

Nurturing Thriving Staff and Flourishing Students: A School Journey of Discovering Positive Education

Westwood Primary School
Singapore

As a new school which was set up at the start of this year, Westwood Primary aspires to deliver exceptional education in the 21st century to raise a generation of children with deep anchors of character, to flourish and thrive, with their hands to the nation, hearts to the community, and eyes for the future. Beyond excellence, we seek to design and provide lessons for life, so as to prepare the next generation of children to be future-ready, anchor-steady. This is premised on designing and delivering a holistic education, to prepare our pupils to thrive in a fast-changing and highly-connected world. This calls for us to place important emphasis on imparting both *skills and competencies* and to teach *wellbeing*, and for our pupils to gain greater insights of the *self* as an agent for change and knowledge creation. This paper outlines the envisioning journey we have embarked on to explore how Positive Education can guide us in developing school-wide teacher belief and learning-teaching practices, designing our curriculum as well as shaping our school culture and overall strategic directions. Key areas of focus within *Westwood's THRIVE Model for Positive Education* include nurturing and sustaining positive relationships, promoting and prolonging positive emotion, fostering mindfulness and building resilience, enabling and encouraging the state of flow, cultivating a growth mindset, promoting a deeper understanding of one's meaning and purpose, and increasing awareness of character strengths in self and others.

Keywords: Positive Education, Flourishing, Enabling Institution

Positive psychology research in the field of education is relatively new. Faced with increasing external demands on what to teach, how to teach, and how to work with diverse stakeholders, educational settings such as schools may typically emphasise on fixing perceived deficits, and as a result do not look sufficiently at strengths or how to prioritise change efforts. On the other hand, the study of positive emotions, positive traits and positive institutions accentuates human flourishing (Seligman, 2010), rather than human measuring up. More significantly, positive professional cultures foster productivity, collegiality, support for hard work and high expectations for staff and student success and wellbeing.

The What & Why of Positive Education

Positive Education, simply put, is the incorporation of the science of positive psychology into the life and work of schools (Seligman, Ernst, Gilham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009). It is aimed first at benefitting teachers personally, and then benefits them again by making it easier to get students to engage with and persist in the work they need to master learning. Positive Education inevitably works to create a school culture that supports the caring, trusting relationships that distinguish excellent schools from their mediocre peers.

The Ministry of Education announced the implementation of a new framework for schools to enhance the development of 21st century competencies (21CC) in our students. This will underpin the holistic education that our schools provide to better prepare our students to thrive in a fast-changing and highly-connected world. This framework spells out that in order to better position our students to take advantage of opportunities in a globalised world, our students need to possess life-ready competencies like creativity, innovation, cross-cultural understanding and resilience. This calls for schools to place greater emphasis on imparting both “traditional skills” and to teach “well-being” and for students to gain greater insights of the “self” as an agent for change and knowledge creation. Moving forward, schools that embark on the journey of positive education would do well to develop the future-ready child we want for the 21st century.

Our Discovery Journey: *An Appreciative Inquiry*

Using an Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider & Avital, 2003), we engaged a schoolwide strategic conversation and envisioning journey following the iterative stages of “Discovery”, “Dream”, “Design” and “Destiny”, viz:

1. Preliminary sessions were held with selected parents and pioneering staff in the previous year to solicit their aspirations for the new school;
2. A staff conversation around Positive Education was held on 18 Mar 2013; a planning meeting between Strategic Planning Teams and our Superintendent was held on 24 Apr 2013;
3. A whole-school engagement session involving staff and stakeholders, including after school care staff, was held on 6 Jun 2013 to define our Teacher Beliefs, School Culture and discussed our Student Outcomes and Teaching-Learning framework for Westwood Primary;
4. Selected staff attended “Positive Schools Conference” in Perth in May and “Discovering Positive Education” programme by Geelong Grammar School in Jun. A consultation session was also held in Jul to share these envisioning documents with our School Advisory Committee for further input.



Who We Are: *Our Character Strengths*

In order for “self” to be an agent of change, we focus on harnessing *character strengths*, as ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that enable high functioning and performance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These are the fundamental values-based instincts we want all members of the Westwood community to internalise and demonstrate in all we do on a daily basis. This is our cultural DNA which defines us as a Westwood family, with:

A Heart of Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful ingredient of health and well-being for individuals and society. An important virtue for thriving, gratitude provides one with a sense of meaning and connection to entities that are greater than the self. We demonstrate gratitude when we are constantly aware of and thankful for all the good things that happen to us and when we express thanks to those responsible.

A Resilient Mindset

Resilience enables one to succeed despite encountering significant challenges and adversity. The promotion of resilience thinking is therefore an important, if not central, aspect of schooling and a key enabler of school success. We all can learn to be more resilient by turning challenge into opportunity, and being adaptable and flexible to change and growth

A Passion for Community

Community-spiritedness is to show a deep interest in caring for the place and people we share our living with. By participating in a social cause or reaching out to the underserved, we strengthen the relationships that form the shared compact, to fulfill our responsibility to one another and for the wider community.

A Future-Ready Confidence

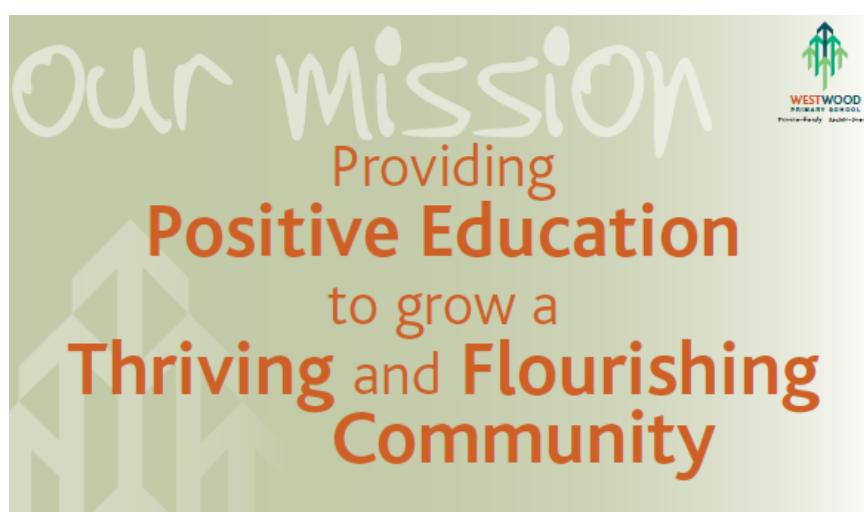
Confidence and courage that come from the preparedness for the future enables us to always innovate, evolve and grow ourselves and the community so we can always be responsive to changing demands. Having a future-oriented outlook is key to ensure we always stay ahead while remaining humble and grounded to continuously improve, learn and grow as a people and community.



Why We Exist: *Our Purpose Statement*

With the above in mind, central to our school mission is “to provide positive education to grow a thriving and flourishing community”. Specifically, positive education guides our school in the following:

1. Maximizing positive impact of instructional leadership by defining effective learning-teaching principles and responsive curriculum, instruction and assessment;
2. Promoting a positive school climate, culture and community engagement; and
3. Personalizing pupil support for learning and development.



Our Westwoodian: *The Flourishing Child*

To nurture a *flourishing pupil*, and taking reference from MOE’s desired student outcomes, our focus is to develop each Westwood pupil, who possesses our school character strengths to strive to attain outcomes and developmental goals as follows:



The Flourishing Westwood Pupil
Our Student Outcomes and Developmental Goals

<i>Character Strengths</i>	<i>Student Outcomes</i>	<i>Desired Attributes & Behaviours</i>	<i>P1 & P2 Goals</i>	<i>P3 & P4 Goals</i>	<i>P5 & P6 Goals</i>
Heart of Gratitude	A Concerned Citizen	Expresses empathy and appreciation for others Takes action in bettering the lives of others	I thank everyone who has helped me.	I encourage my friends to express gratitude to the people around them.	I role model how to express gratitude & appreciation.
Resilient Mindset	A Self-Directed Learner	Thinks critically and reflectively of own learning Perseveres to achieve personal best	I keep trying.	I take time to reflect and to improve.	I reflect on my weaknesses and work on my strengths to achieve my personal best.
Passion for Community	A Compassionate Leader	Works effectively in team for common good Takes initiative to lead and serve members	I help my teachers, family and friends.	I take initiative to help others in need.	I lead and serve the community with my heart.
Future-Ready Confidence	A Confident Person	Knows what is right and what is wrong Appreciates personal strengths and weaknesses	I speak up in front of my friends and teachers	I step forward to lead my friends.	I reach my goals despite all challenges.

Our Teacher Belief & Staff Culture: *The Thriving Educator*

To realize these student outcomes, our teachers must strive to grow in their craft mastery and engagement under the Teacher Growth Model (TGM), so that every Westwood staff can be a “teacher-leader and a community-builder”. We have therefore adopted a Teacher Belief statement as: “*A Talented and Unique Individual with the Potential for Success*”:

1. We believe in growing ourselves, moving beyond our comfort and taking the initiative to make significant and positive impact in all we do
2. We believe in touching the lives of our pupils and colleagues so as to make a difference to both their and our futures

At the same time, staff put together a Culture statement as “*of GROWTH - to LEAD*” encapsulating the following staff attributes: **Generosity, Respect, Open-mindedness, Wellbeing, Trust, Happiness**; so as to **Love, go the Extra mile, Act on our belief, and finally to Drive**.

What Do We Want To Become: *Our Vision Statement*

Given the above, our aspiration is therefore for Westwood Primary “*To become a positive institution that inspires the community to lead meaningful and engaged lives*”. Becoming a *Positive Institution* is the quest for Westwood Primary not only to deliver positive education, but also to live out positivity as a school to inspire our community, both within and without, to find meaning, purpose and engagement in all we undertake.

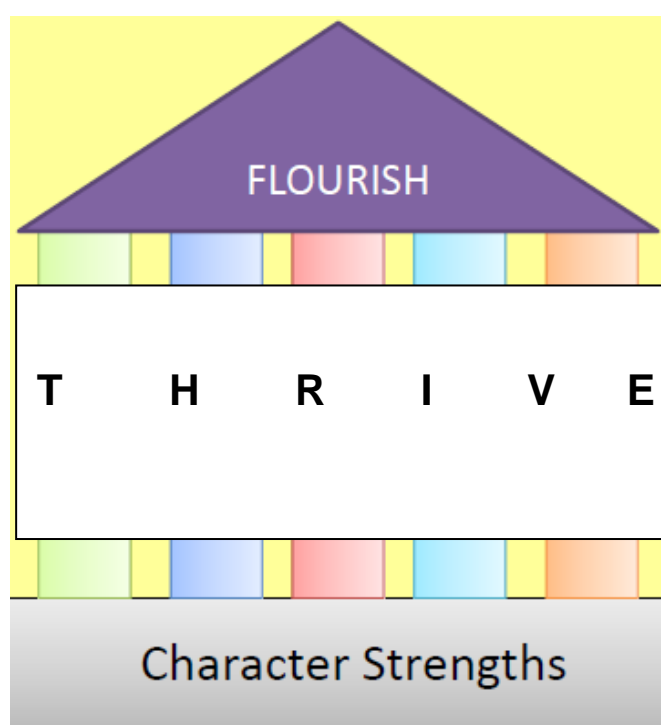


How Do We Get There: *The Westwood THRIVE Model*

Based on Seligman's (2010) Model of Flourishing, enshrined within the positive institution is our focus on promoting:

1. Positive Emotion (P) – to broaden-and-build our mental and emotional capacity
2. Positive Engagement (E) – to be in the 'flow' when learning and doing
3. Positive Relationship (R) – to be both a team player and to lead others
4. Positive Meaning (M) – to be purposeful in our end-goals
5. Positive Accomplishment (A) – to make a positive impact to our lives and our community

To this end, we have developed our THRIVE Framework for Positive Education:



THRIVE Framework For Positive Education © Westwood Primary School

Thinking Mindfully (Growth Mindset & Mindfulness):	Positive Accomplishment
Healthy Coping (Resilience & Energy Management):	Positive Health
Relating Well (Active Constructive Responding):	Positive Relationship
In the Moment (Flow & Optimal Engagement):	Positive Engagement
Values-driven Actions (Meaning & Purpose):	Positive Meaning
Emotions of Positivity (Dipper & Bucket, Gratitude):	Positive Emotion

Way Forward

We are currently designing and developing school-wide approaches to realise this model for whole school practices. For a start, as part of articulating the journey with tangible positive education strategies in the classroom, our teachers brainstormed on possible ways to begin inculcating a growth mindset and a positive outlook in our Westwood pupils. Some of the strategies raised at the planning session to date include:

1. Using common icons like the traffic light to teach explicit reflective thinking. For example, a traffic-light to represent: Stop Think Go- for teachers to guide pupils in reflecting on their actions and thoughts in class.
2. Regular “What Went Well” (WWW) moments in the classroom, at the end of the day or week for regular reflection opportunities to “pan for gold” in their lives.
3. Creating reward charts to institute specific praise for effort, rather than just achievement in tasks and relationships.
4. Creating more lesson opportunities for teachers to offer words of affirmation to the pupils and for peer encouragement of effort and behaviour.
5. Creating “Students Will Be Able To” (SWBAT) corners on the front of class for pupils to have clear learning and behavioural objectives for the various lessons.

Overall, the THRIVE model undergirds our focus for Westwoodians to flourish, i.e. to strive for both excellence, and for wellbeing, leveraging on character strengths of resilience, gratitude, community-spiritedness and future-ready confidence for the 21st century school. It serves to guide the translation of our ongoing research on positive education into effective policies and programmes that promote the competence and wellness of all. At the same time, it provides a roadmap for subsequent phases of school envisioning and direction-setting, to effect deep and sustainable culture to bring about a new prosperity that combines positive outcomes in lives within the school context and the community at large.

References

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