

Using Sparklers to support the mental health of Canterbury children

Capturing the experiences of those using the Sparklers web-based resource in primary and intermediate schools



An evaluation report prepared
for the *All Right?* Team/Sparklers Project Team
by the Information Team,
Community and Public Health, CDHB
June 2018

Canterbury
District Health Board
Te Pori Hauora o Waitaha

The information contained in this document may be derived from a number of sources. Although the CDHB has taken reasonable steps to ensure that the information is accurate, it accepts no liability or responsibility for any acts or omissions, done or omitted in reliance in whole or in part, on the information. Further, the contents of the document should be considered in relation to the time of its publication, as new evidence may have become available since publication. The Canterbury District Health Board accepts no responsibility for the manner in which this information is subsequently used.

© Canterbury District Health Board, 2018

Front page Te Pae Mahutonga graphics courtesy of Healthy Christchurch.

Contents

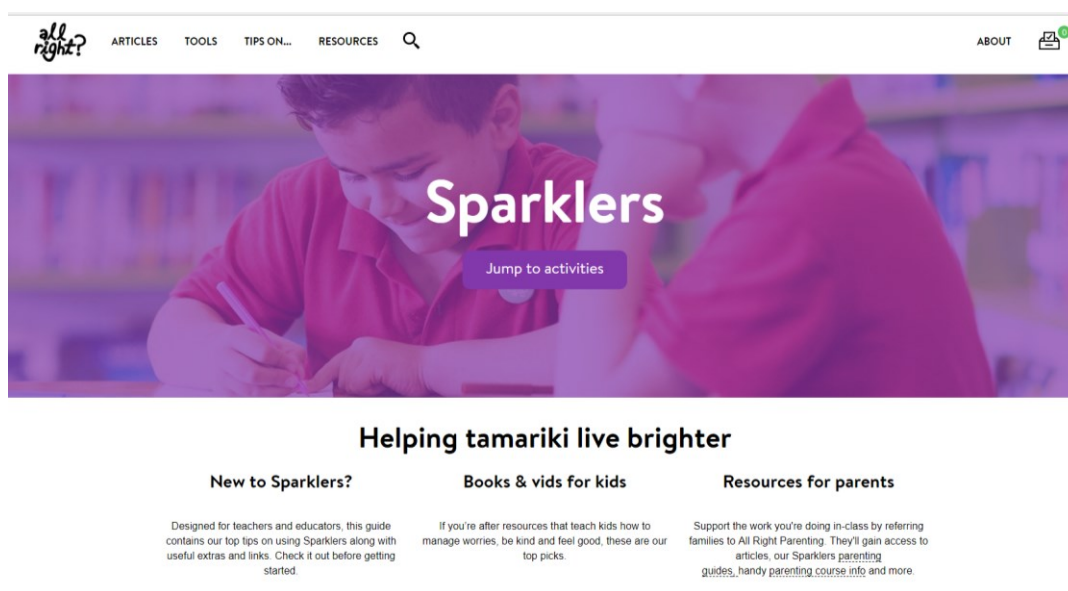
Sparklers

Background.....	3
Evaluation methodology	3
Evaluation findings.....	4
Interviews with senior school leaders.....	4
Focus groups and interviews with teachers.....	6
Online survey for teachers	9
Focus groups with students	11
Key Stakeholders	13
Conclusion: Summary, ideas for consideration, and final reflections	20
Summary	20
Ideas for consideration	21
Final reflections	22

Sparklers

Background

Following the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes, many teachers, researchers and other professionals working in schools sought guidance from the Canterbury District Health Board's School Based Mental Health Team (Specialist Mental Health Service) and Health Promoting Schools Team (Community and Public Health) regarding ways to enhance student wellbeing. Consequently the two teams joined forces with the *All Right?* campaign and in collaboration developed a resource – Sparklers¹ which has been designed to support children in learning the skills required to build positive mental health and cope with life's challenges. Taking over two years to develop the Sparklers resource brings together evidence-based wellbeing activities that support children in managing their own wellbeing, emotions and relationships.



Sparklers is digital classroom resource bank of wellbeing activities for students in Years 1-8, which is aligned with the New Zealand Curriculum (i.e. activities can be organised by the key competencies: thinking; relating to others; using language, symbols, and texts; managing self; and participating and contributing). Activities can be used as starter activities or integrated into or used to form the basis of full classroom sessions. Sparklers activities range from 10 minutes to an hour in length and cover a range of different types of activities which are grouped together under the headings: showing kindness, gratitude and giving, being ourselves, feeling good, balancing energy, managing emotions, using our senses, noticing our world and warm up activities. The activities can be filtered using these headings, by key competency, and by whether or not the activity is a game or craft-based activity, and/or has

¹ Sparklers has been made possible thanks to funding from the Canterbury Earthquake Appeal Trust and support from the Canterbury District Health Board, Community and Public Health, CDHB and the Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://allright.org.nz/tools/sparklers/>

a worksheet provided. In addition, a guide for teachers provides an overview of the resource together with further reading material, and a number of parenting guides offer information on ways in which parents can support child wellbeing at home.

Following receipt of funding from the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal Trust (CEAT) the Whānau Wellbeing Collaboration was established and the funding managed by the Methodist Mission. The Collaboration was made up of a number of agencies including Community and Public Health (A division of the Canterbury District Health Board which also houses the *All Right?* campaign). Initial funding for Sparklers came from this fund and the Collaboration was involved in its development. Specific resources for Māori and Pacific families were also produced and supported by this fund, including the Whānau Effect seasonal activities and Pacifically Speaking activity cards and conversation starters for families. Some of the activities, from each of these resources, have been integrated into Sparklers providing a connection between the three resources.

Pilot evaluation (2016)

A pilot of the Sparklers resource was undertaken in over fifty Canterbury-based schools late in 2016, in order to inform the planned formal launch of the resource in 2017. Participating schools and teachers were invited to respond to an online feedback form on the *All Right?* campaign's Sparklers webpage or via a SurveyMonkey link sent directly to participating schools. Although responding numbers were low, due at least in part to the time of year that the resource was released, the comments about Sparklers were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents reported that they were keen to use the resource and to share Sparklers with other teachers.

Formal launch of Sparklers (June 2017)

Sparklers was formally launched on 20 June 2017 at Kaiapoi Borough Primary School, with media coverage on TV3 news. In addition, Sparklers activities undertaken at Saint James' School, Christchurch were highlighted by the Christchurch Press and Stuff website as part of the launch of the resource. In the six weeks immediately following the launch, over 10,000 Sparklers page-views were recorded.

Evaluation of Sparklers

This evaluation was requested by the Sparklers project collaborators and the *All Right?* campaign with the expectation that the findings would help shape the future development of the Sparklers resource, including plans to share the resource nationally. In addition, the findings of this evaluation and its recommendations may be made available to funders and potential partners. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- describe teacher perspectives regarding the utility of the Sparklers website, the Sparklers activities they have used/implemented with students, and teacher perceptions of the impact of the Sparklers activities on student behaviour,

- describe the student experience of Sparklers and capture examples of applied learning as expressed by the students themselves,
- describe the perspectives of key stakeholders as to the utility of the Sparklers resource and their perceptions regarding the impact of Sparklers in school settings, and
- capture any recommendations regarding the future development of the Sparklers resource.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation plan encompassed a range of methods designed to capture the experiences of teachers and students, and other professionals working in schools (e.g. Health Promoting Schools Advisors, Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), and members of the School Based Mental Health Team).

Parallel evaluation streams were planned and included an online survey of teachers and Health Promoting Schools Advisors, key stakeholder interviews or focus groups with teachers and other key stakeholders (e.g. Deputy Principal, Principal, RTLB cluster, and the SBMH Team), and surveys and focus groups with students.

An email invitation to participate in the evaluation was sent to seven schools in November 2017. Three of these schools were invited to be 'case study' schools. Of these, two schools had been using Sparklers prior to the formal launch in June 2017, and a third school was introduced to the resource at a staff meeting in September 2017.

Five schools accepted the invitation to participate in the evaluation, with communication with the schools revealing substantial differences in how the resource was being used in each school. For example, one school was using the Sparklers resource with groups of students who had been selected from classes across the school, but the resource had not yet been introduced to all staff; and in another school all teachers were using some Sparklers activities to support student readiness for learning following morning tea and lunch breaks. In addition, the contacts at all schools, bar one, expressed concern that students would not necessarily know that an activity they had participated in had been sourced from the Sparklers resource.

As a result a decision was made, in consultation with the contact person for each school, to select the most appropriate data gathering method for each school. For example, the student survey was not used in any of the schools, but some students did offer their perspectives through participation in focus groups held at three schools, and the evaluator was able to observe one junior class engaging in Sparklers activities at a fourth school.

Given the many competing priorities and time pressures in schools, the data collection for the evaluation was spread across a period of eight months beginning in November 2017 and concluding in May 2018. The principal and teachers at the third case study school reported that they had not embedded the resource as thoroughly as they had wished in the time

available, and although staff contributed to the evaluation in May 2018, the school was not profiled as a 'case study' school.

The evaluation objectives were explained to all those participating in interviews and focus groups prior to data collection. Participants were assured that they could ask any questions of the evaluator, refrain from answering questions that they did not wish to answer, and/or to decline participation at any time. Participants were advised that any quotes used in the evaluation report would not contain information which could identify them or a particular school setting unless that individual/school setting had previously agreed to being directly quoted (i.e. they were a 'case study' school and only then following consultation with the school).

The focus group and interviews were transcribed and reviewed alongside the evaluator's written focus group and interview notes, and the audio files as necessary. Once each transcript was confirmed to be an accurate record, the relevant audio file was deleted.

The transcripts were then analysed using a simple process whereby comments were grouped according to key content, or the main idea or theme identified in the text, and with reference to the evaluation objectives. The web survey data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey® and managed using Excel documents (Microsoft Excel 2013). Anonymity was an assurance of participation in the surveys and where any potentially identifying comments were made by respondents, these were anonymised.

Evaluation findings

Interviews with senior school leaders

Interviews were completed with two principals and two deputy principals representing four of the five participant schools. In each case, senior staff in these schools had been introduced to Sparklers by a Health Promoting Schools facilitator, or a member of the School Based Mental Health Team (SBMH Team).

Although most senior leaders reported that Sparklers was being used by at least some staff members in their school, one school principal described making a decision to embark on a school-wide application of the resource. The principal, who was new to the school, had become concerned about some student behaviours, particularly those delaying student and class readiness for learning following morning tea and lunch breaks. Introducing Sparklers in all classrooms was one of a number of actions taken to address student behaviour.

'Sparklers – it was the School Based Mental Health Team that recommended it to me and we had a look and it was exactly what we needed to help resolve those issues and have kids come together ready for learning. Something that's going to be fun...I'm hoping they'll run back to class because they want to be involved in a Sparkler.'

Principal

Although the principal asked all teaching staff to introduce Sparklers into their classroom programmes, how this was achieved was left up to individual teachers. This resulted in some teachers selecting one or two activities that they repeated often, whilst others selected a

different activity each week. The principal commented that they had observed very positive changes over time.

'We saw some really positive changes. There were a lot of different things happening so what I couldn't say is that Sparklers alone resulted in all these positive changes but it absolutely contributed to, one of the things...what we don't have at all and what we haven't had all of Term 4 is kids not coming back to class and that was really bad in Term 1.'

Principal

Some interviewees reflected that the evaluation had been a timely reminder to revisit the Sparklers website and activities. One deputy principal described an initial burst of interest in Sparklers and noted that it had been used extensively throughout the school immediately following their introduction to the resource. She outlined how teachers were planning to use Sparklers activities to support Year 2 students in transitioning to new and larger learning spaces, and reflected that the evaluation had prompted her and other teaching staff to revisit the activities.

Interviewees noted that the website was easy to use and that Sparklers activities were particularly useful in supplementing other resources such as those being used for Circle Time and mindfulness sessions.

'And it's used as a resource to supplement for the purpose of what we're doing, so just in time rather than just in case. I mean there's so much out there in terms of resourcing that you often do that with things. You pull it, you dip and dive and...'

Principal

'I think the most important thing was the fit it has with what we're doing anyway in mindfulness and that it was another tool that could be used...that we're not depending on one resource but we can flit to and fro.'

Deputy Principal

'I remember saying...well people have structures and understanding already for these things because of our work with mindfulness. It won't be difficult for teachers to add the Sparklers activities into their programme when they see the resources they could use for a particular group, or child...'

Deputy Principal

The availability of the resource online and its accessibility was appreciated and interviewees particularly valued the fact that the Sparklers resource was free – that they hadn't been required to purchase 'a programme'.

'We value the resource, I mean it's easily accessed, easy to use.'

Principal

'So, the fact that it's free is huge...if there had been costs involved, and online and readily accessible and available. That is also I thought a really positive thing.'

Principal

'It was really easy. I just flicked out the site to my staff. All the resources are there, there are teacher notes, clips, videos and whatever you need...and a variety of activities. That really appealed to me.'

Principal

'It's a pretty easy resource to use and all the teachers have got big screens in their classroom spaces so it was easy to flick it up on the screen and go through things together.'

Deputy Principal

Interviewees were keen to see Sparklers shared widely and suggested ideas such as bookmarks, or postcards for handing out at different meetings they attended. Many talked

about wanting to share the resource with others, and one recommended that there be an opportunity for schools to share their stories back to the *All Right?* and Sparklers Project Teams as a way of promoting Sparklers.

'It's a fantastic resource and probably the only thing I would say is it just needs to be publicised more. Getting the word out is important I think. And why wouldn't you? It's something that kids are going to get use from.'

Principal

One deputy principal perceived that consistent use of Sparklers resulted in the best outcomes for students and teachers. She also commented that she had recommended Sparklers to parents.

'And I've recommended the resource to parents and I know they have used it. Then they've come back to me and said, 'That was really helpful. Thank you.'

Deputy Principal

Some senior leaders commented that Sparklers was a good 'fit' with the overall direction or strategic focus of the school, and that it aligned well with whole-school approaches to culture change and initiatives such as PB4L².

'And it fits really well with our overall focus on wellbeing for our school.'

Deputy Principal

'If the kids aren't ready to learn, or they don't feel safe, or they feel they don't belong, or you know they can't....they're disengaged...we need to focus on wellbeing and I truly believe achievement will take off. It will come if we can set the scene, the culture...'

Principal

Focus groups and interviews with teachers

The evaluator met with teachers based in five schools. Focus groups were held in three schools (with between three and five teachers participating at each school) and interviews were held with one teacher at each of the remaining two schools. In some cases the school's principal or deputy principal joined the focus group or interview for a period of time.

Most teachers had been introduced to the Sparklers resource in a staff meeting. Teachers reported being excited by what they learned about the resource, and remembered being keen to start trying activities immediately. Teachers noted that the website was visually appealing and user-friendly. They found negotiating the site generally straightforward, and noted the usefulness of the filters that could be applied. A few teachers found navigating back to the activities they had previously found more complex, with one teacher noting the importance of bookmarking pages in order to keep track of where particular activities were located.

'It's just so easy to use and it's so self-explanatory, you don't have to think about anything.'

'I've found the website really easy to use - just nice, easy, paint by numbers – very intuitive.'

² <http://pb4l.tki.org.nz/> PB4L is a long-term, systemic approach involving a series of initiatives. These currently include whole-school change initiatives, targeted group programmes, and individual student support services.

'I found it at the start, quite tricky to figure out...because there was so much, so much there. And you click on this and, 'Ooooh! Hang on where was I?'...For me it was just trying to get my pathways to figure out where I'd been and where I had located things, and where I remembered that they were...um, it has been a learning thing for me.'

Teacher comments

Teachers appreciated that each activity came with clear instructions and that most did not require lots of materials or challenging organisation.

'The website is really attractive and easy, all the links are there and there are really good headings so you know if it's an active thing or a relaxation activity.'

'It is actually so straightforward and I love that it says what sort of activity it is. Yeah, I don't think it could be any clearer.'

Teacher comments

Teachers described being able to easily identify activities designed to address the needs of their students. They valued the links that were clearly articulated between activities that addressed similar skills or understandings. This had enabled teachers to select the next most appropriate activity (i.e. an activity linked to the activity just completed) feeling confident that it would build on what they had already done – that it would 'move on and extend' their students. One focus group noted that they would appreciate being able to filter/select activities by age band or year level, particularly when looking for activities more suited to Year 7 and Year 8 students. This was seen as helpful in narrowing down the search time required.

Teachers talked enthusiastically about the different Sparklers activities they had used with their students – some had tried numerous Sparklers activities since the launch of the resource, others had tried a few activities from time to time, and yet others had firm favourites they regularly revisited. Some teachers reflected that they had mainly used quiet or calming activities whilst others had also used some of the more active Sparklers options.

'I've mainly done all the quiet, calm activities. I haven't really done the moving around ones...'

'I've used some of the loud ones like....'Fruit salad'...always fun, if you get it right...'

'I loved the music one, 'Musical Adventures', I did, where you play different types of music and they draw how they feel. I really enjoyed that because of the different things coming out. It was all different what they got out of it and how they felt. It was a really good activity - I've done that more than once as well.'

'We've done a lot of breathing...after certain break times we have had calming time with all sorts of breathing....I think some kids do use it.'

Teacher comments

Teachers commonly referred to adapting the Sparklers activities to varying degrees for their students. For example, one teacher working with groups of Year 7 and Year 8 students, focusing on building social and emotional skills, described a number of adaptations she had made to different activities to ensure they better suited the needs of her students. This had included creating her own supplementary photocopy masters for these students who came together for weekly sessions.

Teachers found that some activities took practice - as students became more accomplished they were able to calm themselves using 'Tummy breathing' more quickly, and to generally sit and relax more quickly than previously.

'It is what it is now. They just come in and you can often see them, particularly there's a couple of them, they do get quite heightened or a bit frustrated and you can see them taking in their big breaths and putting their hands on their belly and so you can see that they're using the tools that we've given them.'

'It's got to the point where the children come in and they just know. They sit and they just relax. Which is great. That's been really beneficial.' **Teacher comments**

Some activities had been modified over time to suit class groups – one teacher described starting with 'Sleeping statues' and 'Tummy breathing' which proved very successful in helping a group of older students to calm after time outside. Over time though, the novelty began to wear off and lying down was no longer as acceptable to the students as it had been previously. Together the class modified the activities and they now do them where it suits them – sitting in a corner, on a beanbag or they may even sit outside.

'So we modified it, so we used the ideas as a base but then we modified it so it's no longer 'stupid'. And that's fine. So they'll come in and they'll just sit there and sometimes they will say, 'We just need to sit' and so I say, 'That's great, go and sit – you know what you need to do.' **Teacher**

Teachers had found the activities helpful in building a positive classroom culture. They noted, for example, the benefits for their students, particularly those with low self-esteem, as their peers described them positively in compliments-focused activities. Teachers appreciated that some activities were particularly well suited to being repeated, allowing students to benefit further from the activity as they reached a new level of understanding or maturity.

'It's something you can keep coming back to. We always need to reinforce the good behaviours, positive behaviours, using kind words....so yeah, I think it's been really good.'

'And they are activities you can redo. So each term you can actually do them again - things change and people evolve and develop and mature in our space so you can go back and do them again and it's fresh.' **Teacher comments**

One teacher working with junior students recommended using puppets in tandem with Sparklers activities to build student awareness. Having regularly used puppets during Circle Time she has found that they help 'bring out the best in some children' and were helpful in modelling positive interactions. In addition, this teacher highlighted the benefits of 'classroom companions' – soft toys that children can sit with to assist them in self-calming – and suggested that this idea could be utilised by the Sparklers Project Team.

Teachers noted that they had used, or would be using, Sparklers activities at the start of the new school year as they worked to establish their classroom environment with a new group of students.

'We did 'My pepeha', of course...about where we belong, at the beginning of the year, and you know just making connections. And we talked about how important it is to make connections with other people.'

'It was a good way to get to know the kids a bit more. A bit of sharing and things like that...I remember doing the 'Compliment posters'. It was the one I did first and you could just see the positive effect that it had on the kids. Who doesn't like getting a compliment?'

'So we've done 'Superheroes', we did 'Sneaky thank yous', we did 'Gratitude o'clock' and the 'Compliment posters' and 'Compliment tag'. So they all fitted in with our, "All about me".'

Teacher comments

In one school where Sparklers had been implemented school-wide, the focus group participants contemplating the new school year, reflected on the benefits that might accrue for both teachers and students, as children arrived in their new classes with strategies, such as tummy breathing, already well-practiced and normalised.

'Yeah, do they know this, have they got this...do we no longer need to worry about that? Because they know that self-management skill, or that self-calming skill. I can sort of see it very much like....where we just go back and 'touch in', you know 'just in time' kind of teaching...'

Teacher

Teachers noted that Sparklers activities were not only useful in establishing and building a favourable class environment or culture, but also contributed to and aligned well with building understandings about a school's identified values.

'With our values the respect, empathy and perseverance, it's quite good that you can choose activities to sort of represent one of those...we were thinking we actually should be writing the Sparklers activities into our lessons around school values...'

'At the moment we're looking at 'Community' from our values and so I'm using them [Sparklers] to build into that. So 'Loop-de-loop' is actually around being a class community and working together and so that's why we've been choosing this activity to do....and so what our children's needs are, or what our values are, actually link really well to these [Sparklers].'

Teacher comments

Online survey for teachers

The link to the teacher survey was sent to all school contacts at the time they were invited to participate in the evaluation of Sparklers. Seven teachers (including two designated Special Education Needs Co-ordinators) from two schools responded to the survey. Although this is clearly a low participation rate, the responses of these teachers (who may or may not have contributed to the evaluation through focus groups or interviews) do offer the personal perspectives of seven teachers working with the Sparklers resource in Canterbury schools.

Two teachers reported that they were working with Year 1 and 2 students, four with Year 3 and 4 students, and two with Year 5 and 6 students. Respondents were very positive about the Sparklers website and the activities. They had found the website easy to negotiate (six 'agreed', one neutral response), the organisation by key competency helpful (six 'agreed', one

neutral response), and all 'agreed' (seven respondents) that it was easy to identify which activity would be most appropriate to use in a particular situation.

All survey respondents agreed that the instructions provided with the activities were clear and helpful and that they had been able to adapt the activities to suit the year level/s they were working with (one 'strongly agreed', and six 'agreed').

In addition, all respondents 'agreed' (six respondents) or 'strongly agreed' (one respondent) that the activities had been culturally appropriate for their students.

'I have found that it is not targeted as well to the senior school as it is for the junior school.'

'I have especially liked [Ka] hikitia te hā, Compliment Circle and Kindness.'

Survey comments - teachers

Respondents 'agreed' (five respondents) or 'strongly agreed' (one respondent) that their students had responded positively to the Sparklers activities used with them, and one respondent offered a neutral response.

One teacher commented that initially the students in his/her class has been somewhat hesitant about learning to breathe but after a few sessions 'they responded very positively', and another that most children had enjoyed the 'chance to calm and allow their bodies (and mind) to fully relax before having to get ready for learning again'. Another teacher noted that the class now requests a Compliment Circle when they come back in to class.

'Tummy breathing - after some practice the children were able to really participate well in this activity and they found it very calming.'

'Kindness and Compliment Circle can turn around conversation after a lunch break from 'telling on someone' to a time of celebrating successes and effort.'

'Tummy Breathing - this was a really good way for my class to re-centre themselves after breaks when they would return to class from the playground often in a heightened state. '

'Mandala Colouring - Good way to have students eager to return to class.'

'I think it is a fabulous resource and it is very easy to integrate into the classroom routine.'

'It has helped us to focus on the positives of one another. Some students with low self-esteem look forward to hearing positives from their peers rather than just the teacher.'

Survey comments - teachers

Focus groups with students

Focus groups with students were held by the evaluator in three schools - five students from one school and six students from each of the other two schools (selected either due to their membership of a particular group or class by their teachers and/or the principal) reflected on taking part in Sparklers activities. Senior leaders and teachers in two of these schools noted that students were unlikely to know that the different activities they had been participating in were Sparklers activities. Although this proved to be the case, students in all schools were able to recognise different Sparklers activities by their title name or description. Sparklers activities had been used by teachers in different ways in each of the three settings, but some commonalities of experience were evident in discussion with the students. This was apparent not only in terms of the activities they had been exposed to (some of which had been repeated over time), but also in terms of the positivity expressed by students regarding the personal and collective (group/class) experience and benefits of having participated in Sparklers activities.

'It felt nice and calmed us down.'

'Um, they're really calming and some of them...we feel really nice afterwards.'

'I like that....we're very grateful to have this thing in our school.'

'It's a place to feel comfortable and be yourself.' **Students (Focus Group comments)**

Tummy breathing was mentioned by some students, and in one school it had been a regular feature of settling students following morning tea and lunch breaks in all classes.

'We did tummy breathing – after breaks we would lie down and we would tummy breathe for ten or two minutes. It felt nice and it calmed us.'

'And sometimes the teacher says to us, if we get angry, she tells us to use our breathing.'

'And we play sleeping statues and that really calms us down.'

Students (Focus Group comments)

'Showing kindness' activities had been used in each of the schools. Students commented on creating 'Compliment posters', playing 'Compliment tag', showing gratitude ('Gratitude o'clock'), making thank you cards ('Sneaky thank you cards'), and making surprises to share with others ('Bunches of aroha').

'So we've like watched this video of these people that have dropped things, or are having trouble with things, and other people are helping them and it's brightening their day.' *[Reference to 'Everyday kindness', Colour Your World video link]*

'And we have compliment circles. So, if people have compliments they can share them with other people.'

'We've been doing compliment posters and we played a compliment game. So, we drew a picture of ourselves and then we had other people writing why we're special. It felt really nice to know that other people thought good things about you.'

'Yeah, helps you so you could be even more kind. And there's other ways of being kind than just...I mean there's other ways of being kind.'

Students (Focus Group comments)

At one school a visit to the *All Right? Sparklers* webpage was used to prompt students' recognition of the activities they might have participated in (although they had not previously seen the website). The students easily navigated the website and were readily able to identify and comment on the Sparklers activities they had experienced. For example, the following activities were identified at the beginning of the focus group.

'Every day kindness (Yeah we did that one), Compliment posters, Compliment Tag, Gratitude o'clock (Yes, I did that one, we haven't), Sneaky thank you cards (Yah), My amazing brain (Yes, yeah), Superheroes (I've done that one), Mandala colouring (Yep), Whānau posters (Yep...), Musical Emotions (one of the classes has done that). And that one? Tummy breathing (Yep, yes...yes, yeah, we've done that), the Faces game (Yeah, we've done that. It was quite cool because it was kind of like 'snap'). We haven't done them all but we've done quite a few.'

Multiple student voices (Focus Group comments)

Another popular activity linked with 'Compliment posters' was 'Superheroes', an activity which encourages students to think about their personal strengths. A group of Year 7 students shared their superhero posters with the evaluator and described gluing photographs of themselves onto a superhero body and then taking time to think about, and share with others, the things they were good at. They had found it an engaging and entertaining activity. These same students described themselves as particularly keen on any activities that resulted in them having something to give away to someone, and suggested that more of these types of activities be included in the Sparklers repertoire.

'Or like baking and stuff and things...like sewing and technology stuff.'

Student

Older students were also keen to see more activities targeted to their age level and for the images on the website to reflect the fact that older students were part of the intended audience for Sparklers. Some younger students also commented on the types of activities and several boys suggested the inclusion of more outside games, and more science-based activities. Although most students had not seen the website, one group of students had particularly enjoyed and valued the opportunity to discuss upcoming activities or future possibilities with their teacher.

'Doing maybe some activities for a little bit older and varieties of kids. Cause most of them were, like some of the other kids thought Sparklers were just for like younger kids more, as well.'

Student

Junior class observation

In addition to the focus groups completed with students, the evaluator observed a junior class (at a fourth school) participating in Sparklers activities during an afternoon session facilitated by their classroom teacher.

A group of Year 2 and 3 students demonstrated ‘Loop-de-loop’, one of their current Sparklers favourites. Working as two teams (a team of girls and a team of boys) the students worked together to pass the hoop around the circle of students as fast as possible. A teacher-led discussion about showing care and respect for one another was skilfully linked to the school values (displayed on the classroom wall) as well as to the Sparklers activity (a few challenges had arisen during the activity).

The teacher also used puppets to broaden the ideas being shared and the group reflected together on how to cope when things are not going as well as they might, and to think about managing self – both in terms of being supportive rather than negative towards others, and how to cope when people make comments that are upsetting.

The teacher then organised the students into small groups and handed out a teacher-made jigsaw puzzle (see ‘Tactile fun’ and ‘Brain booster circuit’). She invited each group of students to work together to solve the puzzle. There was a high level of engagement with the task but some challenges arose as the students struggled to complete the puzzles. Following a quick yoga break (see ‘Brain booster circuit’), the students quickly completed the puzzle challenge and in response to teacher questions were able to articulate the benefits of taking time out to do yoga.

‘We were more relaxed.’

‘I was more confident we could do it.’

‘It was easier after yoga.’ Junior Students

Key Stakeholders

School Based Mental Health Team (focus group with team members)

The evaluator met with members of the School Based Mental Health Team (CDHB). Some of the focus group participants had been integral to the Sparklers Project Team over time, having initiated conversations with teachers about the possibility of bringing together a toolbox of activities to support the wellbeing needs of students.

The involvement of team members in the Sparklers Project Team and their role in developing and trialling Sparklers activities was highly valued by the wider team. Collectively the team expressed pride in how the Sparklers resource had come together. They described loving the look and feel of the website and reported that they had been, and continued to be, delighted by the response to Sparklers that they observed in others when sharing the resource.

‘I think I was really blown away when I saw it, and saw all the activities. It was just so much better than I ever thought that it would possibly look. So you know the front page of Sparklers online looked amazing and I think taking it out into schools, people were really wowed...’

SBMH Team member

'I think watching how quickly teachers get on it and watching how quickly then they show other teachers, and then they sit there and they develop this excitement. That was pretty cool to see.'

SBMH Team member

Team members noted a number of features of the Sparklers resource and website that both they and teachers valued. Easy website navigation and explicit links to the curriculum's key competencies were particularly noted.

'...you know this relates to the wellbeing competencies...you could see teachers just kind of light up and go, 'Wow! This is a really good resource!'

'I think the curriculum, having it tied to the curriculum is a really big deal for teachers.'

'And I like the list of, so you've got the skills you want, but then you've also got the types of activities and then you've got the key competencies....so that you can pick and choose within those whatever suits you, or the learning style, or whatever you're looking for which is cool.'

SBMH Team Focus Group extract

Team members reported that teachers found it easy to identify and select which Sparklers activities were best-suited to their situation, using the different filters available. The teacher notes supplied for each activity and the printable masters associated with activities were valued by both teachers and SBMH Team members. Teachers were also reported as highly valuing the fact that the Sparklers resource was available to them free of charge.

'But I think that's the beauty of it ...that you don't have to do the whole thing. You can just pick and choose what you need at the time you need it. And for teachers that's gold.'

SBMH Team member

'Ah, I'll do this activity and it will slot in easy as, everything's already there, ready for them to click on and print out as well...'

SBMH Team member

'It's a big deal for a school to have a resource that actually is solid, broad and is free.'

SBMH Team member

Members of the team talked about the various ways in which they had used Sparklers in different situations and they also offered examples of how teachers had responded to the resource and were using it in their classrooms. Team members described using the activities with individual students, with groups of students, and with classes and their teachers to help address and manage the needs of students. They had shared the Sparklers website widely and had modelled Sparklers for groups of teachers and teacher aides, and presented the resource at parent workshops.

'So, I went around one school who were starting to want to put the kind of relaxation mindfulness in and just help them in each class to do some basic activities with the kids.'

SBMH Team member

'I've taken a workshop at a school. I didn't model anything but we talked about implementing it [Sparklers] within Circle Time. Yeah, so just how to use that in that

situation and what types of activities they might use....relating back to a health topic or whatever it is they're doing.'

SBMH Team member

One team member described how a school she worked with had implemented Sparklers school-wide in an effort to help students transition back into learning following morning tea and lunch breaks. Another described how a school was adapting Sparklers for a school-wide emotional literacy project they were undertaking with their students. Team members agreed that there had been wide variation in how schools had picked up the resource.

'I've got a real continuum...like a school that's like an 'A+' school in terms of adopting it [Sparklers], through to schools that haven't really gone with it at all. And so there's this continuum. So, I find that for a lot of schools I'm still quietly plugging away and offering to go and actually help the teachers with it.'

SBMH Team member

It was noted that schools were able to readily incorporate Sparklers into existing Circle Time or similar programmed classroom sessions. One team member commented that in some schools where there had been a significant investment in certain programmes this had limited the uptake of Sparklers.

'And there are some schools that have invested in some other mindfulness activities and resources that they've spent a lot of money on and feel obliged to use those and continue using those to justify the expense. So you know those schools haven't really taken up Sparklers.'

SBMH Team member

A team member mentioned that teachers in one school, who had been using Sparklers extensively, were becoming more aware of the social and emotional literacy of their students. For example, where a student (or several students) struggled with a particular Sparklers activity this had provided teachers with helpful information about that student's emotional literacy (e.g. a student being unable to give a compliment because they didn't know 'how to start that process').

'It's almost like an assessment piece in a way...but what they're noticing is when they do the activities that there are some struggling that they weren't expecting.'

SBMH Team member

The presentation of Sparklers to a large group of teachers was managed by setting up a different Sparkler activity at a series of workstations. Watching teachers experiment with the activities at the workstations was a highlight for members of the SBMH Team who reflected that they had been impressed by how teachers had effectively adapted the activities to suit the situation they were in.

Team members discussed the challenges implicit in providing a resource to meet the needs of Year 1 to Year 8 students and noted that some Sparklers activities were not a 'particularly good match' for Year 7 and Year 8 students. They did agree, however, that teachers were very good at adapting Sparklers to their particular classroom setting and that ensuring any given activity was age-appropriate was something that teachers were already very skilled at doing.

Team members described attending a Community of Learning teacher only day (primary and secondary teachers were present) where they talked about Sparklers and also shared the resources embedded with the *All Right?* campaign's website. The team considered the *All Right?* resources were pertinent not only for all teaching staff present but also provided those working with secondary school students some useful material. Team members raised the possibility of modifying Sparklers to include a secondary school audience which, in the future, could offer teachers and guidance counsellors some activities to implement with their students.

Although team members acknowledged that teachers are regularly managing challenging student responses and interactions, they wondered if there was some way to offer further support to teachers as they developed their skills relating to the provision of psychological safety and first aid for their students – particularly in terms of setting the scene for a new Sparklers activity or in addressing any problems that arose for students following an activity.

It was evident from comments made throughout the focus group session that there was considerable variation across schools in terms of the uptake of the Sparklers resource – in some schools one teacher was using the resource, in others several were committed to using it, and in a few schools there had been a broader, school-wide adoption of Sparklers. For those teachers who were using Sparklers somewhat in isolation, the team wondered if there was some way to link these like-minded teachers.

'But now we've got pockets where some teachers might be using it a lot but they're not in contact with other teachers who are, so how do we connect them and build those relationships around that resource.'

SBMH Team member

Members of the team commented that when they introduce Sparklers to staff at a school they recommend that information about Sparklers be placed in the school's newsletter, or that an activity be sent home with students so that parents can be made aware of the Sparklers website and the parenting guides. Although team members were not certain about whether or not schools did this consistently, they reflected on the benefits of home and school being aligned, and of parents being aware of the support available to them (and their children) on the Sparklers and *All Right?* websites.

Keeping Sparklers 'refreshed' was discussed and team members suggested that it would be ideal if people returning to the website were able to see that new activities, or resources were being added. Profiling stories on the website about teachers and schools who had been using the resource was suggested as a way of inspiring other teachers to try out the activities for themselves, and to emphasise the value of the resource overall.

'Yes, it's like the All Right? campaign generally. Like they keep on adding a new thing in there, so every time you go back and look at it you find something new.'

SBMH Team member

'Yeah, and things that they could recommend to parents, and things they could recommend to youth, as well as activities for children. So, if Sparklers were able to have those little updates periodically...'

SBMH Team member

Thinking about the future of Sparklers, team members appeared highly committed to continuing to share the resource widely, and to the provision of ongoing support to those already implementing the activities within their classroom and wider-school programmes.

'I'm really happy and proud to present this [Sparklers]. One of the leaders of my team has done this and created this. This is a real initiative. It's evidence-based and it's kiwiana. You know, it fits within our culture and society and stuff. So, it's really nice to be able to provide a resource that fits all of that for our schools.'

SBMH Team member

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (focus group with RTLB cluster)

The evaluator met with Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTsLB) who, as members of a local RTLB cluster, had been involved in piloting the Sparklers resource and in sharing the resource widely following its formal launch. Due to their close links with the School Based Mental Health Team and aware of the challenges being faced by teachers as they worked to meet the needs of 'increasingly anxious children, dysregulated children', the RTsLB followed the development of Sparklers with great interest.

'I like the fact that they've gone out and done a lot of research for it – you know they've brought it together and collated really, best practice. So, you can go on there [Sparklers website] and know they've done the homework for us. We can go immediately on there and find something useful that they've tried and tested.'

RTLB

The RTLB focus group participants were overwhelmingly positive about the Sparklers resource and reported that they had shared the resource widely with teachers (including designated Special Education Needs Coordinators), teacher aides, parents of students they were supporting, and with community-based groups such as Heart Kids Canterbury. They appreciated that the resource had been positively framed ('positive psychology focus') rather than using a deficit model. Focus group participants explained how they had included Sparklers activities in Intervention Plans prepared for students they were working with, and others described sharing the website's parenting tips with parents as well.

'The tips for use with parents – the parents' guide – tips for mums and dads, I've given those to a few parents and it's been nice and easy for them to follow. They can see...'Phew! Yes, I am feeling like that and it's OK.' So it's been really useful.'

RTLB

'What I like about it is that it has a positive psychology focus...so it's focusing on the positives for students and teachers and parents. So I think that's really good as opposed to a deficit model.'

RTLB

The focus group participants described different ways that they along with others (e.g. School Based Mental Health Team, teachers) had used Sparklers. For example, one RTLB supporting

a Year 8 student introduced 'Tummy breathing' to the parent, the student and the student's class – enabling the class teacher, for whom Sparklers had been modelled, to 'take it forward for calming and breathing'. Another described how a member of the School Based Mental Health Team had worked one-on-one with a junior student and then with that child's class to embed Sparklers activities that would help the whole class group and their teacher manage the situation. One described a teacher who was using Sparklers activities with Year 7 and 8 students in an effort to model appropriate ways of managing personal interactions and relationships generally. The teacher was described as,

'...using all the compliments stuff....all the gratitude and compliments things and also the calming. Just actually teaching her students come of those strategies so that they can actually go and they can learn to speak nicely to each other....' **RTL**

Although the RTSLB provided examples of Sparklers being used with senior students, they agreed that it 'would be great to get a teenage version' of the resource. They noted the website images were of younger children and wondered if a teacher might skip over Sparklers thinking that the resource was not intended for older students.

'...because when you look at the front page and the photos of the children they're all kind of between what I'd predict as being kind of Year 3 through to Year 6...so if there was some work done on that page...if I didn't know, as a teacher I might think, 'Oh, this looks too young for my kids.'. You know....looking at some of the photos and graphics and thinking about how they can make it a bit more appealing.'

RTL

The advent of the Sparklers resource had, importantly, given the focus group participants a sense that they, along with teachers, had a new-found authority to prioritise wellbeing.

'I think the resource has actually given us the authority, the teachers the authority to prioritise wellbeing.'

'Because it's a resource, because it's endorsed by government agencies, because it's actually really easy then it's a 'go-to' for teachers and it also gives us what...you know we've got children, a lot of children in a class who are dysregulated and all the rest of it, and we can come in and say, 'Look, here's a wonderful resource, something that you can pick up.' Because it's a resource therefore it gives us authority to be able to prioritise it....'

'...And we don't have to be mental health workers. We're facilitators of a resource that the school can just run with....'

'...Anyone can pick it up....'

'It's not going to harm anyone. It's just a bit of common sense that is put in a package for parents, teachers...'

'And I just think that this...it gives us the authority to go and say, 'You need to prioritise this and here's a simple way that you can do that.''

RTL Cluster - Focus Group extract

Reflecting on whether or not the resource was culturally appropriate the group hadn't noticed, or been made aware of, any problems. One noted that the resource was being used with a local kura and there had been 'no feedback otherwise'. However, when considering possible improvements or future possible developments in terms of the Sparklers resource, focus group participants suggested incorporating more Māori and Pasifika imagery, language, and activities.

'You can always do more. When it comes to culture you can always have more photos, you can always have more te reo, you can always, always do more.' **RTL**

The RTsLB were also keen to be able to provide information about Sparklers to others suggesting that it would be helpful if they had 'rap cards' or pamphlets to promote the resource.

'You can talk about it, but if you have something, and even with a couple of the strategies, you know like – Remember if stressed...here's three things [activities] you could use. It could be good for teachers to have in their pocket...some of the top ones [activities].' **RTL**

The group was very supportive of the current ready-made Sparklers' resources, and suggested that it would be helpful if there were more. They wondered if some items such as the *All Right?* campaign's compliments posters could be provided to schools with blank tear offs to allow students and teachers to write and share compliments. They saw this as a good fit with current Sparklers activities (e.g. 'Compliment posters' and 'Compliment tag').

'So maybe more resources like that [idea of blank compliments posters], that link in with the Sparklers games or Sparklers activities that teachers are not having to make themselves but could use straightaway. Because sometimes they'll look at things and go, 'That's a great idea but it's a bit hard, or I'll do it later, or I haven't got time'. Whereas for that – compliments – you know it could be right there – they print it off, there it is...they can do it.' **RTL**

Health Promoting Schools Facilitators (online survey)

Five Health Promoting Schools (HPS) facilitators (based at Community and Public Health, CDHB) working with Canterbury schools responded to an online survey which asked how they had shared the Sparklers resource with teachers, how it had been received, and how it was being used in schools they worked with. Teachers were described as having responded positively to the availability of the Sparklers, with one facilitator noting:

'Yes! When it was presented (at staff meetings, or in discussion) the response was enthusiastic and positive.' **Survey comment – HPS facilitator**

HPS facilitators had introduced the Sparklers resource to schools in different ways. This ranged from mentioning the resource in conversation, providing the website link and talking with key contacts at schools (e.g. principals, teachers, RTL, school counsellors), talking with lead health teachers, and presenting and co-presenting (with the SBMH Team) at staff meetings.

The HPS facilitators had observed schools using the Sparklers resource in different ways. This included a Special Education Needs Co-ordinator using specific activities with individual students, a teacher using activities as a 'starter' before a learning session, the resource being used to focus on and build social skills, and a school identifying and using activities that fitted well with their PB4L focus.

Asked for any specific feedback they had received from teachers, one facilitator reported that an RTLB had found Sparklers easy to use and had noted the 'holistic, roundedness' of the resource; another offered the following quote from an email:

'I just came out and said, 'Oh my! That Sparklers!!' It had nearly brought her class to tears receiving compliments!! Great discussions have come of it.'

Quote from a school - offered by HPS facilitator

A number of suggestions for future development were offered by HPS facilitators. Several commented on the benefits of developing the resource further for older students and one queried whether the same platform could be used for an Early Childhood version. Although it was noted that the parenting guides are really useful, one respondent suggested that they might benefit from being less wordy and incorporating more images. Facilitators were also keen to be able to share narrative reports or video clips, showing how the Sparklers resource was being used by schools and the benefits of using it, with schools they visited.

Conclusion: Summary, ideas for consideration, and final reflections

Summary

This evaluation has focused on capturing the perspectives of senior school leaders, teachers, students and other key stakeholders as they talked about their personal experiences of the Sparklers web-based resource.

School leaders interviewed were all familiar with the Sparklers resource and extremely positive about its application within their schools. Although they had not necessarily used the resource personally, they were positive about how Sparklers was being used by teachers in their schools and keen to see the resource shared widely with other schools. They valued the availability of the resource online, particularly appreciating that it was accessible to schools free of charge. Some senior leaders also commented on how well Sparklers activities aligned with whole-school approaches to building wellbeing, and creating culture change.

All teachers spoke enthusiastically about implementing the Sparklers activities with their students. Teachers described adapting Sparklers to suit their students and enjoyed being able to revisit activities, enabling students to become more confident and skilled with particular Sparklers over time. Teachers valued the easy accessibility of the website and the clear instructions provided for each activity. Sparklers activities were seen as particularly pertinent in helping to build or develop class and school-wide culture.

Teachers who completed the online survey had also found the website easy to negotiate. They agreed that it was easy to identify which activity would be most appropriate to use and

valued the instructions provided. They also noted that students had responded positively to the Sparklers activities.

Students were able, with some assistance, to identify Sparklers activities they had participated in. Although most did not know, at the time they had participated in the activity, that it had been sourced from the Sparklers resource, students were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of the activities. They were able to identify and describe different Sparklers activities they had participated in, and could also articulate some personal and collective (class) benefits of taking part in the activities.

Members of the School Based Mental Health Team were impressed by how well the Sparklers website had come together and noted how easy it was for teachers to navigate the site. They had shared the resource widely in schools they worked with and although they had noted variable uptake of Sparklers in schools, they were delighted by how many teachers were using the resource. Working alongside teachers, the team had modelled Sparklers in numerous settings and were impressed by the ways in which teachers were implementing and adapting activities in support of their students.

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour had also shared the resource extensively with schools and teachers. They were overwhelmingly positive about the Sparklers resource and very pleased to be able to profile the resource and share the activities and website material with parents, teachers and students. Members of the RTLB cluster commented that the very existence of the Sparklers resource gave them a sense of new-found authority to highlight and prioritise wellbeing in the settings where they worked.

Ideas for consideration – generated by participants

Interviewees and focus group participants were invited to share any ideas and/or recommendations they had for the Sparklers Project Team with regard to the future development of the Sparklers resource and website. These ideas have been grouped as follows:

Website specific suggestions

- Keep the Sparklers front page ‘refreshed’ by profiling new Sparklers activities and resources regularly
- Highlight/host stories and video clips of teachers/schools using Sparklers
- Include images of more senior (year 7/8) students
- Include more Māori and Pasifika imagery
- Offer navigation advice e.g. suggest users bookmark specific activities/website pages to help them relocate identified activities/resources
- Add an age-band filter for the activities
- Explore options for linking teachers who are using Sparklers

Sparklers – ideas directly related to activities

- Consider providing handouts (e.g. postcards, bookmarks, rap cards or pamphlets) to enable information about Sparklers to be shared easily with others

- Provide opportunities for teachers/schools to share their stories back to the *All Right?* campaign and the Sparklers Project Team
- Provide additional Sparklers activities particularly suited to Year 7 and Year 8 students
- Explore options for additional Sparklers activities e.g. 'make and do' options to use as random acts of kindness gifts; consider adding more outdoor activities; consider adding some science-based activities; provide advice about using puppets
- Explore options for additional ready-made printables that align with existing Sparklers e.g. *All Right?* compliments poster
- Investigate options for expanding the resource to suit early childhood and secondary settings

Resources – thinking about additional advice/support

- Create resources supporting the professional development of teachers in the areas of psychological safety and psychological first aid
- Revise the parenting guide

The suggestions made by those who have contributed to the evaluation range from relatively practical and straightforward options to those requiring significant resourcing over time, potentially expanding Sparklers in very significant ways. In addition to the suggestions offered by the evaluation participants, the evaluation findings suggest that there are opportunities to:

- highlight how Sparklers can be incorporated into wellbeing strategies and whole-school approaches to culture change,
- identify options for supporting schools in linking Sparklers with school values/agreed ways of being,
- support teachers in using Sparklers to establish effective classroom management practices and safe classroom environments e.g. establishing helpful routines, ensuring readiness for learning, and
- link Sparklers with social and emotional learning programmes, and Pastoral care policies and practices, already established within the school.

Final reflections

Contributors to this evaluation offered overwhelmingly positive comments about their experiences of the Sparklers resource - whether sharing the resource with others, observing its implementation in a class or school, navigating the website to identify an activity, facilitating an activity with students, or participating as a student in a Sparklers activity, all participants offered comments that were affirming of the resource, and of the decision made by the Sparklers Project Team to develop and disseminate a wellbeing resource.

Some participants, based in schools, expressed a degree of regret related to not having implemented the resource to the extent that they had originally envisaged. Without exception these participants were positive about the utility of the resource and were committed to using it more in the future. Other participants noted that the evaluation had

been a timely reminder to revisit the activities so enthusiastically embarked upon when they had first been introduced to Sparklers.

The efficacy of the resource in different contexts is apparent in the reflections of the evaluation participants. School Based Mental Health Team members and Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour used Sparklers with individuals, groups and classes to assist teachers and students in managing complex behaviours and situations. Similarly teachers used Sparklers activities to help build the social and emotional literacy of their students – and students were able to describe, among other things, how Sparklers activities had helped them to calm themselves, to show kindness to others, to give and receive compliments, and to reflect on personal strengths.

Overall, the availability of the Sparklers resource was highly valued by all who participated in this evaluation. Importantly the resource appears to have offered teachers and other professionals working in schools, a concrete starting place for conversations about the wellbeing of students, and has provided a common language for staff and students alike. Ultimately, it seems that talking about wellbeing and the wellbeing needs of students has become increasingly normalised in the school settings visited over the course of this evaluation – the availability of Sparklers, and the professional support associated with the resource, has without doubt been a contributory factor.