

# RESEARCH DESIGN

The evaluators have utilised qualitative and quantitative tools and techniques in addressing the research questions below.

## **Overarching research question:**

*Can the BSEM be applied in Government schools?*

## **Sub-questions:**

*Has the use of the BSEM impacted on student wellbeing? If so how?*

*Has the use of the BSEM impacted on (a) student achievement, including literacy and numeracy (b) student engagement, and (c) school suspension or incident data? If so how?*

*What have been positive outcomes of the BSEM pilot?*

*What have been the key challenges of the BSEM Pilot?*

Data collection was carried out in two stages, near the commencement of the Pilot and following its conclusion. Interview data was drawn from focus groups conducted with students, teachers and school leadership during two sets of visits to the participant schools (Latimer Valley P-12 and Mt Excel PS). Student focus groups were comprised of young people across Years 5-8 at Latimer Valley P-12 and Years 5/6 at Mt Excel.

**Table 1: Focus group participants**

	Latimer Valley (P-12)		Mt Excel (PS)		Total
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	
School leadership	4	2	2	1	9
Teachers	5	8	2	4	19
Students	13	13	13	13	52
Total					80

A total of 26 young people (13 at each setting) formed focus groups for the first stage of the interview process. All but three of the young people (two at Latimer Valley P-12, one at Mt Excel PS) were able to take part in the second round of focus groups. Their places were filled by other students, including two young people from the FLO program at Latimer Valley P-12.

Analysis of findings from Phase One informed the delivery of an Interim Report to Berry Street in July 2015.

Interview data collected during Phase Two was supplemented by school outcomes data including:

- Student wellbeing data (per a modified version of the Student Attitude to School survey (SASS)), completed by students at the start and conclusion of the pilot.
- AusVELS data, December 2014 and December 2015; and
- School suspension data 2014-2015.

This final report incorporates findings from both stages of data collection.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Berry Street is the largest independent child and welfare organisation in Victoria. During the past decade (i.e. since 2003) its wide range of services and activities has expanded to include direct provision of alternative education for young people who are affected by experiencing or witnessing trauma. There are currently three Berry Street School campuses, each of which emerged out of concerns at the inability of local mainstream settings to adequately meet the complex educational and therapeutic needs of these young people.

Teaching at each Berry Street campus is framed by the organisation's own model of education. The BSEM draws on extensive international research that has included systematic review, analysis and comparison of such programs and philosophies as the Sanctuary Model, USA (Bloom, 1995), or the Calmer Classrooms, Australia (Downy, 2007) approach.

Most existing (or traditional) models take a two-tier healing approach to learning that focuses primarily on repairing the student (i.e. fixing self-regulatory and relational abilities), and progressing from a deficit perspective (e.g. what deficiencies or developmental struggles does this student face?) (Brunzell, Waters & Stokes, 2015).

The BSEM seeks to take the healing approach a step further by adopting a 'strengths' perspective (e.g. what strengths does this student have to build upon for future success?). The Model proposes three tiers of therapeutic learning and growth. It builds on (or extends) the focus of previous practice on **repairing the student's regulatory abilities (Tier 1) and repairing the student's disrupted attachments (Tier 2)**, by adding a third domain: **increasing the young person's psychological resources in order to promote post-traumatic growth (Tier 3)** (see Figure 2).

It is argued that by focusing on healing while simultaneously providing pathways towards post-traumatic growth, the BSEM expands the possibilities of teaching and learning and makes a unique contribution that bridges research from the fields of traumatology and positive education. Berry Street likewise argues that the Model has strong cross-sectoral potential, believing that its impact within specialist settings is replicable and it can be applied effectively in mainstream schools. Almost 40% of American school students can be defined as being trauma-affected, based on them having been exposed to some sort of traumatic stressor. The majority of these students are in mainstream schools (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014). This finding has clear and disturbing implications for the Australian educational community.

Teachers in both mainstream and specialist settings increasingly confront challenges in educating students who present with a range of symptoms and behaviours that include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), peer bullying, school refusal, conduct and oppositional-defiance disorders, distracted or aggressive behaviour, limited attentional capacities, poor emotional regulation, attachment difficulties and poor relationships with peers. There is growing need for educational approaches that address effectively the complex needs of the growing proportion of students who are struggling in 21st century classrooms.