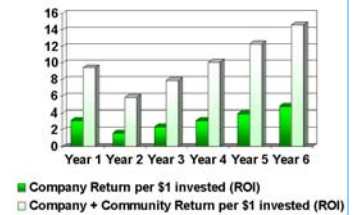


A Business case for Effective Safety Management in Schools

In General Industry

Progressive organizations in all industries increasingly recognize the commercial value of investing in their people's safety. Their increasing elevation of occupational health and safety (OHS) management beyond mere obligation is validated by data that consistently find *direct* returns of 300% - 800% on OHS investment.⁽¹⁻⁵⁾



Indirect returns on safety investment are even more compelling, because they include quality, productivity and corporate image gains, all of which contribute significantly towards market advantage, increased sales, and market share growth.⁽⁶⁾

In Schools

Schools are optimally positioned to gain market share from effective OHS management, and conversely, to lose market share from the reverse, because Australian 'purchasers' of school enrolments are predominantly parents, whose 'purchasing' and 're-purchasing' criteria consistently rank as paramount⁽⁷⁾:

1. Schools producing high-quality academic outcomes,
2. Schools demonstrating high-level values, care and safety, and
3. Schools providing high-quality teaching and leadership.

The correlation between effective safety care ('purchase' criterion 2), school selection and student enrolments is obvious and validated by Australia's largest independent education survey that found parentally-perceived poor school values and/or safety were the most frequent school-related causes of student attrition⁽⁸⁾.

The correlation between safety and academic outcomes, leadership and teaching quality ('purchase' criteria 1 and 3) is less obvious but nevertheless true. Strong links between safety and employee productivity, quality of work and leadership have been well-established by research^(9,10). Since safety influences leadership quality, and teachers are leaders, then safety influences school leadership quality. And since safety influences employee productivity and work quality, if employees are teachers, then safety influences teacher productivity, teaching quality, and necessarily, academic outcomes.



Not surprisingly, recent research has found a high inter-relationship between safe and supportive learning environments, student wellbeing and academic success⁽¹¹⁾ and a strong correlation between student well being, safety and security and results of student literacy and numeracy tests⁽¹²⁾.

In this light, Board of Studies registration conditional on the demonstration of safe and supportive school environments appears in a magnified dimension. And, influencing the achievement of *all* major ‘purchase’ motivating outcomes, and thereby affecting schools’ market appeal, effective OHS management makes undeniable business sense.

Although OHS management is not primarily a commercial or academic consideration but one of genuine concern for people’s welfare, these findings beg of all schools, particularly fee-reliant schools, two critical questions:

1. *“To what extent is safety management (or lack thereof) in our school lending advantage (or disadvantage) to our market appeal and therefore to student enrolments and operating viability?”*
2. *“How can we best manage safety in our school to the advantage of all?”*

The answer to the first question depends on internal analysis.

The answer to the second question, according to research-based expert opinion, is OHS Management Systems (OHSMS), particularly those implemented in organisations in which:

- Senior management commitment to, and leadership of OHS management are high⁽¹³⁾
- The OHSMS is organisation-specific and used as a tool to drive and measure continuous OHS improvement⁽¹³⁾
- OHS care is a true organisational priority, supported by adequate resources and genuine stakeholder consultation⁽¹³⁾
- The OHSMS is consistent with Australian standards such as AS/NZS 4804 (or its companion audit standard AS/NZS 4801), and/or International standards such as BS OHSAS 18001⁽¹⁴⁻¹⁶⁾

Case Study - CSO Broken Bay



A case study of the Catholic Schools Office of Broken Bay (CSO) in NSW provides a clear illustration of the benefits of school OHS management using an organisation-specific OHSMS.

In 2000, CSO recognized the need to better manage the safety of the many students, employees, volunteers, contractors and visitors in the 43 schools under its care. Underpinned by the commitment of its senior managers and in consultation with stakeholders and expert advisors, CSO developed and implemented a school-specific OHSMS consistent with AS/NZS 4801.

By 2004, CSO's OHSMS was attracting attention from external school organisations and had gained national recognition by winning the National Safety Council of Australia (NSCA) 2004 Awards of Excellence for *Best Implementation of an OHS Management System* and *OHS Excellence*.

With increased confidence, CSO continued to implement its long term vision of “*All people learning, developing and working in a safe, secure and supportive environment and every-day culture of pro-active and continuously improving safety management*”. Through 2005, CSO reviewed, augmented and transformed its paper-format OHSMS into a secure online system, *CSOHS Online*.

With extensive staff training, consultation and communication, *CSOHS Online* was launched and implemented in CSO schools in 2006, accompanied by keen industry interest, to which CSO responded by commissioning, with assistance from CCI Insurances, the creation of a non-CSO version of *CSOHS Online* for use by external school organisations. By 2007, *CSOHS Online* was serving not only the health and safety of CSO's 43 school communities but also more than 800 external school communities subscribing to the CCI-sponsored *CSOHS Online*.

During 2007, CSO was awarded SAI Global's *OHS Management System Excellence Award*, NSCA's *Best Specific OHS Management System Award*, WorkCover NSW's *Best OHS Management System Award* and the Australian Safety & Compensation Commission's *Best OHS Management System Award*.



CSO safety dividends have been significant, beginning with the progressive achievement of its primary vision of a safe and secure learning environment, accompanied by ongoing incident and injury management cost savings (such as a reduction of \$750,000 in 2006-2007 workers compensation premium) returning increasing investment in its core business of providing children's education.

Prospective and current CSO school parents can be assured that CSO is serious about caring for their children's health and safety, and does so in ways Australian OHS authorities applaud.

Effective OHS Management - Passive Effect or Active Force?



OHS performance is passively at work, to school advantage or disadvantage, without anyone's conscious wielding or notice. Assuming an OHS performance advantage, rather than disadvantage, is in hand, how might this advantage be wielded appropriately?

Prominent amongst options is public reporting, opportunities for which most schools possess in abundance, and the climate for which is favourable, given increasing public and government interest in corporate social responsibility, sustainability and transparency⁽¹⁸⁾.

Public OHS reporting will demonstrate that safety is a high priority to which the school is pro-actively committed, and geared towards continued improvement.⁽¹⁹⁾

Certainly, parent buyers of school education are one audience for whom published school OHS performance data will be of critical interest and persuasion.



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