

# Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment

A Partnering Agreement between the  
Department of Human Services  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria  
Independent Schools Victoria



# Contents

Ministerial foreword	1
Endorsement	2
<b>1 About the Partnering Agreement</b>	<b>3</b>
What is the Partnering Agreement?	3
Why is a Partnering Agreement required?	3
Who are the parties to the Partnering Agreement?	4
Who does the Partnering Agreement apply to?	4
What are the aims and key requirements of the Partnering Agreement?	5
How does the Education Support Guarantee relate to the Partnering Agreement?	6
Can information about a child or young person be shared under the Partnering Agreement?	6
How should differences or difficulties be resolved?	7
<b>2 School enrolment</b>	<b>9</b>
Transition to school	11
<b>3 Promoting attendance and engagement</b>	<b>13</b>
Transition to secondary school	14
<b>4 Supporting achievement</b>	<b>15</b>
The Student Support Group	16
Individual Education Plans	17
<b>5 Case planning</b>	<b>19</b>
The Student Support Group and case planning	19
Looking After Children	20
<b>6 School retention</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7 Implementing the Partnering Agreement</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>8 Monitoring student outcomes</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>9 Resources and links</b>	<b>27</b>
General education policies and procedures	27
School enrolment policies	27
Student engagement, pastoral care and behaviour management policies	27
Relevant references and resources	28
<b>10 Contacts</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>11 Appendices</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Parties to the Partnering Agreement</b>	<b>33</b>
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	33
Department of Human Services	33
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria	34
Independent Schools Victoria	34
<b>Appendix 2: School responsibilities checklist</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Case manager responsibilities checklist</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Learning mentor guidance</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Student Support Group guidance</b>	<b>39</b>
Individual Education Plans	40

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# Foreword

Education makes a vital contribution to improving the outcomes and lives of children and young people in out-of-home care. For these children and young people, school is often a place of safety and stability, where they connect with teachers and friends. Participation in education provides a significant gateway through which they can pass into adulthood, employment and effective participation in community life. However, the circumstances and background of children in out-of-home care mean that they are likely to need additional assistance to gain access to educational opportunities, experience positive school engagement and improve academic performance if they are to realise their full potential.

*The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* is based on best interests principles that require all decision-making to consider the need to protect a child or young person from harm, safeguard their rights and promote their development. Children and young people in out-of-home care must have the best possible care, where all aspects of their development are addressed and their best interests are at the centre of every action and decision. A strong out-of-home care system in which children and young people are at the centre must include a range of supports to meet their diverse needs including recognition of the important role of education.

Victoria has a high-quality, dynamic education and training system which provides a range of options to meet the diverse needs and preferences of the community. As children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria may attend government, Catholic or independent schools, it is important that there is a consistent approach across all schools when responding to their needs.

*The Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria* (the Partnering Agreement) acknowledges that providing the best start in life for children and young people in out-of-home care is a shared responsibility and provides a strong platform for staff in Victorian schools and case managers within Child Protection and community service organisations to work closely together to achieve this objective.

The Partnering Agreement supports the creation of a society where every child thrives, learns and grows, is respected and valued, and becomes an effective adult member of the community – a community in which the safety, stability, health, development and learning of every child is protected and promoted throughout childhood.

# Endorsement

We, the undersigned, on behalf of our respective departments and organisations endorse the *Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria* (the Partnering Agreement).

The Partnering Agreement reflects the shared commitment of the out-of-home care and education sectors to children and young people who live in out-of-home care.

The Partnering Agreement outlines the requirements and responsibilities of all parties to work in cooperation to improve the educational experience and outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care. We commend the Partnering Agreement to all schools and case managers who work with these vulnerable young Victorians.



**Gill Callister**  
Secretary,  
Department of Human Services




**Richard Bolt**  
Secretary,  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development




**Stephen Elder**  
Director,  
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria




**Michelle Green**  
Chief Executive,  
Independent Schools Victoria



# 1 About the Partnering Agreement

On any one day across Victoria, approximately 5500 children and young people live in out-of-home care. These children and young people have been subject to protective intervention by Child Protection and are subject to a range of Children's Court Orders<sup>1</sup>. They live in a range of alternative care arrangements away from their parents, including living with relatives or friends (kinship care), living with non-relative families (home-based care, sometimes known as foster care) and living in residential care units with rostered care staff (residential care). Some children or young people may live in out-of-home care for only a few days or weeks while others may be in care for many years.

Children and young people in out-of-home care are a diverse group who share the common experience of being exposed to significant abuse and trauma which has resulted in them being removed from the care of their parents. The State takes on the responsibility usually undertaken by a parent for these children and young people. Children and young people in out-of-home care have a right to be protected, cared for and educated in a way that maximises their life opportunities. The **Charter for Children in Out-of-Home Care**<sup>2</sup> states that a child or young person in care has a right to be provided with the best possible education and training.

## What is the Partnering Agreement?

The *Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria* (the Partnering Agreement) updates and replaces the *Partnering Agreement: School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care (2003)*. It provides renewed guidelines for Victorian schools and case managers from Child Protection and community service organisations.

The Partnering Agreement:

- outlines strategies to support the educational issues and social needs of children and young people in out-of-home care during the years they attend school, including flexible learning options
- promotes common practices across Victoria and provides a framework to monitor educational engagement and achievement more closely
- provides guidance about key areas in which support for children and young people in out-of-home care is required, including school enrolment, transition planning, attendance and engagement, achievement, case planning and school retention
- outlines a process for implementation of the Partnering Agreement and for monitoring outcomes.

## Why is a Partnering Agreement required?

In Victoria, the central goals of school education focus on the importance of improving literacy and numeracy standards and retaining young people in education. In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed on a national target of 90 per cent of young people completing Year 12 or its equivalent by 2020. Children and young people in out-of-home care face educational disadvantage and often fall into the 10 per cent of young people who become disengaged from schooling, have lower levels of academic achievement and do not successfully complete Year 12 or its equivalent.

<sup>1</sup> Further information about Children's Court Orders – Family Division is available at [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/41725/ecec\\_court\\_orders\\_ongoing\\_and\\_new.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/41725/ecec_court_orders_ongoing_and_new.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Charter for Children in Out-of-Home-Care*, Department of Human Services, 2007. Access at <http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance/charter-for-children>

Disengagement refers to the detachment from school of those children and young people of compulsory school age. Children and young people in out-of-home care are at greater risk of disengagement because their life circumstances, history of trauma, disrupted schooling, learning experiences and/or behaviours impact on their learning and school participation. They require particular attention and support to overcome these barriers and achieve positive educational outcomes.

Research indicates that children and young people in the out-of-home care system often have low levels of educational achievement. Studies generally indicate that children subject to guardianship or custody orders across all year levels have much lower mean test scores for reading and numeracy than the general student population<sup>3</sup>.

There has also been a significant amount of international research on the impact of abuse, trauma and disrupted attachment on brain development which can impact on school engagement and performance. Abuse and neglect impact on academic performance in various ways, including reduced cognitive capacity, sleep disturbance, memory difficulties and language delays. There are also impacts on social functioning, including the need for control, attachment difficulties (including attachment to school), poor peer relationships and instability arising from frequent moving<sup>4</sup>.

### Who are the parties to the Partnering Agreement?

Improved educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care must be based on the principle of partnership and shared responsibility. As such, the Partnering Agreement is an agreed commitment between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and Independent Schools Victoria. The Partnering Agreement also guides the work of community service organisations who are contracted by DHS to provide out-of-home care placements and support to children and young people, carers and families.

The Partnering Agreement provides a common understanding of the expectations and requirements of all parties to ensure that strategies are implemented for all children and young people in out-of-home care to provide the foundations for educational success. Additional information about the parties to the Partnering Agreement can be found in Appendix 1.

While it is acknowledged that a quality early childhood education and care experience provides children with a strong foundation for learning at school, the Partnering Agreement is focused on children and young people accessing school education, including flexible learning options.

### Who does the Partnering Agreement apply to?

- Staff who work in government, Catholic and independent schools, including principals and other school leaders, teachers and flexible learning options staff. It also guides the work of student wellbeing staff such as student welfare coordinators, primary welfare officers, student support services officer, chaplains, school nurses and wellbeing staff employed locally by schools such as youth workers, psychologists and social workers.
- Case managers who work within the DHS Child Protection program or for community service organisations that are contracted by DHS to provide case management services. The role of case managers is to coordinate the development and monitoring of a child's case plan. This includes direct case work with children and families, developing linkages with key services and coordinating care team meetings.

<sup>3</sup> *Educational Outcomes of Children and Young People on Guardianship and Custody Orders: A pilot study*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (June 2007), Canberra. Access at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/cws/eoocogoco/eoocogoco.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (2007), *Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatized Children*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at [http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer\\_classrooms.pdf](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf)

- Regional (government sector) or Diocesan (Catholic sector) staff who have responsibility for providing advice to schools and case managers about the requirements of the Partnering Agreement. This includes appointed Partnering Agreement Contact Officers in DHS and DEECD with responsibility for ensuring the ongoing implementation of the Partnering Agreement.

### **Important note regarding independent schools**

While the Partnering Agreement can guide the work of staff in independent schools, these schools are individual legal entities and subject to their own policies and procedures. The principles, processes and requirements outlined within the Partnering Agreement are supported and endorsed by Independent Schools Victoria but cannot be mandated. There are elements of the Partnering Agreement, such as Regional and Diocesan organisational structures, that do not necessarily apply to independent schools. Guidance and advice will be provided by Independent Schools Victoria to schools that require assistance in the interpretation or implementation of any part of the Partnering Agreement.

### **What are the aims and key requirements of the Partnering Agreement?**

The Partnering Agreement aims to ensure that:

- processes are in place to actively support the educational achievement of every child and young person in out-of-home care
- a strongly coordinated approach exists to support the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care
- all parties understand each other's roles and responsibilities and work cooperatively
- strategies are implemented to improve outcomes related to student enrolment, attendance, achievement, case planning, retention and school completion.

Since the initial Partnering Agreement was launched in 2003, enrolments and attendance rates for children and young people in out-of-home care have improved. Since this time, partnerships between DHS and DEECD at both central and regional levels have been established and resulted in positive outcomes for many of these children and young people. However, attendance, literacy and numeracy outcomes for these children and young people are still below that of the general student population. The revised Partnering Agreement aims to address these issues and reinforce the importance of collaboration and cooperation between the sectors. This spirit of shared responsibility is reflected in the addition of CECV and Independent Schools Victoria as parties to the agreement.

Community service organisations also play an important role in supporting the education of children and young people in out-of-home care. Community service organisations hold significant expertise in understanding the needs and experiences of these children, young people and their families and can provide advice and support to schools. Some community service organisations also offer consultation or professional learning opportunities to school staff regarding trauma and attachment and how this can impact upon learning and behaviour.

The Partnering Agreement sets out a number of key requirements including:

- case managers should advise the school that the child or young person resides in out-of-home care
- schools should record the child or young person's out-of-home care living arrangements in their student information record keeping mechanism (CASES21 for government schools)
- schools should establish a Student Support Group for each child or young person in out-of-home care and case managers must participate in this group
- schools should lead the development of an Individual Education Plan for each child or young person in out-of-home care, including input from the case manager

- schools and case managers should facilitate referrals for assessments and services to support the learning and wellbeing of the child or young person.

Compliance with the requirements of the Partnering Agreement will be monitored by DHS and DEECD through an annual survey. The achievement, absences and exit destinations of children and young people attending government schools will also be annually monitored through the CASES21 data collection system (See also Section 8: Monitoring student outcomes for further detail about monitoring compliance).

### What is the Education Support Guarantee?

An Education Support Guarantee for children and young people in out-of-home care has been established to commit schools and education-related health and wellbeing services and programs to providing an increased level of support and responsiveness to the educational needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. The elements of the Education Support Guarantee that are incorporated within the Partnering Agreement are:

- allocation of teacher or staff member as a learning mentor to each child or young person in out-of-home care enrolled in a school
- prioritisation of referrals for children and young people in out-of-home care to education-related health and wellbeing services to ensure that these services are highly accessible and responsive to the needs of this group
- an educational needs assessment for every student who has resided in out-of-home care for a period of three months or longer to identify their individual learning needs and to inform their Individual Education Plan
- priority status for post-round applications to the Program for Students with Disabilities for children and young people in out-of-home care enrolled at a government school
- checklists outlining the commitments and responsibilities for schools and case managers from DHS or community service organisations when a child or young person enters out-of-home care or when they are enrolled at a school.

### Can information about a child or young person be shared under the Partnering Agreement?

In order to plan and support the education of children and young people in out-of-home care, case managers and school staff will need to share information. This information should be treated sensitively and confidentially and staff must comply with the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001* whenever personal information is collected, stored, transmitted, shared, used or disclosed. Information that impacts upon the planning and monitoring of a child or young person's education and progress should be shared.

Information sharing guidelines are available at:

For schools - [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/41568/ig\\_education.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/41568/ig_education.pdf)

For case managers in community service organisations - [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/41566/information-sharing-guidelines-community-services.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/41566/information-sharing-guidelines-community-services.pdf)

Additional information about supporting privacy practice is available from DEECD at [privacy.enquiries@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:privacy.enquiries@edumail.vic.gov.au)

### How should differences or difficulties be resolved?

Generally, when there are differences or disagreements between parties in the course of supporting the education of a child or young person in out-of-home care, the issues should be raised with individual school staff, case managers or other professionals involved. Sometimes, more senior expertise or a review of a decision may be required. In these circumstances, the matter should be raised at the local level with the Principal or manager to achieve a resolution.

If a case manager experiences difficulties enrolling or transferring a child or young person to a school, the relevant DEECD regional office or Diocesan Catholic Education Office should be contacted for assistance. There are Partnering Agreement Contact Officers in DEECD and DHS regional offices and nominated Youth Services/Student Wellbeing Education Officers within Catholic Education Diocesan Offices who can facilitate the process. Where there are other differences or difficulties that cannot be resolved at a local level, these regional and Diocesan staff can be contacted.





## 2 School enrolment

### Responsibilities: School enrolment

#### Schools will:

- enrol a child or young person without delay – any delay of more than one day must be endorsed by the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director
- ensure that accurate information regarding out-of-home care status is recorded in the school's student information record-keeping mechanism (under 'living arrangements' within CASES2.1 for government schools)
- advise the out-of-home carer of their eligibility for the Education Maintenance Allowance
- liaise with the child or young person's previous school or early childhood education service to ensure the transfer of relevant information including the Individual Education Plan or Transition Learning and Development Statement (for children entering Prep at a government school)
- establish a Student Support Group in the first week of the child or young person's enrolment (see Section 4: Supporting achievement)
- support the child or young person to stay at the school or maintain a connection with their school if a change must occur
- when a student leaves the school, provide appropriate information to the new school regarding the child or young person's learning and support needs to ensure a smooth transition.

#### DEECD Regions and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices will:

- facilitate the timely and effective enrolment of each child and young person in out-of-home care by providing advice and support to schools
- work with schools and DHS to resolve any enrolment difficulties in a timely manner.

#### Case managers will:

- advise the Principal in writing that the child or young person resides in out-of-home care and ensure that relevant and up-to-date information about the child's circumstances and care arrangements is provided as soon as possible and on an ongoing basis as the situation changes
- provide a record of the schools or early childhood education services the child or young person has previously attended
- provide information to the school on key roles and responsibilities of DHS and the case manager
- ensure that accurate information is recorded on the DHS Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) or Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP)
- maintain an ongoing partnership with the school and ensure that case managers, parents and carers are known to the school and promote their involvement in decision-making
- make all efforts to support the child or young person to continue to attend their current school when making case management decisions
- support the child to access early childhood education and care services including two years of a quality kindergarten program wherever possible
- work with relevant early childhood professionals to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for every child entering Prep at a government school.

It is compulsory in Victoria for children and young people from the ages of 6 to 17 years to attend school. Children and young people in out-of-home care may change schools more frequently than other children due to changes in their circumstances or living arrangements.

A child or young person in out-of-home care will generally be enrolled in the neighbourhood school – defined as the closest school to the child or young person's permanent address or placement. However, there may be factors that make another school or flexible learning option more appropriate.

Where a child or young person enters out-of-home care or changes placement, the case manager, school, parent and carer must give high priority to the stability of the child or young person's schooling and make every effort to support them to continue to attend their current school. Where this is not possible, the case manager, in consultation with the parent and carer, should consult the DEECD regional office or the Diocesan Catholic Education Office to identify the closest and most appropriate school.

It is important that the enrolment process<sup>5</sup> occurs quickly and efficiently in order to avoid the child or young person being unable to attend school as this may increase the likelihood of absences and disengagement. A delay of more than one day must be endorsed by the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director.

Upon enrolment, it is essential that the case manager advises the Principal in writing<sup>6</sup> that the child or young person resides in out-of-home care. This should also occur where a child or young person who is already enrolled at a school enters out-of-home care. The Principal must then ensure this information is entered into the school's student information record-keeping mechanism (under 'living arrangements' within CASES21 for government schools).

Following enrolment, the school and case manager should obtain appropriate information and establish the necessary supports to assist the child or young person's introduction into the school. A well-planned introduction into a school community is necessary for a child or young person in out-of-home care to effectively engage and regularly attend school. The out-of-home carer should be advised of their eligibility for the Education Maintenance Allowance<sup>7</sup> under the foster parent category.

In situations where the child or young person changes school, the new school should contact the previous school to advise of the enrolment. The previous school will provide appropriate information and advice to the new school regarding the student's learning and support needs. The case manager should also assist the new school in accessing appropriate information to support the development of an effective educational program for the child or young person. Checklists outlining the responsibilities of schools and case managers when a child or young person enters out-of-home care or when they enrol at a school can be found in Appendices 2 and 3.

Some children and young people in out-of-home care may not have been enrolled or participated in schooling for a period of time. These children and young people need particular attention and support to re-engage in a school or educational program tailored to their needs. Schools, regional offices of DEECD and Catholic Education Dioceses can provide advice and assistance to case managers to identify an appropriate education or training program and to support enrolment processes.

<sup>5</sup> Enrolment policies for Victorian government and Catholic schools are listed in Section 9: Resources and Links

<sup>6</sup> A template for case managers to use to advise schools that a child or young person is in out-of-home care is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/oohc>

<sup>7</sup> Further information about the Education Maintenance Allowance is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/financial/ema/>

Useful resources to complement the Partnering Agreement are *Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatized Children*<sup>8</sup> and *Great Expectations: Supporting Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care to Achieve at School*<sup>9</sup> from the Victorian Office of the Child Safety Commissioner. These resources can assist education professionals who are teaching, or in contact with, children and young people in out-of-home care to understand the educational barriers confronting these students. The resources include a range of strategies and learning activities to help schools respond more effectively.

### Transition to school

Starting school is a major life transition for children and their experiences during their transition to school can have longer-term impacts on their ability to cope with change. A successful start to school is linked to future positive school outcomes, both academically and socially.

Children in out-of-home care may face additional challenges during their transition to school due to their life circumstances. This transition can be supported by regular attendance at an early childhood education or care program such as kindergarten or child care prior to schooling and is strongly encouraged.

When a child is entering Prep in a government school, case managers should work with relevant early childhood education and care services and professionals to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement as outlined in *Transition: A Positive Start to School* guide<sup>10</sup>. These statements help Prep teachers to get to know the children entering their classes before they start, and to plan for each child's learning and development needs.

If a child in out-of-home care has not attended an early childhood education or care service, the case manager should contact the enrolling school as early as possible to work with the school in developing a transition plan that is tailored to the needs of the child.

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<sup>8</sup> Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (2007), Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at [http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer\\_classrooms.pdf](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (2007), Victorian Government. Access at [http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/great\\_expectations.pdf](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/great_expectations.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/guide.htm>



# 3 Promoting attendance and engagement

## Responsibilities: Promoting attendance and engagement

### Schools will:

- develop policies and strategies to support each child or young person in out-of-home care to be engaged in and attend school on a regular basis
- use the Student Support Group process to identify and implement appropriate strategies to support school engagement achievement and transitions
- convene additional Student Support Group meetings if attendance or behavioural issues arise
- identify a teacher or staff member within the school to act as a learning mentor for each child or young person in out-of-home care
- ensure that all relevant information is provided by the primary school to the secondary school prior to this significant transition.

### DEECD Regions and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices will:

- provide information and advice to schools and case managers about the range of services and programs available to support each child and young person in out-of-home care
- provide advice and expertise to schools to assist them to address school engagement issues for children and young people in out-of-home care
- facilitate professional learning opportunities for schools and learning mentors regarding the educational needs and support of children and young people in out-of-home care.

### Case managers will:

- participate in the Student Support Group and the development of the Individual Education Plan
- provide advice to the Student Support Group and support the implementation of strategies to maximise the child or young person's attendance and engagement
- ensure that carers inform the school when the child or young person will be absent and alert the school to any issues impacting on attendance or behaviour
- advise the Student Support Group who is the most appropriate person or people to have access to the Ultranet to monitor the child or young person's progress and attendance (government schools only).

Regular attendance at school is essential if children and young people are to engage with education and actively participate in learning. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age. Students who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on fundamental aspects of their educational and social development, and disengaging from schooling. Children and young people in out-of-home care often face numerous changes and disruptions that can result in absences from school.

It is important that schools, case managers, carers and parents have strategies and effective communication processes in place to maximise the school attendance of children and young people in out-of-home care. This may require schools to examine their environment, curriculum and structures to ensure that the needs of a diverse range of students are met.

The *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*<sup>11</sup> outline a process to support student attendance and engagement, including the establishment of a Student Support Group to monitor a student's progress, develop and implement strategies to support school engagement, achievement and attendance, and engage appropriate supports.

Schools must facilitate the Student Support Group process (see Section 4: Supporting achievement) for all students in out-of-home care at least twice per year, and more frequently when a student's attendance or behaviour is of concern. Meetings should be supportive rather than disciplinary and should focus on solutions. It is important that there is transparent and immediate action in response to any problems identified by the school, case manager, student, carers or parents.

A strong attachment to school can provide stability in an otherwise unstable world. In a stable school environment children and young people can find friendship and enjoy positive and enjoyable learning opportunities, and build resilience and hope. The relationship between the child or young person and teachers and other staff at the school is critical to positive school engagement. Schools should identify a teacher or staff member who has a positive relationship with the child or young person to act as a learning mentor. This staff member should liaise with the Principal to ensure that Student Support Group and Individual Education Plan processes take place. The staff member should agree to take on the role and receive appropriate support. Guidance on the learning mentor role can be found in Appendix 4.

While regular attendance at school is important for children and young people, advances in information and communication technologies have also expanded opportunities for participation in education. For children and young people absent or disengaged from school, the use of digital technologies<sup>12</sup> can provide new ways to participate in learning and remain connected with their class or school.

### Transition to secondary school

Moving from primary to secondary school is another key transition point for young people. Primary and secondary schools have a range of transition programs and strategies to support students in their new environment. However, some young people struggle with this transition, which increases the possibility that they may become disengaged from schooling.

It is important that the transition to secondary school for children and young people in out-of-home care, who experience many changes in their lives and may struggle with change as a result, is well planned and coordinated. Attendance should be closely monitored and a Student Support Group convened by the school if it declines.

<sup>11</sup> *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement>

<sup>12</sup> Further information about the Ultranet is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ultranet>

## 4 Supporting achievement

### Responsibilities: Supporting achievement

#### Schools will:

- establish a Student Support Group comprising recommended members (see Appendix 5) and hold meetings at least twice per year including within a week of the initial enrolment of a child or young person in out-of-home care
- ensure that an Individual Education Plan is developed and regularly reviewed for each child in out-of-home care (and provide this to the new school in a timely manner when there is a change of school)
- provide copies of Student Support Group meeting minutes and Individual Education Plans for each child in out-of-home care to all members of the Student Support Group
- make a referral to Student Support Services (government schools) or Student Services (Catholic schools) for an educational needs assessment for each child and young person who has resided in out-of-home care for three months or longer
- ensure that school-based health and wellbeing staff prioritise support to children and young people in out-of-home care
- facilitate access to appropriate services and programs to support the learning and wellbeing of the child or young person.

#### DEECD Regions and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices will:

- provide information and advice to schools and case managers about the range of services and programs available to support each child and young person in out-of-home care
- participate in Student Support Group meetings where required to resolve complex issues
- have processes in place to ensure priority access for each child and young person in out-of-home care to education and wellbeing support services and programs.

#### Case managers will:

- participate in the Student Support Group and the development of the Individual Education Plan
- work collaboratively with schools to develop appropriate strategies to support the child or young person at school
- work collaboratively with schools to provide information and support referrals or applications for the child or young person in out-of-home care who may be eligible for a range of programs and services
- maintain accurate client records including updating school details as they change and keep a copy of the Individual Education Plan on file.

Every government school has a Student Engagement Policy<sup>13</sup> that supports and promotes a safe and inclusive educational environment where the varying expectations and needs of all members of the school community are taken into account. Catholic schools are encouraged to develop their own Pastoral Care Policy<sup>14</sup> to support students, where those experiencing difficulty or with special needs receive particular care and support. Independent schools will also have their own student engagement and wellbeing policies.

<sup>13</sup> As required by the *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement>

<sup>14</sup> Pastoral care policies for Catholic schools are listed in Section 9: Resources and links.

Some children and young people need extra or more individualised opportunities and support in order to achieve their best. Children and young people who are in the out-of-home care system have often experienced significant trauma and disruption in their home and school lives which impacts on their educational progress and achievement. It is recognised that this group needs strong and effective support to overcome the effects of the disadvantages they face.

Schools must have strategies in place to support individual children and young people in out-of-home care to reach levels of achievement appropriate for their age. These may include innovative curriculum options, mentoring programs, peer support programs or the implementation of flexible learning options to ensure participation in education and assist the transition to further education and training.

To support children and young people in out-of-home care to access the services and assistance they require, referrals to education-related health and wellbeing services should be prioritised for this group to ensure that these services are highly accessible and responsive to their needs. An educational needs assessment to identify their particular learning needs should also be accessed through Student Support Services (government schools) or Student Services (Catholic schools) for every child or young person enrolled at a government or Catholic school who has resided in out-of-home care for a period of three months or longer.

A significant percentage of children and young people who enter the out-of-home care system have some degree of disability or learning difficulty<sup>15</sup>. These children and young people may be eligible for support and funding through the DEECD Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD)<sup>16</sup>. Where an application for funding to the PSD has not been submitted within the annual round timelines, applications for children and young people can be made via a post-round process where they will receive priority attention. This means that applications for children and young people in out-of-home care will be considered all year round. Children and young people in out-of-home care in Catholic and independent schools may be eligible for support through the CECV Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs programme<sup>17</sup> or the Independent Schools Victoria Students with Disabilities program<sup>18</sup>.

Schools and case managers should be proactive in arranging and supporting relevant assessments and work collaboratively to apply for relevant support funding for children and young people in out-of-home care. DEECD regional offices have a PSD Officer who can provide advice to government schools. Each Diocesan Catholic Education Office has a Student Services unit that advises Catholic schools and Independent Schools Victoria has a student services contact person (See Section 10: Contacts).

### The Student Support Group

The Student Support Group is the primary mechanism through which schools, case managers, carers, families and support services collaborate to plan and support the education of a child or young person in out-of-home care. The aim of a Student Support Group is to ensure that those with the knowledge of and responsibility for the child or young person work together to support engagement, attendance and achievement, and establish shared educational and social goals. This group also monitors and evaluates the child or young person's progress.

<sup>15</sup> *Audit of children and young people in out-of-home care services*. Unpublished report, Department of Human Services, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines 2011*, Department of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010. Further information is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability>

<sup>17</sup> Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs programme, Catholic Education Commission Victoria. Further information is available at <http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/resources>

<sup>18</sup> Students with Disabilities program, Independent Schools Victoria. Further information is available at <http://www.independentschools.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm>

Principals must ensure a Student Support Group is established for all children and young people in out-of-home care to identify and address issues that impact on their educational achievement. Schools must hold at least two Student Support Group meetings during the year, and convene meetings more often if required. Meetings of the Student Support Group can also be held at any time at the request of the school, case manager, parent, carer or student. Carers and parents (where appropriate) should also participate in the regular parent/carer/teacher interviews scheduled by the school.

For children and young people enrolled at government schools, it is the responsibility of the Student Support Group to decide who should have access to the Ultranet to monitor the attendance and progress of the student. It may be decided that more than one person should have this access – this may be the case manager, parent, carer or other appropriate person who is responsible for the child or young person's day-to-day school attendance and completion of their school work.

There may be other meeting structures in place that are comparable to a Student Support Group, such as a Student Behaviour Support Group in Catholic schools. Rather than establish a separate Student Support Group, the Student Behaviour Support Group or similar meeting can perform the functions of the Student Support Group (See Appendix 5 for detailed Student Support Group guidance including recommended membership of the group).

### **Individual Education Plans**

The Student Support Group is responsible for the development of an Individual Education Plan to support the educational achievement and engagement of the child or young person in out-of-home care. Individual Education Plans may also be known as Individual Learning Plans. The purpose of an Individual Education Plan is to describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the child or young person.

Individual Education plans for children and young people should be reviewed on a regular basis according to the needs of the child or young person and at least twice per year. If a child or young person changes school, the Individual Education Plan must be forwarded by the existing school to the new school for consideration. The new school should also request a copy of the plan if this has not been forwarded in a timely manner (See Appendix 5 for more detailed information).



# 5 Case planning

## Responsibilities: Case planning

### Case managers will:

- invite schools to participate in case planning meetings or seek appropriate input into planning for each child or young person in out-of-home care
- negotiate with the school regarding the most appropriate form of communication between the school and the case planning process
- report relevant outcomes of the Student Support Group meetings to the broader case planning process.

### Schools will:

- participate in the case planning process including the provision of Individual Education Plans or reports if required.

Every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness irrespective of their family circumstances or background<sup>19</sup>. The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (CYFA) is a key building block to promote children's safety, wellbeing and development.

The CYFA has a unifying set of best interests principles<sup>20</sup> that community services, Child Protection and the Children's Court must consider when taking any action or making any decision. These principles require child and family services that keep children from harm, protect their rights and promote their development in culturally, age and gender appropriate ways.

The principles guide the case planning process that aims to address the circumstances in which the child or young person came into out-of-home care, determine the long-term care goals for the child or young person and identify strategies to achieve these goals. Child Protection is responsible for case planning for children and young people in out-of-home care; however, day-to-day case management may be contracted to a community service organisation.

## The Student Support Group and case planning

The Student Support Group focuses on educational planning and day-to-day school issues whereas the case planning process has a broader planning role for the child or young person. The Student Support Group has a critical role to play in contributing to the broader case planning and decisions through the provision of information about the child or young person's educational needs and progress.

Information from schools regarding attendance, educational attainment, strengths and areas for further development is essential when case planning for a child or young person. Where appropriate, case managers should facilitate the participation of the school in case planning meetings. When the school cannot participate directly in these meetings case managers should ensure that the school has the opportunity to provide relevant information such as a report or copy of the Individual Education Plan.

*Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* <http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/policy-planning-funding/legislation>  
*The Best Interests Principles: A Conceptual Overview*, [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/43011/eccec\\_best\\_interests\\_conceptual\\_overview.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/43011/eccec_best_interests_conceptual_overview.pdf)

## Looking After Children

Looking After Children (LAC) provides a practice framework for considering how each child or young person's needs will be met while they are in out-of-home care.

When a child is placed in out-of-home care a group of people share parental responsibilities, including the placement agency caseworker, out-of-home carers (foster carers or residential workers), the Child Protection worker as well as the child or young person's parents and other adult family members. In out-of-home care, this group of people are referred to as the care team. The LAC framework, processes and tools assist the care teams to work together effectively to support the child or young person's safety, stability and developmental needs in seven life areas:

- health
- emotional and behavioural development
- education
- family and social relationships
- identity
- social presentation
- self-care skills.

LAC includes a set of tools that prompt good practice and which also comprise the main client records kept by the community service organisation providing the out-of-home care placement.

The framework also supports the complementary processes for developing, implementing and monitoring Individual Educational Plans for each child or young person in out-of-home care. More information on LAC is available at

<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/placement-support/looking-after-children>

## 6 School retention

### Responsibilities: School retention

#### Schools will:

- identify and implement a range of initiatives and strategies to retain each child and young person in out-of-home care at school
- follow appropriate processes regarding the suspension or expulsion of a child or young person as outlined in the *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines* (government schools) or *Guidelines for Student Behaviour Management* (Catholic schools)
- convene additional meetings of the Student Support Group (or Student Behaviour Support Group) when suspension or expulsion is under consideration for a child or young person in out-of-home care
- inform the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Office Diocesan Director in advance in all cases where expulsion of a child or young person is being considered
- provide details of the new school, education or training placement to the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Office Diocesan Director.

#### DEECD Regions and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices will:

- provide advice and expertise to schools to assist them to address attendance and behavioural issues in relation to a child or young person in out-of-home care
- support principals to identify an appropriate education or training pathway when efforts to retain a young person at the school have not been successful.

#### Case managers will:

- participate in the Student Support Group (or Student Behaviour Support Group) to develop and implement strategies to prevent school exclusion of the child or young person in out-of-home care
- in conjunction with the Student Support Group, consider other options for meeting the educational needs (where relevant) of the child or young person in out-of-home care
- support schools to understand the circumstances and needs of the child or young person in out-of-home care, develop strategies, and refer to other appropriate services and supports.

School completion leads to greater employment opportunities, economic and social prosperity, community inclusion and participation, and better health and wellbeing outcomes. Research highlights that many children and young people who have been in out-of-home care leave formal schooling at a relatively young age, with 47 per cent of young people surveyed leaving school before the age of 16<sup>21</sup>. These children and young people require targeted interventions that are monitored regularly to assist them to improve their wellbeing and educational performance over time.

The behaviours that children and young people in out-of-home care use to cope with situations of extreme stress and anxiety may not be useful or appropriate in the classroom, although they may have been crucial to their survival in other environments<sup>22</sup>. When a child or young person in out-of-home care appears to be disengaging from school as evidenced by their attendance or behaviour, the

<sup>21</sup> *Children in Out-of-Home Care in Victoria: Numbers in Care and Educational Outcomes Achieved*, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, May 2008.

<sup>22</sup> *Great Expectations: Supporting Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care to Achieve at School*, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, 2007. Access at

Student Support Group process (or Student Behaviour Support Group in Catholic Schools) should be implemented to address these issues as early as possible to avoid school exclusion.

School exclusion, either through suspension or expulsion, is an act that has significant impact on the educational outcomes and future life chances of a child or young person and can lead to further disengagement from schooling. Children and young people in out-of-home care in particular can find it very difficult to successfully reintegrate into school if they have been excluded.

Children or young people should only be excluded from school when all other measures have been implemented without success, or where an immediate suspension is the only appropriate course of action given the student's behaviour. Principals should ensure that all appropriate processes are followed<sup>23</sup> including convening a Student Support Group or a Student Behaviour Support Group in Catholic schools, when suspension or expulsion is being considered. Independent schools will also have their own student behaviour management procedures.

If a child or young person is suspended from school for a period of time, every effort should be made to ensure that they remain connected to the school and their school work. Schools should consider in-school suspensions and provide appropriate and meaningful school work while the child or young person is suspended.

As required by the *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*<sup>24</sup>, if a child or young person of compulsory school age is expelled from a Victorian government school, it is the responsibility of the Principal of the expelling school, with support from the DEECD Regional Director (or nominee), to ensure that the child or young person is enrolled at another school or registered training organisation. The advice of the Student Support Group should be sought in identifying another school, flexible learning option or an appropriate education or training setting for the child or young person. If the young person is of post-compulsory school age, the Principal should negotiate an appropriate education or training pathway with the young person and the Student Support Group, and track the young person's destination for a period of six months following their exit from school.

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<sup>23</sup> Student engagement policies for Victorian government and Catholic schools are listed in Section 9: Resources and links.

<sup>24</sup> *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement>

# 7 Implementing the Partnering Agreement

## Responsibilities: Implementing the Partnering Agreement

### DHS, DEECD and CECV will:

- establish a Partnering Agreement Central Reference Group

### DHS and DEECD Regional Directors and Catholic Education Diocesan Directors will:

- collaboratively establish a Partnering Agreement Regional Implementation Group
- nominate a Partnering Agreement Contact Officer in each region/diocese
- provide ongoing advice to staff to ensure that they understand their responsibilities in relation to the Partnering Agreement.

### Regional Implementation Groups will:

- oversee and provide guidance and support for the ongoing implementation of the Partnering Agreement in their region
- develop, monitor and regularly review the Partnering Agreement Regional Education Plan
- promote the Partnering Agreement to all key regional stakeholders.

### DEECD, DHS and Catholic Education Diocesan Partnering Agreement Contact Officers will:

- facilitate the continuous implementation and monitoring of the Partnering Agreement in the region and respond to implementation issues that arise
- establish collaborative processes between DHS, DEECD, Catholic Education Dioceses and independent schools to support compliance with the requirements of the Partnering Agreement
- provide direct support to schools and ensure that there is regional office/diocesan involvement in Student Support Groups when required in situations of complex need or where school exclusion is likely
- coordinate professional learning and training opportunities for schools and case managers related to the education of children and young people in out-of-home care
- promote connections between schools, case managers, support services, and early childhood education and care services to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care
- participate in a Central Reference Group to oversee the statewide implementation of the Partnering Agreement.

Improving educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care will require a shared commitment by DHS, DEECD, CECV and Independent Schools Victoria to the continuous implementation and monitoring of the Partnering Agreement.

To support the ongoing implementation process, Regional Implementation Groups should be established and maintained by DHS and DEECD to oversee the education issues for children and young people in out-of-home care and promote the requirements of the Partnering Agreement across all schools, case managers and key regional stakeholders. Regional Implementation Groups will develop, monitor and review Regional Education Plans incorporating regional protocols, effective

processes and enhanced supports for children and young people in out-of-home care. Regions should ensure that Catholic Education Diocese and community service organisation representatives are invited to participate in Regional Implementation Groups.

DHS and DEECD Regional Directors should nominate and maintain a Partnering Agreement Contact Officer from each Department who will facilitate the regional implementation process and respond to any issues that arise. Each of the Diocesan Catholic Education Offices will nominate the appropriate officer to oversee the implementation process in the dioceses.

Partnering Agreement Contact Officers will establish collaborative processes to support compliance with the requirements of the Partnering Agreement and provide advice about effective enrolment, engagement, educational achievement, case planning and school retention of children and young people in out-of-home care.

A Central Reference Group will oversee the statewide implementation of the Partnering Agreement, ensure that guidance is available on the processes outlined in the Partnering Agreement, resolve implementation issues, profile best practice examples and monitor progress of Regional Education Plans.

# 8 Monitoring student outcomes

## Responsibilities: Monitoring student outcomes

### Schools will:

- track and monitor the attendance and achievement of each child and young person in out-of-home care.

### DEECD and DHS will:

- maintain a cohort descriptor for the collection of system level data through the standard computerised administration system used in Victorian government schools (CASES21)
- annually monitor the out-of-home care cohort against statewide benchmarks relating to literacy, numeracy, attendance and exit destinations
- conduct an annual survey of the educational characteristics of each child and young person in out-of-home care and compliance of schools and case managers with the requirements of the Partnering Agreement.

A key objective of the Partnering Agreement is to improve educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care as evidence shows that this group does not fare as well as the general population<sup>25</sup>. In order to improve outcomes, it is important to understand and monitor how children and young people in out-of-home care are progressing in their school attendance and academic achievement.

Government, Catholic and independent schools will ensure that data relating to absences from school and academic achievement for children and young people in out-of-home care is collected and monitored at a school level.

DEECD will also monitor this group of children and young people in government schools through the CASES21 data collection system and the use of a separate cohort descriptor for out-of-home care students. The following data will be collected annually and provided to DHS:

- student achievement against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards in the English and Mathematics domains
- student absences
- exit destinations.

To monitor compliance with the requirements of the Partnering Agreement, DHS and DEECD will collaboratively conduct an annual survey of the educational characteristics of children and young people in out-of-home care. The survey will identify the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care:

- who were enrolled in formal education, training or employment
- where case managers advised schools that the child or young person was in out-of-home care
- with a Student Support Group
- with an Individual Education Plan
- who have a learning mentor
- who have had an educational needs assessment.

<sup>25</sup> *The State of Victoria's Children 2008: A Report on How Children and Young People in Victoria are Faring*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/annualreports.htm>



# 9 Resources and links

## General education policies and procedures

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (2009), *Faith in Your Child's Future Parent Handbook for Victorian Catholic Primary Schools*, Melbourne, Victoria. Access at

[http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/parents/primary\\_booklet\\_2010.pdf](http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/parents/primary_booklet_2010.pdf)

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010), *Program for Students with Disabilities Guidelines 2011*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability>

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, *Guide for a Registered School: Minimum Standards and Other Requirements for School Registration*. Access at

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/voced/Accreditation/vrqa/mnstdregschls.pdf>

## School enrolment policies

### Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (2009), *Enrolment for Schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne Policy 2.4*, Melbourne, Victoria. Access at

<http://web.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/index.php?sectionid=450>

### Catholic schools in the Diocese of Ballarat

Schools have their own enrolment policies. Further information is available at

<http://web.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au>

### Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale

Diocese of Sale (25 June 2010), *Catholic Schools' Enrolment*. Access at

<http://www2.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/our-schools/index.aspx>

### Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sandhurst

Diocese of Sandhurst (2010), *Catholic Primary Schools Prep Enrolment Information*. Access at

[http://www3.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/publicationsresearch/downloads/cat\\_view/112-parent-resources.html](http://www3.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/publicationsresearch/downloads/cat_view/112-parent-resources.html)

### Victorian government schools

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide – Section 4.1 Student Attendance*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at

[http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/enviro/4\\_1.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/enviro/4_1.htm)

## Student engagement, pastoral care and behaviour management policies

### Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Catholic Education Office Melbourne (2009), *Guidelines for Student Behaviour Management*. Access at

<http://web.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/index.php?sectionid=556>

Catholic Education Office Melbourne (2009), *Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools Policy 2.26*, Melbourne, Victoria. Access at

<http://web.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/index.php?sectionid=555>

**Catholic schools in the Diocese of Ballarat**

Diocese of Ballarat (2010), *Pastoral Care Policy*. Access at  
<http://web.ceoballarat.catholic.edu.au/downloads.asp>

**Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale**

Diocese of Sale (2009), *Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools*. Access at  
[http://www2.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/uploadedFiles/06\\_Policies\\_And\\_Publications/files/Policies/Policy%202.6%20Pastoral%20Care%20of%20Students%20in%20Catholic%20Schools.docx.pdf](http://www2.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/uploadedFiles/06_Policies_And_Publications/files/Policies/Policy%202.6%20Pastoral%20Care%20of%20Students%20in%20Catholic%20Schools.docx.pdf)

Diocese of Sale, *Guidelines for Discretionary Action: Management of Student Behaviour of a Harmful or Serious Nature* (updated 17 December 2009). Access at  
[http://www2.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/uploadedFiles/06\\_Policies\\_And\\_Publications/files/Policies/Policy%202.11%20Management%20of%20Student%20Behaviour%20of%20a%20Harmful%20or%20Serious%20Nature.pdf](http://www2.ceosale.catholic.edu.au/uploadedFiles/06_Policies_And_Publications/files/Policies/Policy%202.11%20Management%20of%20Student%20Behaviour%20of%20a%20Harmful%20or%20Serious%20Nature.pdf)

**Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sandhurst**

Diocese of Sandhurst, *Pastoral Care Strategic Plan*. Access at  
<http://www3.ceosand.catholic.edu.au/pastoral-care/strategic-plan.html>

**Victorian government schools**

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009), *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement>

**Relevant references and resources**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (June 2007), *Educational Outcomes of Children and Young People on Guardianship and Custody Orders: A pilot study*, Canberra. Access at  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/cws/eoocogoco/eoocogoco.pdf>

Department of Education and Training (2006), *It's Not OK to Be Away – Student Attendance Support Kit*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/attendance/initiative.htm>

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Out-of-home care website* (including Student Support Group and Individual Education Plan guidance). Access at  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/oohc>

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009), *Supporting Children, Young People and Their Families Affected by Homelessness – Guidelines for Victorian schools*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/homelessness.htm>

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009), *Transition: A Positive Start to School Guide*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/guide.htm>

Department of Human Services (2007), *Charter for Children in Out-of-Home Care*. Access at  
<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance/charter-for-children>

Department of Human Services (2007), *Child Development and Trauma Guide*. Access at [http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0013/43042/ecec\\_development\\_and\\_trauma\\_intro.pdf](http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/43042/ecec_development_and_trauma_intro.pdf)

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (2007), *Calmer Classrooms: A Guide to Working with Traumatized Children*, Victorian Government: Melbourne. Access at [http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer\\_classrooms.pdf](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf)

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner (2007), *Great Expectations: Supporting Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care to Achieve at School*, Victorian Government. Access at [http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/great\\_expectations.pdf](http://www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/great_expectations.pdf)

Rice, S. and Lamb, S. (2008), *Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: Melbourne. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/EffectiveStrategies.htm>

Rice, S and Lamb, S. (2008), *A Guide to Help Schools Increase School Completion*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: Melbourne. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/EffectiveStrategies.htm>





# 10 Contacts

DHS REGIONAL OFFICES	
Metropolitan	Phone
Eastern	9843 6000
North and West	9412 5333
Southern	9213 2111
Rural	
Barwon South West	5226 4540
Gippsland	5177 2500
Grampians	5333 6530
Hume	5722 0555
Loddon Mallee	5434 5555

DEECD REGIONAL OFFICES	
Metropolitan	Phone
Eastern	9265 2400
Northern	9488 9488
Western	9291 6500
Southern	9794 3555
Rural	
Barwon South Western	5225 1000
Gippsland	5127 0400
Grampians	5337 8444
Hume	5761 2100
Loddon Mallee	5440 3111

Government school contact details are available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/findaservice>

CATHOLIC EDUCATION	Phone
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria	9267 0228
Catholic Education Office: Diocese of Melbourne	9267 0228
Catholic Education Office: Ballarat Diocese	5337 7135
Catholic Education Office: Sale Diocese	5622 6600
Catholic Education Office: Sandhurst Diocese	5443 2377

Catholic school contact details are available at <http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/frameset.htm?page=directory>

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	Phone
Independent Schools Victoria	9825 7200

Independent school contact details are available at <http://services.ais.vic.edu.au/ebiz/customerservice/schoollocator.aspx>

OTHER	Phone
Office of the Child Safety Commissioner	8601 5886
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.	9481 0800
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency	8388 1855



# Appendix 1:

## Parties to the Partnering Agreement

The Partnering Agreement is an agreed commitment between DHS, DEECD CECV and Independent Schools Victoria.

### Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) brings together a range of services for young people from before birth to the beginning of adulthood. Education and early childhood services are provided directly through government schools and indirectly through regulation or funding of early childhood services and non-government school education.

There are nine regional offices within DEECD – Barwon South Western, Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Loddon Mallee, Eastern Metropolitan, Northern Metropolitan, Southern Metropolitan, and Western Metropolitan. It is the role of regional offices to implement Victorian government policy on school education (including non-school based education approaches) for all school age students and to manage and drive continuous improvement in the delivery of primary and secondary education in Victorian government schools.

Within the nine regions, there are 68 school networks comprising approximately 20 schools in each network. These networks are led by a Regional Network Leader. In 2010, there are more than 1550 Victorian government schools and over 540,000 students in these schools<sup>26</sup>. Details of Victorian government schools can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/findaservice/Home.aspx>

### Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports Victorians most in need to live safe, happy and fulfilling lives. DHS covers the responsibilities of the Minister for Community Services, Women's Affairs and coordinating Minister for Human Services, the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Youth Affairs, and has approximately 11,000 staff working across six divisions over eight geographical regions.

Out-of-home care services look after children and young people when a family needs support, in cases of family conflict or if there is a significant risk of harm or abuse in the family home. Support services help children and young people to cope with their experiences, and assist families to deal with the issues that led to the placement of their child.

Out-of-home care placements are provided in partnership with a range of community service organisations. For children on a Children's Court Protection Order, a Child Protection or community service organisation worker can undertake the role of case manager.

When there is a case manager from a community service organisation, a case contract will be in place which is a formal arrangement regarding responsibility for the child or young person's placement and support. It most often applies to children subject to Children's Court Protection Orders such as Custody and Guardianship to the Secretary Orders. Generally, contracting arrangements are designed to ensure that the most appropriate organisation is responsible for the implementation of particular case management tasks or functions associated with a case plan. Case managers from community service organisations coordinate care team members involved with the child or young person to meet the goals of the case plan.

While Child Protection may contract another agency or service to undertake case management tasks and functions, Child Protection retains the ultimate responsibility for a child or young person's case planning and decision-making.

## Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

CECV is the governing body advising all Catholic schools in Victoria. CECV, in accordance with the beliefs, traditions and practices of the Catholic Church and Church law acts as the recipient of grants provided to Catholic schools and manages all aspects of grant allocations including those from Government agencies. It ensures that Catholic schools comply with relevant legislation and statutory rules. CECV and the Diocesan Catholic Education Offices maintain cooperative links with a wide range of educational bodies in Victoria and nationally.

There are four dioceses in Victoria: Melbourne, Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst. The Catholic Education Offices in each diocese support the work of the CECV.

There are 489 Catholic schools in Victoria and over 188,000 students attend these schools<sup>27</sup>. Details of Victorian Catholic schools can be found at

<http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/frameset.htm?page=directory>

CECV has a strong commitment to the principles of social justice and the dignity of the human person. As outlined in *Faith in Your Child's Future: Parent Handbook for Victorian Catholic Schools*<sup>28</sup>, Catholic schools make it a priority to create an environment in which all feel welcomed and supported, including children and young people in out-of-home care.

## Independent Schools Victoria

Independent schools in Victoria are individual legal entities represented by their not-for-profit member service organisation, Independent Schools Victoria, which is not a system authority. As a peak body, Independent Schools Victoria represents the interests of its member schools, providing products and services that assist them to deliver quality educational outcomes.

There are 221 independent schools in Victoria and approximately 127,000 students attend these schools<sup>29</sup>. Details of Victorian independent schools can be found at

<http://services.ais.vic.edu.au/ebiz/customerservice/schoollocator.aspx>

Independent schools recognise the right of all students to be educated in a way that maximises their educational and life opportunities and potential. Some students in independent schools require additional assistance and support through a coordinated and cooperative approach with government and community agencies, including children and young people in out-of-home care.

In line with federal and state government policies which provide for a coordinated and cooperative response to the educational issues and social needs of children in out-of-home care, Independent Schools Victoria, will promote the use of best practice processes, procedures and strategies as outlined in the Partnering Agreement. Independent Schools Victoria, in partnership with DEECD, DHS and CECV, believes that schools should work in partnership with government and community agencies in 'providing the best start in life for children and young people in out-of-home care'.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *Faith in Your Child's Future: Parent Handbook for Victorian Catholic Schools*, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, 2010. Access at [http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/parents/primary\\_booklet\\_2010.pdf](http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/parents/primary_booklet_2010.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

# Appendix 2: School responsibilities checklist

This checklist provides a quick reference for schools to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities under the Partnering Agreement. Schools should commence using the checklist when a child or young person in out-of-home care is enrolled at a school or when the school is advised that one of their students has entered out-of-home care. The full text of the Partnering Agreement provides more detailed information about these responsibilities.

Upon enrolment or when child or young person enters out-of-home care	Within the first week	Within the first term	Ongoing responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Enrol child or young person without delay or seek endorsement of the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director for any delay of more than one day.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Record out-of-home care status in the school's student information record keeping mechanism (under 'living arrangements' in CASES21 for government schools).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide advice to the out-of-home carer about their eligibility for the Education Maintenance Allowance.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Liaise with the child or young person's previous school or early childhood education service to ensure the transfer of relevant information including the Individual Education Plan or Transition Learning and Development Statement (for children entering Prep at a government school).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Establish a Student Support Group and hold the first meeting.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Develop an Individual Education Plan with input from the Student Support Group and the child or young person.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide minutes of the Student Support Group meeting to members.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask the Student Support Group to identify the most appropriate person/people to access the Ultranet to monitor the child or young person's attendance and progress (government schools).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> With input from the child or young person, identify a teacher/staff member to act as their learning mentor.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review the Individual Education Plan with input from the Student Support Group and the child or young person.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a referral to Student Support Services (government schools) or Student Services (Catholic schools) for an educational assessment for children and young people who have resided in out-of-home care for three months or longer.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that referrals to school-based health and wellbeing services are prioritised.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate access to appropriate support services and programs to support the child or young person's learning and wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Track and monitor the child or young person's attendance and achievement.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hold Student Support Group meetings twice per year and more frequently if there are attendance or behavioural issues.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Regularly review the Individual Education Plan.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with the case manager to participate in case planning meetings or processes.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support the child or young person to remain at the school or to maintain a connection if they have to change schools.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If the child or young person changes school or is transitioning to secondary school or another education or training setting, provide all records and information to the new school/setting.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inform the DEECD Regional Director or Diocesan Director of Catholic Education in advance in all cases when expulsion is being considered.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Track the young person's destination for six months following their exit from school (where relevant).</li> </ul>

# Appendix 3: Case manager responsibilities checklist

This checklist provides a quick reference for DHS and community service organisation case managers to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities under the Partnering Agreement. Case managers should commence using the checklist when a child or young person enters out-of-home care or enrolls in a new school. The full text of the Partnering Agreement provides more detailed information about these responsibilities.

Upon enrolment or when child or young person enters out-of-home care	Within the first week	Within the first term	Ongoing responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advise the Principal in writing that the child or young person resides in out-of-home care.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a record of the schools or early childhood education services the child or young person has previously attended.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide information to the school on key roles and responsibilities of DHS, the case manager and carer.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that accurate information including the school's details is recorded on CRIS or CRISSP.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with relevant early childhood professionals to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for every child entering Prep at a government school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participate in the first meeting of the Student Support Group.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to the development of an Individual Education Plan for the child or young person and keep a copy on file.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advise the Student Support Group who is the most appropriate person or people to have access to the Ultranet to monitor the child or young person's progress and attendance (government schools only).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work collaboratively with the school to develop appropriate strategies to support the child or young person at school and maximise their attendance and engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work collaboratively with the school to make referrals or applications to relevant services and supports for the child or young person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Attend Student Support Group meetings twice per year and more frequently if there are attendance or behavioural issues.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> When there are changes, ensure that the school is provided with relevant and up-to-date information about the child or young person's circumstances, care arrangements, legal status, case plan, placement details and key contacts.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make all efforts to support the child or young person to continue to attend their current school when making case management and placement decisions.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain an ongoing partnership with the school and ensure that the case manager, parents and carers are known to the school and involved in decision-making.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Invite schools to participate in case planning meetings or seek appropriate input into planning processes.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that carers inform the school when the child or young person will be absent and alert the school to any issues impacting on attendance or behaviour.</li> </ul>

# Appendix 4:

## Learning mentor guidance

It is recognised that children and young people in out-of-home care require additional support to achieve their engagement in learning and their educational potential. The allocation of a learning mentor is one strategy that has been shown to be effective in improving the learning, engagement and school experience of children and young people<sup>30</sup>.

### Role of the learning mentor

A learning mentor is a teacher or staff member within a school who is designated to support the educational needs of a child or young person in out-of-home care, help them stay connected to their schooling and overcome barriers that may be affecting their learning. This person may not be directly involved in teaching the child or young person but should be a trusted staff member willing to take on this role. The learning mentor should be identified by the Principal or their delegate in collaboration with the child or young person. The Principal or their delegate should consider who is the most appropriate staff member to take on this role taking into account their skills, experience, workload and relationship with the child or young person. The staff member should then be approached to seek their agreement to take on the role, ensuring they understand the functions and responsibilities of the role. This role is voluntary and should not be imposed on a staff member or the child or young person.

The learning mentor is a role model, guide and advocate for the child or young person – someone who knows them well and takes an interest in their life and learning. The learning mentor is not a counsellor or person to send the child or young person to when they have behaved inappropriately. Unlike other types of mentoring, the learning mentor focuses on supporting the child or young person in their learning, academic achievement and wellbeing within the learning environment.

As the role of a learning mentor is based on understanding and trust, some children or young people may divulge intimate personal information to the learning mentor. Where this information is of concern to the learning mentor, it is their responsibility to ensure that this information is passed onto the appropriate people. Concerns about the child or young person's immediate safety or wellbeing should always be reported to the Principal or their delegate who must ensure the case manager is notified.

The learning mentor will need to specify to the child or young person that while all the conversations they share are based on trust, confidentiality does not apply. However, the child or young person should be informed that the learning mentor will treat their private information sensitively and only relevant information will be shared with those people who need to know.

### Responsibilities of the learning mentor

The learning mentor has a range of responsibilities:

- meeting regularly with the child or young person at a frequency to be agreed between the learning mentor and the child or young person – usually at least weekly
- identifying any challenges or difficulties the child or young person may be experiencing that are affecting their learning or connection to their schooling
- developing strategies in collaboration with the child or young person to address these challenges or difficulties

<sup>30</sup> Cruddas, L. (2005), *Learning Mentors in Schools: Policy and Practice*, Trentham Books Ltd, England.

- facilitating access to additional supports such as help with challenging subjects, homework assistance and access to school wellbeing staff as appropriate
- advocating for the child or young person within the school, including ensuring that they are provided with the opportunity to participate in all school activities and that teachers take their individual learning needs into account
- ensuring that the child or young person's voice is heard in planning and decision-making processes that affect them
- liaising with the Principal to ensure that Student Support Group meetings are convened for the child or young person and facilitating their attendance (where appropriate) or input into the meetings
- participating in the Student Support Group and providing advice as to the range of supports the child or young person may require
- facilitating the input of the child or young person into the development of their Individual Education Plan. This may also include recognising the child or young person's strengths and interests, for example utilising digital technologies for maths activities where the use of technology is a particular interest or learning preference.

### **Role and responsibilities of the school**

The Principal or their delegate is responsible for the allocation of a learning mentor for a child or young person in out-of-home care. When a staff member agrees to take on the role of learning mentor, it is crucial that this role is supported by the school's leadership team.

When the Principal or their delegate agrees to the allocation of the learning mentor role to a staff member, support should be offered to the learning mentor including:

- recognising the value and workload associated with the learning mentor role
- ensuring that appropriate time and space is available for the staff member to meet with the child or young person
- ensuring that other staff within the school are aware of the learning mentor's role and responsibilities
- arranging for the learning mentor to have access to regular formal support in their role through school-based student wellbeing staff such as Student Welfare Coordinators or Primary Welfare Officers, or through Student Support Services. The involvement of community service organisations that have substantial expertise in understanding the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care should also be considered.
- supporting the learning mentor to access professional learning opportunities which will assist them in their role
- formally acknowledging the role of the learning mentor in performance processes and discussions.

In the event that the child or young person or the learning mentor does not want the role to continue for any reason, it is the Principal or their delegate's responsibility to ensure that a new learning mentor is identified in collaboration with the child or young person.

# Appendix 5:

## Student Support Group guidance

The Student Support Group is the primary mechanism through which schools, case managers, carers, families and support services collaborate to plan and support the education of a child or young person in out-of-home care. The aim of a Student Support Group is to ensure that those with the knowledge of and responsibility for the child or young person work together to support engagement, attendance and achievement, and establish shared educational and social goals. This group also monitors and evaluates the child or young person's progress.

There may be other meeting structures in place that are comparable to a Student Support Group, such as a Student Behaviour Support Group in Catholic schools. Rather than establish a separate Student Support Group, the Student Behaviour Support Group or similar meeting can perform the functions of the Student Support Group.

Principals must ensure that a Student Support Group is established for all children and young people in out-of-home care to identify and address issues that impact on their educational achievement. The Student Support Group process will supplement existing parent/carer/teacher interviews. Carers and parents (where appropriate) should participate in the regular parent/carer/teacher interviews scheduled by the school.

### **A Student Support Group should consist of:**

- the case manager from Child Protection or a community service organisation
- a teacher or year level coordinator nominated as having responsibility for the child or young person
- the Principal or nominee to act as chairperson
- the learning mentor from the school
- a student wellbeing staff member such as the Student Welfare Coordinator, Primary Welfare Officer and/or Student Support Services Officer (where appropriate)
- the carer of the child or young person
- the child or young person (where appropriate)
- the child or young person's parent/s (where appropriate)
- any other relevant person, for example external support service.

### **Operation of the Student Support Group**

The Student Support Group meets to identify the needs and strengths of the young person, and to develop an Individual Education Plan to support their attendance, address any behaviour issues, and develop strategies to enhance their achievement and engagement.

The Student Support Group should communicate to the child or young person their rights and responsibilities and the school's expectations, and engage the child or young person in identifying and developing strategies to best support their education. This will include the implementation of relevant aspects of the case plan which is developed by DHS to identify and address issues of concern and develop goals and strategies to protect a child or young person from harm and promote their stability and healthy development.

The school is required to hold at least two Student Support Group meetings during the year, convening meetings more often if required. Meetings of the Student Support Group can also be held at any time at the request of the school, case manager, parent, carer or student. The Chairperson (usually the Principal or a nominee) of the Student Support Group is responsible for convening the meeting.

Student Support Group members should provide relevant information and advice to the meeting. Advice provided by all members of the Student Support Group should be given full consideration. Accurate records of decisions should be kept and outcomes of the meeting must be made available to all members in an appropriate form.

The Student Support Group should work collaboratively to identify a range of supports that may be appropriate for the child or young person in out-of-home care. This may include access to the Program for Students with Disabilities, Student Support Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, tutoring or mentoring. The Student Support Group should ensure that an educational needs assessment is accessed through Student Support Services (government schools) or Student Services (Catholic schools) for every child or young person who has resided in out-of-home care for three months or longer.

For children and young people enrolled at government schools, it is the responsibility of the Student Support Group to decide who should have access to the Ultranet to monitor the attendance and progress of the student. It may be decided that more than one person should have access – this may be the case manager, parent, carer or other appropriate person who is responsible for the child or young person's day-to-day school attendance and completion of their school work.

Student Support Group members have a key role to play in assisting the school to identify which strategies are appropriate to address the child or young person's attendance or behaviour concerns. Strategies normally used by teachers may not be effective due to the student's individual history and circumstances.

### Individual Education Plans

The Student Support Group is responsible for the development of an Individual Education Plan to support the educational achievement and engagement of children and young people in out-of-home care. The purpose of an Individual Education Plan is to describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the child or young person. Individual Education Plans may also be known as Individual Learning Plans.

Many schools will already have a plan in place and may use existing proformas such as Managed Individual Pathways<sup>31</sup> plans or Program for Students with Disabilities<sup>32</sup> student plan.

The Student Support Group should ensure that the Individual Education Plan has an emphasis on engaging the child or young person and is based on a good understanding of their strengths, needs and circumstances. When a child is commencing school (enrolling in Prep) the development of this plan should involve early childhood professionals and build from information about the child's learning and development as recorded in the Transition Learning and Development Statement (government schools).

<sup>31</sup> Further information about the Managed Individual Pathways initiative is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/default.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Further information about the Program for Students with Disabilities is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm>

If a student changes school, the Individual Education Plan must be forwarded by the existing school to the new school for consideration. This can be done using the appropriate processes for exchanging information.

**The Individual Education Plan should:**

- outline a meaningful educational program
- be age and developmentally appropriate
- be flexible and future-oriented
- be a strength-based model with a focus on the student's potential to achieve good educational, social and behavioural outcomes
- aim to retain the student at school
- clearly articulate individual and shared responsibilities
- provide/document information on which to reflect about how the student is progressing
- provide guidance for the Student Support Group
- contain a record of important decisions and actions
- be reviewed on a regular basis according to the needs of the child or young person (at least twice annually).

Individual Education Plan guidance and a suggested proforma are available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/oohc/edplans.htm>



