

# The impact of the IB Primary Years Programme on student well-being and other related social-emotional learning outcomes

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## Research summary

Summary developed by IB Research based  
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## Background

Schools are primarily seen as places where young people acquire academic skills. However, schools also play a vital role in promoting student well-being. Student well-being consists of domains that include “physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic wellbeing” (Pollard and Lee 2003: 1), and can be defined as “the ability to successfully, resiliently, and innovatively participate in the routines and

activities” important in a school context (Weisner 1998: 75). This study investigated the impact of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) on student well-being and related social-emotional outcomes. Specifically, the research examined student well-being in PYP schools in Australia as well as the relationship between the PYP curriculum and student well-being.



## Research design

This mixed-method study included, in the first phase, a review of the literature along with a comprehensive desk-review of IB documentation related to well-being. During this initial phase, researchers sought to determine whether well-being was fostered through the PYP written curriculum. The second phase undertook a retrospective comparative analysis of data from PYP ( $n = 2,141$ ) and non-PYP schools ( $n = 2,141$ ), using an existing Australian student well-being database of 47,568 students. Propensity score matching was used to match students attending PYP schools with students who attend similar non-IB schools. The last phase of the study involved tailored surveys of PYP teachers ( $n = 114$ )

and their PYP year 5 students ( $n = 1,639$ ; mean age 10.69 years) to examine the extent to which the PYP promotes student social-emotional skill development and well-being outcomes. A representative sample of 56 PYP schools across Australia at various stages of implementing the PYP participated in the surveys. The surveys contained items to measure curriculum-specific PYP inputs and activities and well-being-specific outcomes and impacts. Survey results were designed to contribute to a logic model and theory of change that described and assessed PYP implementation and impact while controlling for other well-being activities in schools.



## Findings

### Curricular elements that foster well-being in PYP schools

The IB learner profile and approaches to learning are key programmatic elements that may encourage well-being in PYP schools. PYP curriculum documents indicate that there are clear opportunities for students to develop their own skills and practices for well-being through participation in the PYP. Most notable in the documentation is the positioning of the learner profile attributes as a set of aspirational student outcomes, and the approaches to learning that offer consistent practical opportunities for students to improve their social and emotional understanding and abilities across the curriculum.

The interrelationship between the IB learner profile attributes and the categories of the approaches to learning were conceptually mapped to the widely regarded Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) well-being framework to examine the extent of commonality. Research by the CASEL group is useful in providing a framework that organizes a variety of concepts from the social and emotional well-being domain (CASEL, 2019).

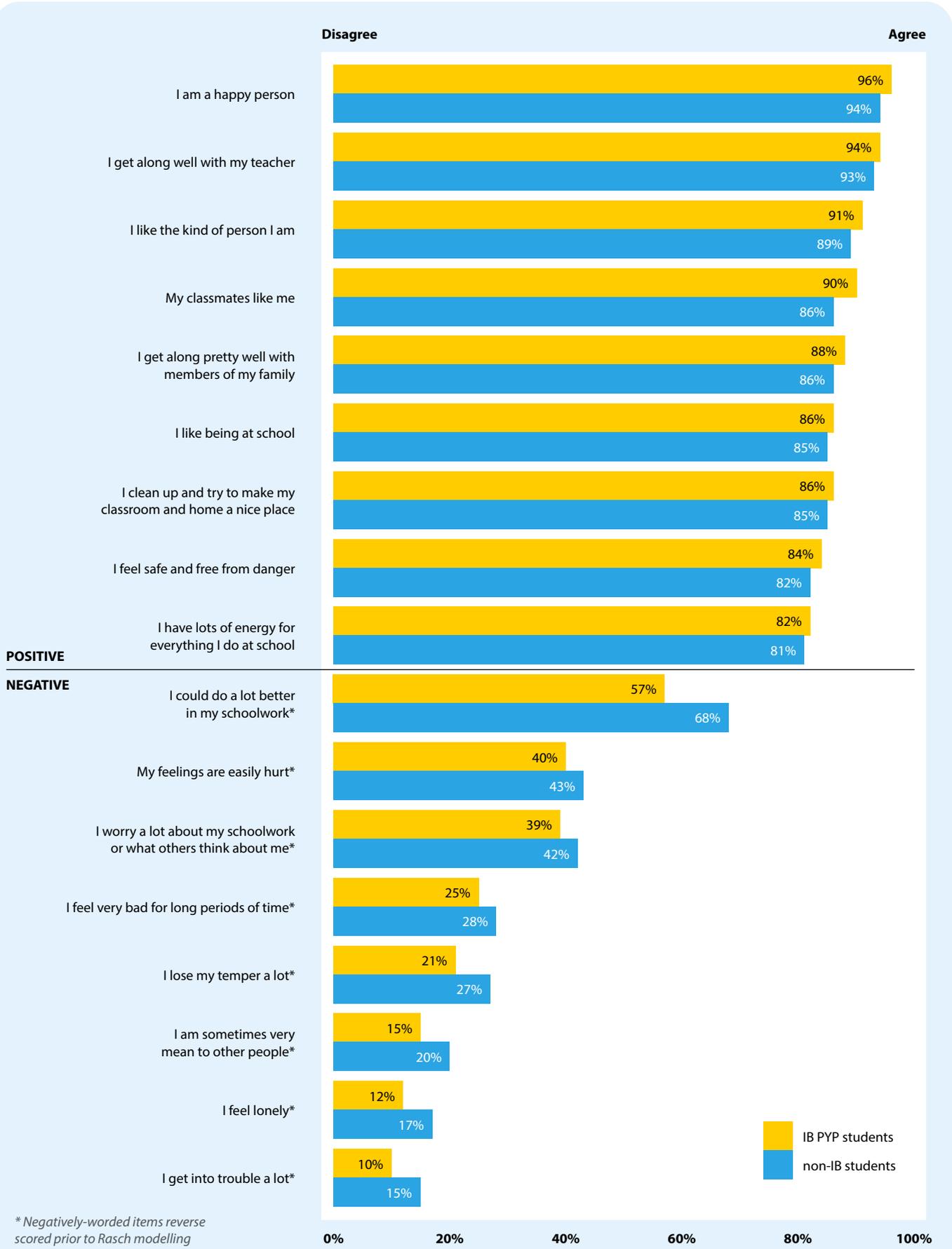
The study showed strong conceptual alignment between the IB learner profile attributes, the IB approaches to learning skill categories and the CASEL

core social-emotional learning competencies of relationship skills, self-management, social awareness, self-awareness and responsible decision-making. To assist students in the development of their well-being, there is an opportunity to make explicit in PYP documentation the clear links to social-emotional learning skills.

### PYP students demonstrate higher levels of well-being

PYP students demonstrated consistently higher levels of well-being compared with similar non-PYP students. The data suggests that PYP students have a moderate advantage equivalent to three months' additional development.

Research indicates that an important aspect of the well-being of young people is the extent to which they experience both negative emotions and behaviours (such as stress, anger and rule-breaking behaviour) and positive emotions and behaviours (such as positive self-identity, happiness and getting along with others). Therefore, the survey measured both positive and negative elements of students' overall well-being (figure 1). The general trend across all items was that PYP students' responses were more positive (for positive items) and less negative (for negative items) for each feeling or behaviour compared with non-PYP students.



\* Negatively-worded items reverse scored prior to Rasch modelling

Figure 1. Students' views about overall well-being: feelings and behaviours

## Impact of the PYP on student well-being

To examine to what extent the PYP was having an impact on student outcomes, it was necessary to develop a measure that could capture the complexity of activities as an indicator of how well a school was implementing the PYP—namely, a PYP Index. The PYP Index that was created for this study offers a new and useful way to distinguish between PYP schools. To investigate the nature of PYP implementation and engagement, teachers were asked explicitly about the extent to which they believed their school implemented the PYP, based on the IB's *Programme standards and practices* (IBO 2016). The standards and practices were used because these are the benchmarks to which IB schools are held accountable and with which teachers are already familiar. The PYP Index measures the overall extent of a school's implementation of IB programme standards and practices (from low to high).

Teacher and student factors were grouped on the basis of being in low to high PYP Index schools. Figure 2 (next page) presents the trends between low and high PYP Index schools. It also presents the profiles of activities in schools, which tend to increase with PYP implementation quality.

Findings suggest that high PYP Index schools supported students' well-being and related outcomes more effectively than low PYP Index schools. The model and analyses indicate that PYP programmatic elements, as assessed in the IB standards and practices (such as teacher professional development, developing the learner profile attributes, promoting student voice and agency), are associated with student well-being and other social-emotional learning outcomes.

Teachers in high implementing PYP schools were more likely to experience a positive school climate and to be confident in supporting well-being in the classroom. Moreover, correlation analyses showed significant relationships between a positive school climate and important elements of the PYP, such as teacher collaboration and embedding approaches to learning to promote a supportive classroom culture. It appears, therefore, that school climate, enabled through

school-wide practices that meet or exceed IB standards and practices, is associated with student well-being outcomes. Students in high PYP implementing schools were more likely to have developed social-emotional learning skills and improved well-being outcomes.

## Personal, social and physical education

Personal, social and physical education (PSPE) is a unique subject in the PYP with a strong well-being focus, where all teachers are expected to teach the personal and social (PS) education component, while the physical education (PE) component may be taught as a separate subject. Of all the elements of the PYP that were examined, PSPE was reported as the component least understood by the teachers surveyed. There is an opportunity to clarify the PSPE and, perhaps more explicitly, separate the PS component to encourage a core well-being focus in the PYP classroom.



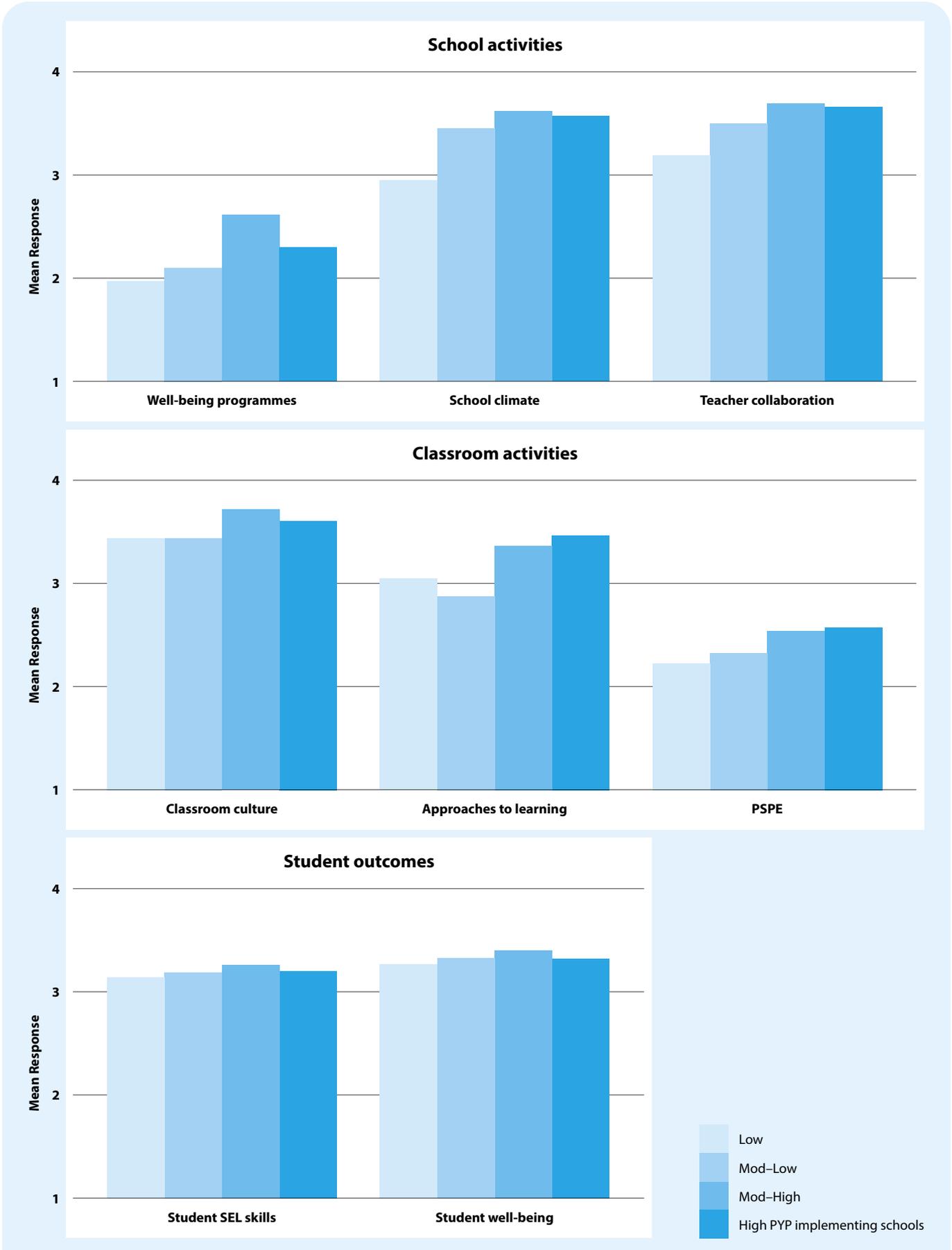


Figure 2. PYP implementation quality independent of socio-economic status

## Summary

This study found the PYP curriculum and programmatic elements to be imbued with activities and practices that promote well-being. In its attempt to assess the potential impact of the PYP on student well-being and associated outcomes, this study developed a new tool—the PYP Index—to aid in comparative analyses between schools. PYP schools with strong implementation consistently showed a more positive school climate and higher levels of teacher engagement, student participation and student well-being outcomes, attributable to the PYP. Supported by similar findings from the propensity score matched analysis of PYP and non-PYP schools, these findings offer substantial evidence that the PYP encourages student well-being above and beyond other well-being activities undertaken in schools.

## References

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This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at: [www.ibo.org/en/research/](http://www.ibo.org/en/research/). For more information on this study or other IB research, please email [research@ibo.org](mailto:research@ibo.org). To cite the full report, please use the following: Dix, K and Sniedze-Gregory, S. 2020. *The impact of the IB Primary Years Programme on student well-being and other related social-emotional learning outcomes*. Bethesda, MD, USA. International Baccalaureate Organization.