STRONGER SCHOOLS

An inclusive education plan for Victoria

MAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION AFFORDABLE FOR EVERY VICTORIAN FAMILY

Every child and young person participates fully in education regardless of their family circumstances.

Every child should be able to access a high quality education and participate fully in educationally enriching activities, regardless of their family's capacity to pay for essential items and activities. While the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) prescribes that delivery of the standard education curriculum should be free for all students, schools often charge families for digital devices, school uniforms, textbooks, camps, excursions, elective subjects and speech or occupational therapy.

Research by the Australian Scholarship Group suggests families' average annual out-of-pocket cost for sending a child to a Victorian Government primary school is $3,489 and $5,170 for secondary school.[1]

Although the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and State Schools' Relief provide some support for disadvantaged families, for many, they do not cover the full out-of-pocket costs. Community sector organisations continue to be overwhelmed by requests from families for assistance to meet educational costs, particularly at the start of each school year.

Where families cannot afford essential items, children and young people risk being excluded from the standard school curriculum and activities, increasing their risk of disengagement, behavioral issues, bullying, and poorer learning and wellbeing outcomes. The Victorian Government can prevent this by fully funding schools to deliver the standard curriculum.

In 2015, Victoria's Auditor-General found that the Department of Education and Training (DET) did not understand the actual costs of running a school and 'its funding model distributes money based on relative need, rather than actual need'. School principals report that the inadequacy of school funding is the reason for increasing parental payments.

In determining what families should be charged for, Victorian state schools and school councils are responsible for developing their own parent payment policies based on DET guidelines. However, the Auditor-General found schools still do not understand or comply with the DET Parent Payment Policy guidelines, and that there was limited monitoring and oversight of this by DET.[4]

1

Provide free education in the standard curriculum

- DET should identify a 'standard basket of education goods', which outlines essential items (including IT) and activities required to provide free instruction to all students at all levels of schooling, and fund schools accordingly to cover these.

- In the interim, funding should continue for State Schools' Relief[5] and the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund[6] to support eligible students' participation.

2

Assist children and young people from families experiencing financial disadvantage to participate fully in school and extra-curricular activities

- DET educates schools to ensure compliance with the 'Parent Payment Policy' guidelines[7] and 'Personal Devices – Parent Payments and Access' policy.[8]

- DET monitors and ensures parent payment policies are implemented consistently across the state, and identifies and addresses systemic issues.

- DET supports schools to develop and implement inclusive policies to assist students and families experiencing poverty and disadvantage by supporting the development of a hardship policy.

- Fund a new free Myki card to support students experiencing financial disadvantage to travel on public transport. This will support children and young people's attendance at school and participation in extra-curricular activities.

1. Australian Scholarship Group, ASG's Education Cost Estimates, Metropolitan Victoria Estimated schooling costs in 2018, accessed at https://www.asg.com.au/doc/default-source/2018-asg-planning-for-education-index/asg_edcosts_schoolcosts_–2018_vic_metro.pdf?sfvrsn=2
2. Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Additional School Costs for Families, 2015, accessed at https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/additional-school-costs-families
3. Victorian Government, School Policy and Advisory Guide – Parent Payments, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx
4. Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Follow Up of Selected 2014–15 Performance Audits, 2017, p.3.
5. Victorian Government, Schools Policy and Advisory Guide – State Schools Relief, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/stateschoolsrelief.aspx
6. Note: The Camps, Sports and Excursions has only been funded for one year, see Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.44, accessed at https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf
7. Victorian Government, School Policy and Advisory Guide – Parent Payments, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx
8. Victorian Government, Schools Policy and Advisory Guide - Personal Devices - Parent Payments and Access, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/personaldev.aspx

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INCREASE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO STUDENTS FACING DISADVANTAGE AND THEIR SCHOOLS

Reduce the impact of disadvantage and promote an inclusive society and economy, by giving every child and young person access to a quality education.

Without needs-based funding and targeted intervention programs, students facing disadvantage are more likely to fall further behind their peers in key educational outcomes, and to drop out of education altogether.

Analysis of Victorian NAPLAN data found the "learning gap between students whose parents have low education and those with highly educated parents grows from 10 months in Year 3 to around two-and-a-half years by Year 9"[1]. All political parties have a responsibility to support schools to remediate this gap.

Supporting schools to become more culturally safe and inclusive for all students will also help promote better health and wellbeing, and support students at risk of disengaging.

1

Increase equity funding to support students facing disadvantage

- Increase state government equity funding to at least 15% of school funding to support schools to employ additional staff and implement targeted learning and support programs for students with additional learning and development needs.

- Analyse how schools are using equity funding for students facing disadvantage, and increase transparency by publicly reporting outcomes and encouraging schools to share best teaching and learning practices.

2

Provide targeted interventions to address students' learning gaps

- Maintain a strong state literacy and numeracy strategy that focuses on lifting educational outcomes and closing the gaps in achievement for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.[2]

- Ensure schools deliver evidence-based literacy and numeracy programs for all children and young people who are more than one year behind their peers.

- Provide additional resources to English Language Schools and Centres to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds receive English language capability support before they enter school.

- Ensure English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in mainstream schools receive support to promote their learning and engagement, through funding the EAL program in government schools.[3] The 2018-19 Victorian Budget funds the program for two years.[4] This should be extended and incorporated into ongoing departmental recurrent funding.

3

Help all schools to become culturally safe and inclusive for all students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and students with disability

- Continue to implement the actions and related initiatives of DET's Education State agenda and the Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026, to support every Koorie child to reach their full potential.[5]

- Build the cultural competency of all teachers, staff and school councils by mandating compulsory cultural understanding and safety training at all Victorian schools.

- Implement the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's recommendations in Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools to address bullying of students with disability.[6]

- Continue to support the Safe Schools program to ensure schools are safe places for all students (including same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students) and are free of discrimination.[7]

- Provide schools with tools and resources to better understand the challenges low socioeconomic status families face in fully engaging in school. This could include updating and utilising the Low Income Awareness Checklist[8] and the Social Inclusion at School guide,[9] and the development and rollout of specific training modules on working with low socioeconomic status families and/or others who face exclusion (e.g. families from CALD backgrounds).

4

Help children successfully transition between primary and secondary school

- Develop a comprehensive transition framework spanning Grade 5 to Year 8, to help children prepare for and successfully navigate the transition to secondary school. This should include strategies to identify and respond to early warning signs of disengagement and strategies for engaging with families.

- Ensure students with additional learning needs are supported during transition from primary to secondary school through tailored orientation activities and improved information flow between schools on student performance.

1. P Gross & J Sonnemann, Widening gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress, The Grattan Institute, Carlton, 2016, accessed at https://grattan.edu.au/report/widening-gaps/
2. Victorian Government, Education State – Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Version 1, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/litnumstrat.pdf
3. Victorian Government, English as an Additional Language, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/diversity/eal/Pages/default.aspx
4. Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.44, accessed at https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf
5. Victorian Government, Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan, July 2016, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/aboriginal/Marrung_Aboriginal_Education_Plan_2016-2026.pdf
6. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, accessed at http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012
7. Victorian Government, Department Program – Safe Schools, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/safeschools.aspx
8. Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, Sample Low Income Awareness Checklist for Schools, accessed at http://www.goodshepvic.org.au/Assets/Files/Low_Income_Awareness_Checklist.pdf
9. Foundation for Young Australians, Social Inclusion at School - How to help low-income families, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/PP_SocialInclusion.pdf

BOOST FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY

Students with disability and/or other health and developmental needs are engaged and learning.

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Students with disability face additional health, learning and development needs that often require targeted teaching support and access to specialist therapists and integration aides.

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,[1] Australia recognises the right of people with disability to access education without discrimination. An inclusive education system equips people with disability with academic, life and social skills that help them participate fully and equally in society.

People with disability should never be excluded from mainstream education system on the basis of disability and should receive every support needed.

Students with disability and/or other health and development needs often face suspension or expulsion for behavioural issues related to their disability. Many behaviours can be avoided if students are in an inclusive learning environment, with support from qualified experts.

There are also students who attend part-time because of gaps in specialist supports. About 15 per cent of Victorian students require reasonable education adjustment to participate in school equally with their peers.[2] However, under current eligibility requirements for the Program for Students with Disability (PSD), only 4 per cent of students qualify for specialist funding support.[3] This means about 60,000 students are missing out on targeted funding that could maximise their learning.

According to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, reasonable education adjustments are less likely if a student does not attract specific funding.[4]

There is also "significant unmet need for support services for students with disabilities, including integration aides, occupational therapists, speech therapists, other specialist staff and assistive technology".[5]

Students who are deaf or are hard of hearing may require reasonable adjustments to be made including preferential seating, wireless assistive listening devices or Auslan interpreters.

In 2017, the Victorian Government released The Principles for Reduction and Elimination of Restraint and Seclusion in Victorian Government Schools.[6]

These guidelines are scheduled to be reviewed by December 2018[7] and should be updated to reflect evolving best practice. Whilst the guidelines require that every instance of restraint or seclusion be reported to enable data collection, monitoring and review of the effectiveness of existing strategies, this is not publicly reported.

Without support and an inclusive school environment, students with disability and/or additional health and development needs are more likely to disengage from education and not achieve their full academic and social potential. As the VEOHRC notes "genuine participation and learning ... means more than just getting by".[8]

1

Increase funding and support to students with disabilities and/or additional health and developmental needs

- Implement the remaining four recommendations under consideration from the Review of Program for Students with Disability (PSD).[9] Specifically:

  – Introduce a new tiered funding model based on a strengths-based functional needs assessment that meets the needs of all students with disability and/or additional health and development needs. This model includes: base funding, a teaching and learning load that would help schools to support all students who require reasonable adjustments, and targeted funding to support students with disabilities that have high education adjustment needs.

  – Adopt a functional and educational needs–based approach to assess eligibility and determine funding amounts. This would enable the full range of factors affecting a child's learning to be considered (including their risk and protective factors and educational needs) rather than focusing narrowly on their disability diagnosis.

- Ensure PSD funding is spent on evidence-based practices that improve learning outcomes for students with disability.

- Continue to fund and support the Students with Disabilities Transport Program[10] and the Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program,[11] and provide support for students with disability transitioning from primary to secondary school.

2

Help schools become more effective in supporting students with disability and/or additional health and development needs

- Provide schools with face-to-face training by qualified professionals and access to specialists to help implement evidence-based approaches for supporting learning and development of students with disability. This includes evidence-based positive behaviour support.

- Reduce and eliminate the use of restraint and seclusion by strengthening policies and procedures to reflect contemporary research, and ensure schools fully comply with the policies and procedures through data collection and monitoring.

- Increase transparency by publicly reporting on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools.

- Ensure students who are Deaf or hard of hearing can access Auslan interpreters in schools.

1. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Inclusive Social Development, Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, accessed at https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

2. Victorian Government, Education State – Review of the program for students with disabilities, p.30, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Report.pdf

3. Victorian Government, Education State – Review of the program for students with disabilities, p.61, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Report.pdf

4. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.163, accessed at http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012

5. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.60, accessed at http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012

6. Victorian Government, The Principles for Reduction and Elimination of Restraint and Seclusion in Victorian Government Schools, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/participation/15Principals.pdf

7. Victorian Government, Enrolment, Attendance and Behaviour, Restraint and Seclusion, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/behaviourofconcern.aspx

8. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools, September 2012, p.54, accessed at http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/184-held-back-the-experiences-of-students-with-disabilities-in-victorian-schools-sep-2012

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10. Victorian Government, Students with Disabilities Transport Program, Policy and Procedures, January 2016, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/management/sdtppolicyandprocedures2016.pdf

11. Victorian Government, Finance - Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpref010.aspx

GIVE TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS THE TOOLS, TRAINING AND RESOURCES THEY NEED TO HELP ALL STUDENTS

Student outcomes are improved by equipping schools with sufficient tools, training and resources to support tailored interventions.

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High-quality teaching is the single largest in-school influence on student results.[1] To deliver high-quality, inclusive teaching and learning, teachers need adequate time release for professional development, mentoring and coaching, and sharing best practice.

Having access to evidence-based teaching and learning resources helps teachers better support all students' needs. Schools should be supported to share best practice and resources to drive learning outcomes, particularly with schools in their local area with similar student cohorts.

This helps teachers improve teaching methods and discover new ways to engage students, particularly students with complex needs.

1

Provide schools with more time, resources and staff to support students with complex needs

- Encourage and fund schools to undertake ongoing and regular evidence-informed and face-to-face professional development to support the academic and social development of students with complex needs. This should include building staff cultural responsiveness and awareness of the needs of refugee, migrant and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and the needs of students who have experienced trauma (e.g. family violence).

- Require the Victorian Institute of Teaching to review and amend pre-service training for teachers to ensure they are culturally competent and can better meet the needs of all students, including those with disability, complex needs or who have experienced trauma. This includes introducing compulsory core units and ensuring teaching and learning for diverse needs cuts across university curriculum.

- Adequately resource schools to engage qualified professionals who can best support students with complex behavioral and learning needs.

2

Support schools to share best practice

- Invest in communities of practice across Victoria to share evidence-based best practice approaches and lessons, roll-out effective practices and facilitate stronger collaboration between schools (including schools delivering flexible learning options).

- Retain investment in DET regional support staff, including the Koorie Education Workforce,[2] to better support schools and communities at a local level, help schools understand and consistently implement DET policies, and facilitate collaboration between schools and communities.

1. John Hattie, Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence?, 2003, University of Auckland, accessed at https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=research_conference_2003
2. Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Our Department – Regions, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/structure/Pages/regions.aspx

GIVE STUDENTS A GREATER VOICE IN SHAPING THEIR OWN EDUCATION

Students gain life and work skills through increased learning options and involvement in school governance.

Increasing student voice in every school is important for improving student learning, engagement and school governance. It helps students shape their own learning and drive positive change in schools.

Students report they would like a greater range of study and training options. Increasing their learning options and supporting their pathways to employment will support students' engagement and equip them with the skills they need in life and work.

High quality Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) allows students to include vocational studies in their senior secondary certificate, and a chance to obtain practical work experience.

Flexible learning options deliver more tailored education and 'wrap-around' support in alternative settings to mainstream schools.

They help young people with complex needs who need more intensive support to stay engaged.

1

Increase student voice in every school to improve student learning, engagement and school governance

- Develop comprehensive mechanisms in every primary and secondary school to proactively engage students in decisions that affect and matter to them. This should build on the current requirement for students to be elected with full voting rights to every government secondary school council.

- Ensure student leadership and representation on school councils is inclusive, representing all students in the school by engaging and supporting students experiencing disadvantage, or with additional health and development needs, to nominate.

2

Invest in holistic education models so every student has access to a wide range of options including VET, VCAL and flexible learning options

- Ensure each of the 17 DET Education Areas has an integrated suite of educational options to meet all students' needs and interests. This includes access to a wide range of VET and VCAL subjects and courses, and high quality flexible learning options.

- Support more schools to provide VET and VCAL subjects and promote them as valuable pathways to employment. The new Head Start apprenticeships and traineeships, (supporting up to 1,700 teenagers in 100 secondary schools to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship while finishing high school)[1] should be trialled and evaluated for expansion.

- Work with the community sector and schools to develop flexible learning options, in mainstream schools and community settings well connected to schools.

- Keep funding Tech Schools across regional areas, to connect students to the skills and jobs of the future.[2]

- Enhance secondary vocational pathways by maintaining funding for a Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) Quality Assurance Framework to help schools purchase high-quality VETiS, support VETiS program delivery and increase the provision of VETiS by TAFEs.delivery of VETiS programs and increase the provision of VETiS by TAFEs.[3]

1. Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.45, accessed at
https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf
2. Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.48, accessed at
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3. Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.44, accessed at
https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf

MAKE SURE EVERY STUDENT IS HEALTHY, RESILIENT AND SUPPORTED TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN SCHOOL

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Students' academic success and social development are boosted through health, wellbeing and resilience initiatives.

Schools help build children and young people's social and emotional development and wellbeing. Students with strong wellbeing tend to have better learning outcomes, stronger social bonds and healthier relationships.

Prevention and early intervention for children and young people experiencing difficulties is critical to helping them achieve better educational and employment outcomes.

Qualified youth workers, Student Support Services Officers, and wrap-around support services provided in partnership with community sector organisations, help ensure that students receive timely access to support and interventions that address their needs and supports their learning.

1

Build student resilience to improve their health and wellbeing through investing in universal and targeted initiatives

- Keep investing in programs that promote students' good mental health, positive, respectful relationships and social and emotional wellbeing. For example, the Respectful Relationships program supports schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respectful relationships and gender equality.[1]

- Keep supporting new student health and wellbeing initiatives, including 2018–19 Victorian budget funding for access to speech pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, additional mental health support for students, a suicide prevention pilot and a positive behaviour support program.[2]

2

Provide early identification and intervention for children and young people experiencing difficulties

- Support schools to continue to deepen relationships with students and families, community service organisations and the local community. This includes proactively engaging with families experiencing disadvantage and who may be harder to reach.

- Ensure all schools and teachers know about supports available to help students, such as the Languages and Learning Disabilities Support Program,[3] Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)[4] and Headspace.[5]

- Support in-school early identification, prevention and treatment of problematic alcohol and other drug use. Providing drug and alcohol treatment and support services in schools is an effective way of identifying, engaging and treating young people experiencing problematic substance misuse as well as identifying and supporting their families.

3

Increase students' access to qualified youth workers and wrap-around support services

- Increase investment in youth workers, Koorie Engagement Support Officers, and Student Support Services Officers (such as psychologists and speech therapists) which are closely connected to schools. This will help provide students with early diagnosis, intervention and referral, and reduce waiting lists.

- Invest in a school lawyer program in secondary schools to improve young people's access to legal education and confidential advice. This will help improve access to justice to assist young people with public transport fines, fair pay, and family violence at home, and ensure young people leave school with a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

4

Work with partners to give children and young people holistic, coordinated support

- Invest in school-as-community-hubs and other integrated services models to provide children and young people with more holistic support, particularly in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. This includes resourcing a full-time dedicated coordinator to help coordinate services.

- Develop a framework for positive interaction and support from community service organisations.

1. Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Respectful Relationships, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx

2. Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.47, accessed at https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf

3. Victorian Government, Finance – Language and Learning Disabilities Support Program, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/finance/Pages/srpref010.aspx

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5. Headspace, accessed at https://headspace.org.au/?gclid=CjwKCAjwopTYBRAzEiwAnU4kbwgGeKOb8Lk-zMxB7QTp Qyl6xXZiXPhosZTtctM4yLV9AvcOp0gqHBoCNo8QAvD_BwE

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KEEP STUDENTS AND FAMILIES CONNECTED TO EDUCATION

Young people are supported to remain in education through strong school and family partnerships.

Keeping young people at school should be a key goal for the Victorian Government.

Each year several hundred children are expelled from government schools, some as young as five or six years old.[1] Most expulsions do not comply with Victorian Government regulations, including having a plan for the student to find a new school. Many more children are expelled informally – encouraged or forced to leave without a formal process – despite informal expulsions being prohibited by DET.[2]

A disproportionate number of expelled children have a disability, identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or are in out-of-home care.[3] There are often complex issues involved, such as trauma, mental health, family conflict, or inadequate support for additional health and development needs.

The impact of expulsion on the child, their family, and the wider community cannot be overstated. It impacts young people's self-esteem and disrupts their education. According to the Victorian Ombudsman:

"Some 60 per cent of those in the youth justice system had previously been suspended or expelled from school, and over 90 per cent of adults in our prisons did not complete secondary school."[4]

Whilst improvements to suspension and expulsion procedures have been made,[5] more can be done to prevent informal expulsions and part-time attendance where there is no legitimate reason or agreement between the school and the family.

1

Help schools better understand and support children facing difficulties in their lives

- Build the knowledge and skills of all school staff about mental health, trauma and disability to help prevent and respond to concerning or trauma-related behaviours.

- Adequately resource schools to engage or access relevant experts.

- Train all school staff in evidence-based approaches such as trauma-informed practice and positive behaviour models, such as the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPB) Framework[6] and the Koorie Inclusive SWPB Framework.

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2

Help schools include and keep students engaged

- Ensure all schools comply with expulsion processes, including understanding and responding to the underlying causes of a student's behaviour before any decisions are made.

- Investigate, monitor and prevent instances of informal expulsions and part-time attendance initiated by schools.

- Where part-time attendance has been initiated by students or their families, ensure schools work with the student and family to develop a pathway back to full-time attendance.

- Help schools develop effective Individual Education Plans and Student Support Groups that improve attendance, student engagement, learning outcomes and monitoring of progress.

- Ensure schools know about and engage with programs that support students at risk of disengaging.

3

Ensure school expulsion is a last resort and no student is excluded from the government school system

- Fully implement the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman's Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions.[7]

- Ensure every student of compulsory age who leaves a school, regardless of the reason, is assisted to successfully transition to another school or flexible learning option of their choice. Where a student is expelled, regional engagement coordinators should coordinate supports for students for at least six months, including working with community sector organisations.

1. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.2, accessed at https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx

2. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, p.6, accessed at https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx

3. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school edupulsions, August 2017, p.2, accessed at https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx

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5. Government Gazette, 18 January 2018, Ministerial Order No. 969 – Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion of Students in Government Schools, p.70, accessed at http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2018/GG2018G003.pdf

6. Victorian Government, School Performance and Improve - School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/swpbs.aspx

7. Victorian Ombudsman, Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions, August 2017, accessed at https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/57d918ec-fee0-48e0-a55e-87d0262d3c27//publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-vic-gov-school-expulsions.aspx

WELCOME AND SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BACK INTO EDUCATION

Young people at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged from education are embraced by the system, not pushed away.

Helping disengaged children and young people return to education improves their educational outcomes and employment prospects.

Leaving school early is often a precursor to poor life outcomes and long-term unemployment.[1] Helping young people reengage in education is critical and requires a suite of evidence-informed programs that focus on early intervention and re-engagement.

The Victorian Government should facilitate greater coordination and referrals between schools, education and training providers, to ensure children and young people receive timely support and don't fall through the cracks.

1

Keep investing in a statewide intensive case management program to help children and young people stay engaged, or reengage in education

- Assist and resource schools to keep young people engaged through maintaining the statewide rollout of the successful Navigator outreach case management program, which supports young people aged 12–17 to stay engaged or reengage with education. or reengage with education.[2]

2

Provide a comprehensive suite of programs to help children and young people stay engaged, or reengage with education

- Develop and publish robust program evaluations, implement recommendations and expand effective programs and initiatives including LOOKOUT,[3] Springboard,[4] Navigator,[5] Reconnect,[6] Local Learning and Employment Networks,[7] School Focused Youth Service,[8] Educational Justice Initiative,[9] and Hands on Learning.[10]

- Make program eligibility flexible so children and young people who require support are not arbitrarily excluded and don't fall through service gaps.

3

Invest equally in students who are in school, and those who are reengaging with school and flexible learning options

- Rectify inconsistencies in Victorian Government funding to ensure that students who are reengaging in the community, as part of their pathway back to education, access the same total level of education funding as their peers who are fully engaged in school (above and beyond the Student Resource Package (SRP)).

1. Kirsten J. Hancock and Stephen R. Zubrick, Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school, University of Western Australia, June 2015 (Updated October 2015), p. 5, accessed at https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/1422/report-education-children-at-risk-of-disengaging-from-school-literature-review.pdf
2. Victorian Government, Enrolment, Attendance and Behaviour – Navigator Re-Engagement Program, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/reengagementnavigator.aspx
3. Victorian Government, Lookout Education Support Centres, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/lookout.aspx
4. Victorian Government, Springboard, accessed at https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/springboard-contact-list-word
5. Victorian Government, Enrolment, Attendance and Behaviour – Navigator Re-Engagement Program, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/reengagementnavigator.aspx
6. Australian Government, Department of Social Services, Reconnect program, accessed at https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children/programmes-services/reconnect
7. Victorian Government, Local Learning and Employment Networks, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/llens.aspx
8. Victorian Government, Enrolment, Attendance and Behaviour, School Focused Youth Service, accessed at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/Pages/sfys.aspx
9. Parkville College, Melbourne Children's Court, Educational Justice Initiative, accessed at http://parkvillecollege.vic.edu.au/?page_id=44
10. Save the Children, Hands on Learning, accessed at http://handsonlearning.org.au/