Dear Parent/Caregiver,

My name is Vaughan Carr, and I am leading the New South Wales Child Development Study (NSW-CDS).

The NSW-CDS is a state-wide study of child development which aims to identify factors affecting later health, education, and behaviour in adolescence or adulthood. The study is being led by researchers at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in collaboration with others at the Universities of Newcastle, Western Australia, and Canterbury (NZ), and in partnership with Government organisations including the NSW Department of Education and Communities, NSW Ministry of Health, and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services.

As part of this study, students enrolled in Year 6 of every primary school in NSW this year will be invited to participate in a survey of child mental health and wellbeing: the Middle Childhood Survey (MCS). This letter is to inform you that the Principal of your child’s school has agreed to conduct the survey during class time in Term 3.

The following information will help you decide whether you would like your child to take part. If you do not opt your child out, they will also have the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate during class time.

The MCS will gather a snapshot of child mental health and wellbeing within a longitudinal research study of children who were assessed using the Australian Early Development Index as they entered school in 2009. The MCS will gather information directly from the children about their thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences at a critical stage of development, in order to better understand the needs of children in this age-group, and how programs and policies might be improved to promote their healthy development into adulthood. It is important to note that the MCS cannot be used to “label” children or diagnose a mental illness. Most children will complete the MCS in class under the supervision of their teacher. There will be no researchers at schools; the survey is designed for students to complete themselves. In the future, MCS responses will be combined with information from other organisations via record linkage processes; linked data may include, but is not limited to, child and parent records from Health (e.g., hospital admissions), Education (e.g., literacy and numeracy skills), Welfare (e.g., community services), and Justice (e.g., crime statistics) departments. These linkages will facilitate the long-term goal to develop policies and programs that promote the healthy development of all Australian children.

We stress that the privacy of your child’s responses will be protected at all times: all information gathered within the NSW-CDS is provided anonymously, and remains confidential (accessible only by the research team). Any findings from the research will be reported in such a way that individuals, schools, and small communities cannot be identified. We will also provide confidential feedback to the Principal of each participating school that summarises the mental health and wellbeing of children in the school, without identifying individual participants.

If you do not wish your child to participate in the MCS, you can complete the Opt-Out Form attached and return it to your child’s class teacher, or visit our website to opt-out now. Even after your child has completed the survey, you have until the start of Term 4 [16 October 2015] to opt them out if you wish. This will ensure that your child’s survey answers are not provided to the researchers.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, they may be directed to the Ethics Secretariat, The University of New South Wales, SYDNEY NSW 2052 (telephone: [02] 9385 6222, fax: [02] 9385 6648, email: humanethics@unsw.edu.au). Complaints will be investigated promptly and you will be informed of the outcome. If you need any further information about any aspects of the NSW Child Development Study, please contact your child’s school for assistance.

Thank you for supporting the MCS.

Vaughan J. Carr
Professor, UNSW
Parent/Caregiver WRITTEN OPT-OUT/WITHDRAWAL Form

Please complete ONLY if you wish to withdraw your child from participating in the Middle Childhood Survey (MCS).

Participating includes completing the MCS survey in class and a linkage of the survey with child and parent information from other organisations. If you have read the Parent/Caregiver Information Leaflet or you simply do NOT want your child to take part in the MCS, please complete the below form to withdraw them from the survey, and return it to your child’s school before survey administration.

If you change your mind about your child’s inclusion in the study you can withdraw your child’s responses from the MCS research database up until the start of Term 4 (16 October 2015); after this point all responses will be de-identified for provision to the research team, such that removal of a specific child’s responses will no longer be possible. If you withdraw your child’s responses, your child’s data will be withdrawn and destroyed.

I have read the enclosed information or discussed my child’s participation in the Middle Childhood Survey, and I request that information is not to be collected or included for:

Child’s full name: ____________________________

Child’s date of birth: / / 20  Today’s date: / / 2015

Full name of authorised parent/caregiver: ____________________________

__________________________
Signature of parent/caregiver:

By signing here, I understand that my child will NOT participate in the Middle Childhood Survey and that an alternative activity will be provided for my child. I understand that withdrawal from the survey can only happen from the time at which this form is activated in the online survey system, and that such withdrawal WILL NOT affect the relationship with my child’s teacher, my child’s school, or The University of New South Wales.