-educational advantage. We then used student-level information to model the probability that a student would respond to the survey, conditional on their school having participated that year. This second model included information regarding student gender, student socio-educational advantage, scholastic year level, whether the student had valid NAPLAN results and the attendance rate for their scholastic year. To calculate the sampling weights, the predicted probabilities from both these models were first inverted and then multiplied together.

- Attendance (secondary schools only) measures self-reported attendance. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report high attendance.
- Optimism (secondary schools only) measures whether students feel good and whether they expect to have positive experiences. We converted this measure to a binary variable consisting of the proportion of students who do and do not report high levels of optimism.

Statistical analysis

We used a series of student-level regression models to estimate changes in the above outcome measures in the schools that received Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services (FF schools) and the schools that did not receive Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services (non-FF schools). The models can be written as:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot FF\ school_j + \beta_2 \cdot time_t + \beta_3 \cdot (time_t \cdot FF\ school_j) + \varepsilon_{ijt}$$

where Y_{ijt} represents the outcome for student i who attended school j in calendar year t ; $FF\ school_j$ is a dummy coded variable taking the value 1 when student i attended an FF school and 0 when student i attended a non-FF school; $time_t$ is a dummy coded variable taking the value 1 when the survey response was collected in 2018 (2 years after the roll-out of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services) and 0 when the survey response was collected in 2016 (at the commencement of the Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services initiative).

In the above equation, β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended an FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in an FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences); and ε_{ijt} represents the error term.

The error term ε_{ijt} in these models does not follow a normal distribution so we did not construct the 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the estimated regression coefficients in the usual way. Instead we used cluster bootstrapping to obtain percentile-based 95% confidence intervals⁵.

⁵ We resampled the dataset with replacement 1000 times using a clustered bootstrap method to account for school-level clustering of students. We obtained one estimate from each sample, and obtained the CIs from the percentile of the 1000 estimates.

Results

Sense of belonging

Primary schools

We present the estimated proportions of primary school students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF primary schools in Figure D1. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D1. Our results show that, in 2016, about 80% (95% CI [79, 80]) of students in non-FF primary schools self-reported a positive sense of belonging, while the estimated proportion for FF primary schools was about 1 percentage point higher (95% CI [0, 2]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging in non-FF primary schools decreased by about 2 percentage points (95% CI [-3, -1]). This was about the same as the decrease in FF primary schools (95% CI [-1, 2]). Therefore, the change in self-reported positive sense of belonging within FF primary schools is no different to the change within non-FF primary schools.

Figure D1:

Estimated proportion of students with a positive sense of belonging in primary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

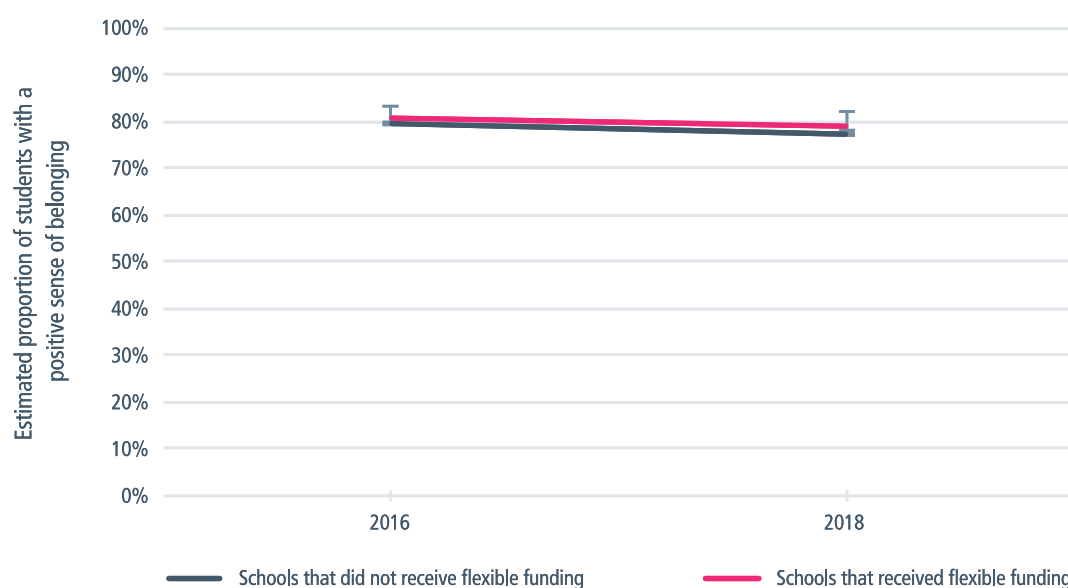


Table D1:

Results of regression analysis for sense of belonging TTFM data in primary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.80	0.79	0.80
β_1	0.01	0.00	0.02
β_2	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01
β_3	0.00	-0.01	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Secondary schools

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D2. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D2. Our results show that, in 2016, about 66% (95% CI [64, 68]) of students in non-FF secondary schools self-reported a positive sense of belonging. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about 2 percentage points lower (95% CI [-4, 0]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging in non-FF secondary schools decreased by about 3 percentage points (95% CI [-6, -1]). Over the same time period, the decrease in FF secondary schools was about 1 percentage point (95% CI [-2, 4]) less than non-FF schools. In other words, the proportion of students that self-reported a positive sense of belonging at FF schools decreased slightly less than at non-FF schools. However, this difference between groups is very small and therefore unlikely to be meaningful. The reduction in self-reported positive sense of belonging is also small for both groups.

Figure D2:

Estimated proportion of students with a positive sense of belonging in secondary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

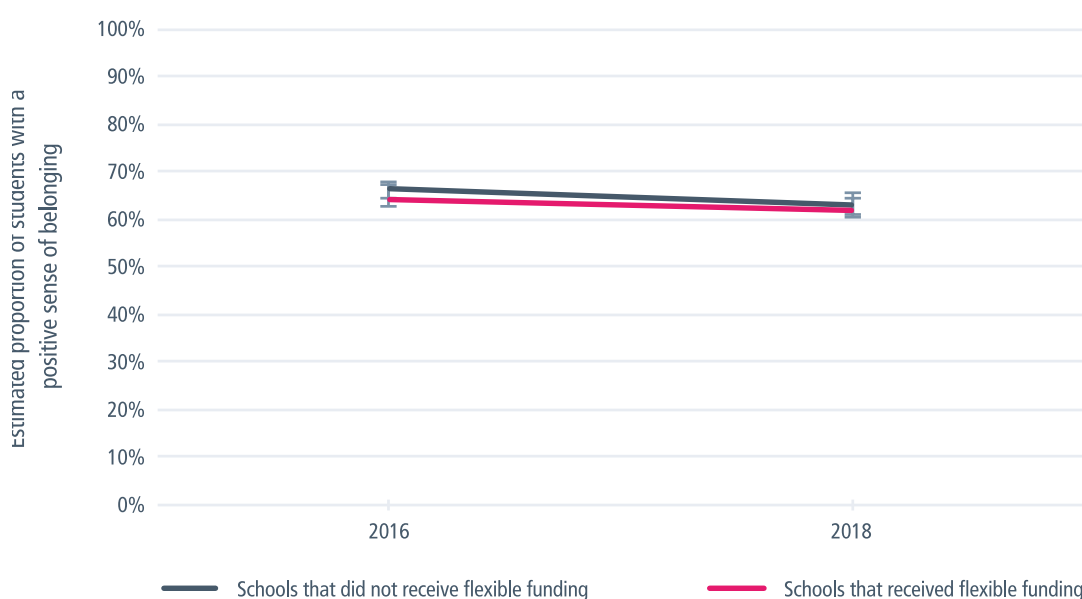


Table D2:

Results of regression analysis for sense of belonging TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.66	0.64	0.68
β_1	-0.02	-0.04	0.00
β_2	-0.03	-0.06	-0.01
β_3	0.01	-0.02	0.04

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Positive relationships

Primary schools

We present the estimated proportions of primary school students that self-reported positive relationships for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF primary schools in Figure D3. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D3. Our results show that, in 2016, about 85% (95% CI [85, 86]) of students in non-FF primary schools self-reported positive relationships. The estimated proportion for FF primary schools was about four percentage points lower (95% CI [-6, -3]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported positive relationships in non-FF primary schools remained about the same (95% CI [-1, 0]). Over the same time period, the proportion of students that self-reported positive relationships in FF primary schools also remained the same (95% CI [-2, 2]). Therefore, there were no changes in positive relationships for either FF or non-FF primary schools.

Figure D3:

Estimated proportion of students with positive relationships in primary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

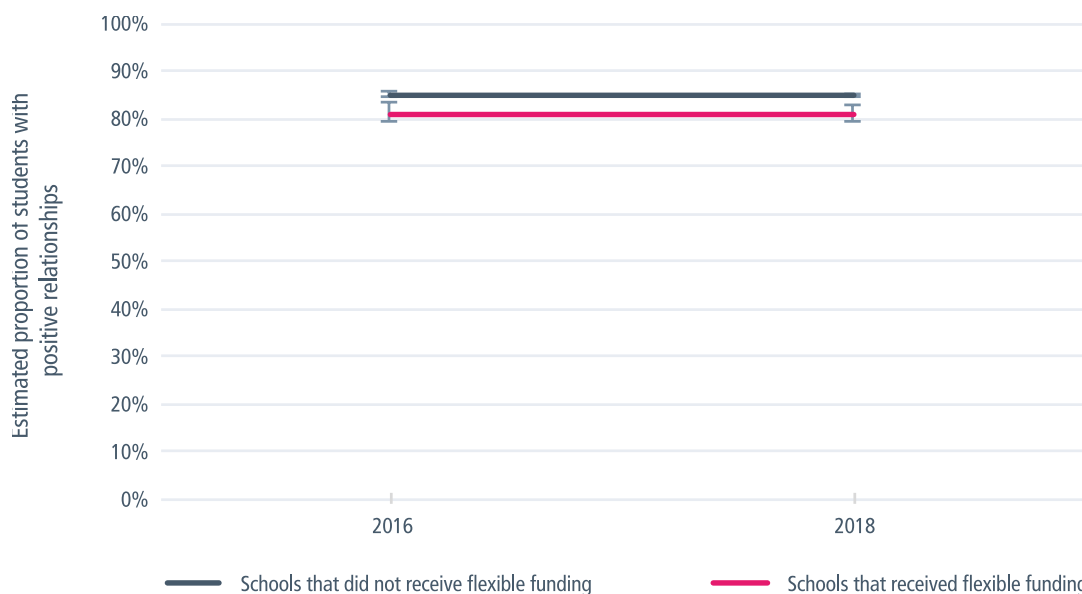


Table D3:

Results of regression analysis for positive relationships TTFM data in primary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.85	0.85	0.86
β_1	-0.04	-0.06	-0.03
β_2	0.00	-0.01	0.00
β_3	0.00	-0.02	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Secondary schools

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that self-reported positive relationships for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D4. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D4. Our results show that, in 2016, about 79% (95% CI [78, 79]) of students in non-FF secondary schools self-reported positive relationships. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about two percentage points lower (95% CI [-3, 0]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported positive relationships in non-FF secondary schools decreased by about two percentage points (95% CI [-3, -1]). This was about the same as the decrease in FF secondary schools (95% CI [-2, 2]). Therefore, the change within FF schools is no different to the change within non-FF schools.

Figure D4:

Estimated proportion of students with positive relationships in secondary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

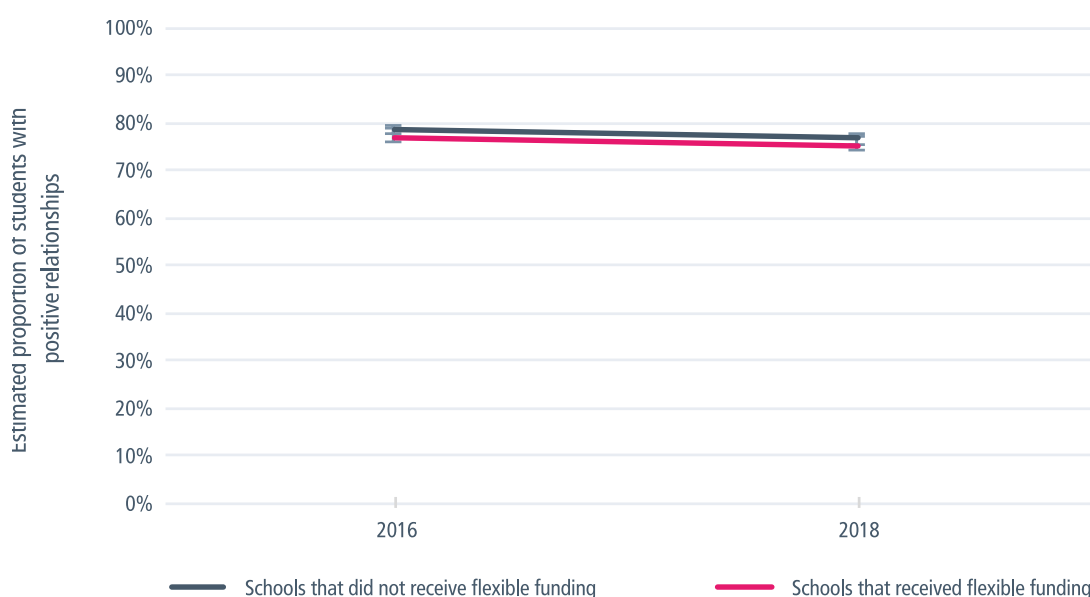


Table D4:

Results of regression analysis for positive relationships TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.79	0.78	0.79
β_1	-0.02	-0.03	0.00
β_2	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01
β_3	0.00	-0.02	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Positive behaviour

Primary schools

We present the estimated proportions of primary school students that self-reported positive behaviour for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF primary schools in Figure D5. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D5. Our results show that, in 2016, about 89 % (95% CI [88, 89]) of students in non-FF primary schools self-reported positive behaviour. The estimated proportion for FF primary schools was about two percentage points lower (95% CI [-3, 0]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported positive behaviour in non-FF primary schools remained about the same (95% CI [0, 1]). Over the same time period, there was a decrease in FF primary schools of about one percentage point (95% CI [-3, 1]) more than the non-FF schools. In other words, the proportion of students that self-reported positive behaviours decreased slightly at FF schools and remained unchanged at non-FF schools. However, this decrease is very small, and the difference between groups is very small, and therefore unlikely to be meaningful.

Figure D5:

Estimated proportion of students with positive behaviour in primary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey



Table D5:

Results of regression analysis for positive behaviour TTFM data in primary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.89	0.88	0.89
β_1	-0.02	-0.03	0.00
β_2	0.00	0.00	0.01
β_3	-0.01	-0.03	0.01

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Secondary schools

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that self-reported positive behaviour for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D6. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D6. Our results show that, in 2016, about 90 % (95% CI [89, 91]) of students in non-FF secondary schools self-reported positive behaviour. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about two percentage points lower (95% CI [-3, 0]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported positive behaviour in non-FF secondary schools decreased by about one percentage point (95% CI [-3, 1]). This was about the same as the decrease in FF secondary schools (95% CI [-2, 3]). Therefore, the change within FF schools is no different to the change within non-FF schools.

Figure D6:

Estimated proportion of students with positive behaviour in secondary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey

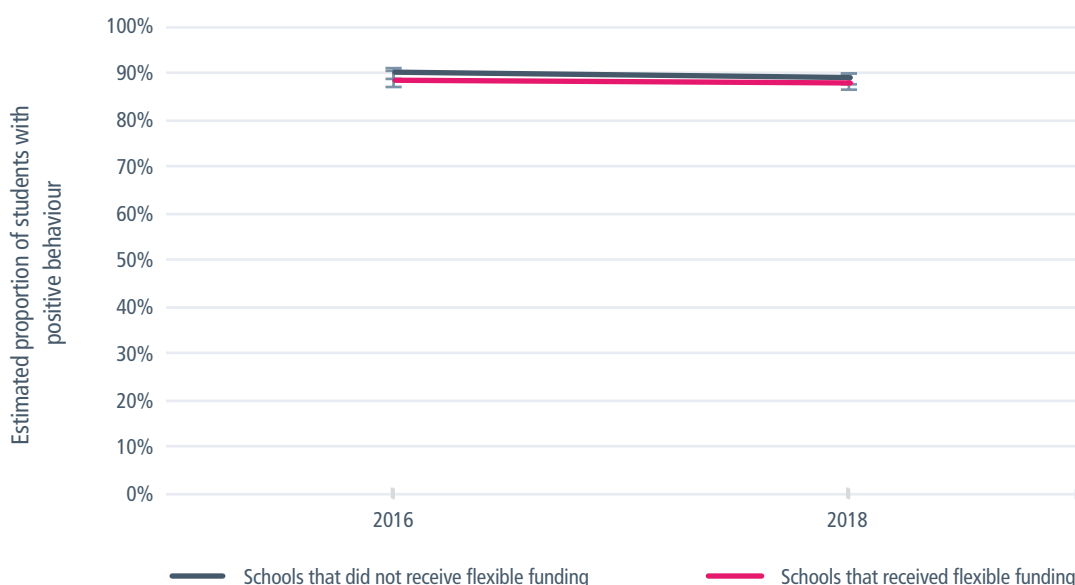


Table D6:

Results of regression analysis for positive behaviour TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.90	0.89	0.91
β_1	-0.02	-0.03	0.00
β_2	-0.01	-0.03	0.01
β_3	0.00	-0.02	0.03

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Bullying

Primary schools

We present the estimated proportions of primary school students that self-reported being bullied for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF primary schools in Figure D7. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D7. Our results show that, in 2016, about 50 % (95% CI [50, 51]) of students in non-FF primary schools self-reported being bullied. The estimated proportion for FF primary schools was about two percentage points higher (95% CI [0, 4]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that self-reported being bullied in non-FF primary schools decreased by about two percentage points (95% CI [-3, -2]). Over the same time period, there was a decrease in FF primary schools of about one percentage point (95% CI [-1, 4]) less than non-FF schools. In other words, the proportion of students that self-reported being bullied at FF schools decreased slightly less than at non-FF schools. However, the difference between groups is very small and the decrease is very small, and therefore unlikely to be meaningful.

Figure D7:

Estimated proportion of students who reported being bullied in primary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey



Table D7:

Results of regression analysis for positive behaviour TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.50	0.50	0.51
β_1	0.02	0.00	0.04
β_2	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02
β_3	0.01	-0.01	0.04

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Secondary schools

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that self-reported being bullied for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D8. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D8. Our results show that, in 2016, about 22 % (95% CI [21, 23]) of students in non-FF secondary schools self-reported being bullied in 2016. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about two percentage points higher (95% CI [0, 3]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students who self-reported being bullied in non-FF secondary schools increased by about two percentage points (95% CI [0, 4]). This change was about the same as the increase in FF secondary schools (95% CI [-3, 2]). Therefore, the change within FF schools is no different to the change within non-FF schools.

Figure D8:

Estimated proportion of students with positive behaviour in secondary schools as measured by the TTFM student survey



Table D8:

Results of regression analysis for bullying TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.22	0.21	0.23
β_1	0.02	0.00	0.03
β_2	0.02	0.00	0.04
β_3	0.00	-0.03	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Attendance (secondary schools only)

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that scored high on self-reported attendance for 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D9. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D9. Our results show that, in 2016, about 91 % (95% CI [90, 91]) of students in non-FF secondary schools scored high on self-reported attendance in 2016. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about two percentage points lower (95% CI [-4, -1]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students that scored high on self-reported attendance in non-FF secondary schools decreased by about one percentage point (95% CI [-2, 1]). Over the same time period, there was no decrease in FF secondary schools so the difference between the two changes was about one percentage point (95% CI [-1, 3]). In other words, the proportion of students that scored high on self-reported attendance at FF schools stayed the same while the proportion of students that scored high on self-reported attendance at non-FF schools decreased slightly. However, this difference between groups is very small and therefore unlikely to be meaningful.

Figure D9:

Estimated proportion of students who self-reported high attendance as measured by the TTFM student survey

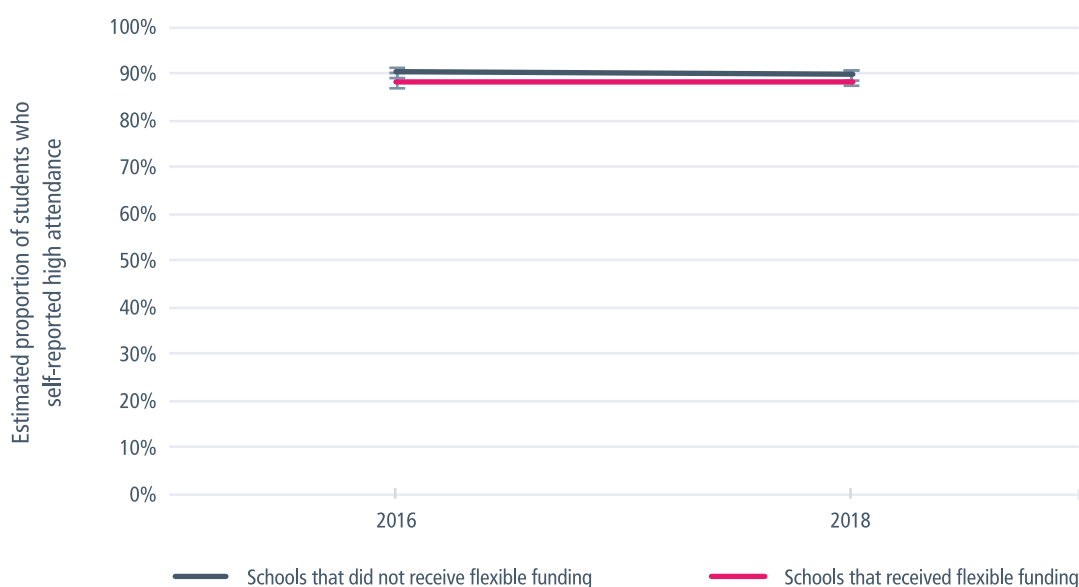


Table D9:

Results of regression analysis for attendance TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.91	0.90	0.91
β_1	-0.02	-0.04	-0.01
β_2	-0.01	-0.02	0.01
β_3	0.01	-0.01	0.03

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Optimism (secondary schools only)

We present the estimated proportions of secondary school students that scored high on self-reported optimism 2016 (pre) and 2018 (post) calendar years in FF and non-FF secondary schools in Figure D10. We also present the estimated regression parameters in Table D10. Our results show that, in 2016, about 43 % (95% CI [42, 44]) of students in non-FF secondary schools scored high on self-reported optimism. The estimated proportion for FF secondary schools was about one percentage point higher (95% CI [-1, 2]) for the same year. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of students who scored high on self-reported optimism in non-FF secondary schools increased by about one percentage point (95% CI [0, 3]). Over the same time period, there was no increase in FF secondary schools and the difference between the two changes over time was about one percentage point (95% CI [-3, 2]). In other words, the proportion of students who scored high on self-reported optimism at non-FF schools increased slightly and remained unchanged at FF schools. However, this increase is very small, and the difference between groups is very small, and therefore unlikely to be meaningful.

Figure D10:

Estimated proportion of students in secondary schools who self-reported high levels of optimism as measured by the TTFM student survey

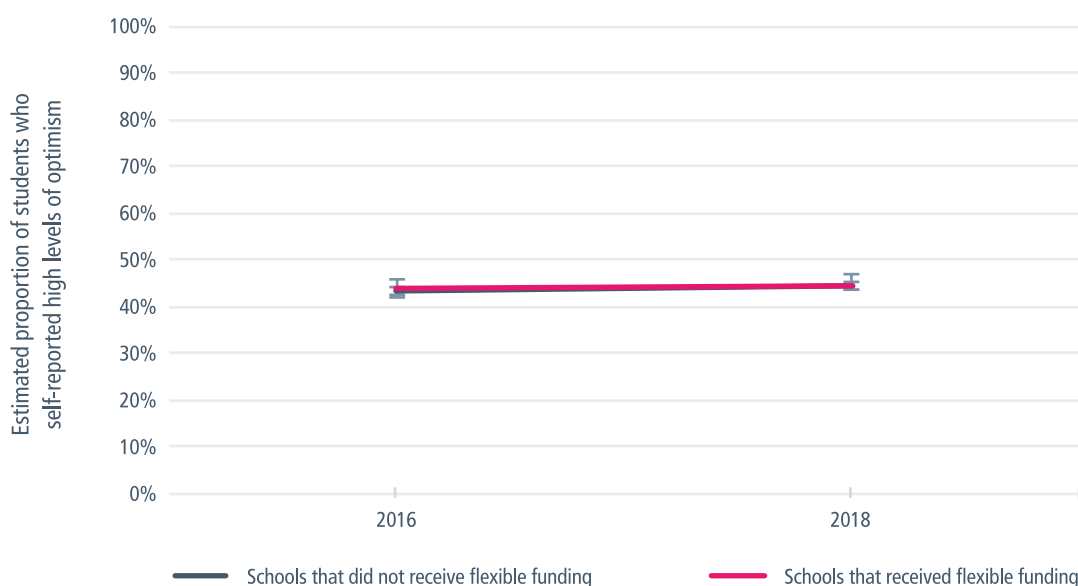


Table D10:

Results of regression analysis for optimism TTFM data in secondary schools

Parameter	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap 95% percentile-based confidence interval	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
β_0	0.43	0.42	0.44
β_1	0.01	-0.01	0.02
β_2	0.01	0.00	0.03
β_3	-0.01	-0.03	0.02

Note: β_0 represents the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_1 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a FF school in 2016 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016;

β_2 represents the difference between the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2018 and the expected outcome for a student who attended a non-FF school in 2016; and

β_3 represents the expected change in the outcome for a student in a FF school following the introduction of Flexible Funding (that is, the difference between the differences).

Limitations

We identify four limitations to these analyses.

1. TTFM is designed to provide schools with data that they can use to inform their school self-assessment, planning and monitoring. Data from the survey should be used cautiously in a research context because the survey's purpose is not to compare one group of schools with another. As a voluntary survey, schools can elect whether or not to participate and those schools that choose to participate can also select which year groups and/or classes complete the survey, and this potentially introduces selection biases. We applied a weighting procedure to minimise these biases to the extent possible.
2. Traditional difference-in-differences models have an assumption of common trends. This assumes that in the absence of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services, schools that received this funding would have the same average change over time as schools that did not receive this funding. We do not have historical TTFM data or information about any other wellbeing programs that schools are implementing, so we cannot say with certainty that the trends would be similar in the absence of Flexible Funding for Wellbeing Services. For this reason, our difference-in-differences models are not estimates of causal effects, and are better conceptualised as models for the mean change over time.
3. The amount of Flexible Funding provided to individual schools ranged from \$33,067 to \$82,667 per year. This is a relatively small amount of money in comparison to the total amount of money that an individual school spends on initiatives and activities that impact on student wellbeing. We know from our survey results that the great majority of schools topped up their Flexible Funding with other sources of funding. This makes it harder to detect a difference between FF and non-FF groups. It also makes it harder to attribute any changes in the outcomes to Flexible Funding.
4. TTFM provides a measure of whole-school or whole-year student wellbeing. Our survey results indicate that many Flexible Funding schools used their funding on initiatives that targeted a subset of students rather than whole-school initiatives. This makes it harder to detect an effect at a whole-school level.
5. Our survey results show that schools spent their Flexible Funding on a diverse range of services. Our chosen TTFM outcome variables will likely be more relevant to some services than others. It was not possible to tailor our analyses to subgroups of schools as the sample size would be too small. This situation again makes it more difficult to detect differences between the two groups.

Summary

Our outcome analyses found no meaningful differences between FF and non-FF schools in the mean (average) change over time in self-reported student wellbeing measures captured in the TTFM survey. However, we identify a number of limitations that make it difficult to detect school-level differences between the two groups.



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