School retention ... what does it take?

A guide to keeping young people under 15 connected to school

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

There is growing concern about the number of young people under 15 years of age who, for a number of reasons, have poor school attendance and are disengaged and marginalised from education. There is also a growing awareness that the health and wellbeing of young people is the business of schools (Galbally 2004). Remaining connected with formal learning is one of the factors that gives young people more options as they grow older, especially if they are able to achieve success in school. The focus on transitions and pathways (Kirby 2000), as well as advances in learning and teaching theories (Russell 2002), have contributed to the recognition of a diversity of learning approaches and pathways that make education more inclusive.

In this context, the Victorian Premier's Drug Prevention Council commissioned a research team from the Centre for Adolescent Health, the Australian Youth Research Centre and the Centre for Youth Drug Studies in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education & Training (DE&T) to undertake the School Retention Initiative.

The aim of the School Retention Initiative was to develop a more detailed picture of the issues confronting young people under 15 years of age who are currently not connected or poorly connected to schools, and who are accessing adult community education (ACE) programs. The initiative investigated what schools do to keep this cohort connected to school and what partnership arrangements could be put in place when a young person under 15 is not attending school.

The School Retention Initiative has resulted in these guidelines, *School retention … what does it take? A guide to keeping young people under 15 connected to school* and a research report of the community pilot projects.

What is the purpose of the guidelines?

These guidelines offer advice on how schools and the broader community can focus their efforts to keep young people under 15 years of age connected to school. The underpinning principle is that the school of origin remains a central source of support and facilitates educational opportunities in partnership with young people, their families and other agencies and education providers.

These guidelines present strategies using a school–community approach and are designed to:

> provide innovative and flexible learning environments through expanding options in education for young people

> increase young people's participation, engagement and achievement

> strengthen the quality of support to young people and their families especially during periods of transition and times of difficulty

> promote a culture of partnerships between schools and other education providers and agencies in the provision of education and services to young people

> create supportive environments in which all can thrive and learn

> enhance the positive mental, social and emotional wellbeing of all who work and learn in schools.

Who will use these guidelines?

The guidelines are designed to assist leadership teams in schools and communities to work with each other and with young people and their families to keep young people engaged in education and connected to school. Such teams include, for example, principals, assistant principals, sub-school coordinators, year level coordinators, student welfare coordinators, curriculum coordinators, other education provider leaders, agency leaders and workers, and representatives from youth networks and the local council.

How were these guidelines developed?

The guidelines use evidence derived from practice as well as evidence from the literature. While literature reviews can provide broad approaches to what works, they fail to provide detail about how such approaches work and the context in which they work. A team of researchers worked with practitioners, young people and their families in three community pilot projects from May 2003 to March 2004 to generate evidence about:

> young people's experiences of education in school and at adult community education
> key transition points for young people and families
> issues of access to education and support services
> what schools and communities do to prevent young people under 15 years becoming disconnected from school, and re-engage those who have already left
> how the program/solution was developed and sustained
> the pathways of young people and how these are managed
> how schools, other education providers and agencies have worked together
> what works and does not work and in what circumstances.

The research team interviewed people in the communities, attended meetings in schools, agencies and networks, observed programs in action and consulted on emerging evidence. The innovative practices that are occurring in communities to address problems rarely find their way into the literature. There is much good practice in the system, but it is often hidden inside the boundaries of schools, agencies and communities (Hargreaves 2003). The research team has worked with communities to try and find out what works, why it works, how others could learn from their experience and how these practices connect with the literature.

The importance of strengthening partnerships

The evidence highlights partnership strategies as essential for both prevention and intervention. In recognition of this, DE&T published the *ACE and Schools Partnership (2003)* guidelines to provide a foundation for communication and arrangements between schools and other education providers. The guidelines address the following issues:

> how to create and sustain successful partnerships
> how to assess the needs of young people in our community
> what roles, responsibilities, expectations and lines of communication are needed

> what structures for sharing information, decision making, planning and implementing action, and monitoring progress are required
> how to strengthen provision and quality of education and services
> what resources could be shared to achieve the common goal.

People in communities already invest enormous energy in this endeavour. The multi-layered, dynamic practices in the community are best illustrated by the rich descriptions offered in these guidelines by the practitioners themselves. What this document offers is a framework and series of strategies and processes which people can build upon.

Why do young people leave school early?

There is no typical school leaver. There are multiple reasons why some young people leave school early. Between 10 and 20 per cent of young people experience serious problems between 12 and 18 years of age, and as many as one in five young people report difficulties with mental health. Under such circumstances, young people can struggle to cope with the demands of school. Schools can be inflexible in their curriculum and pedagogical strategies. For some young people the result is a sense of failure and low academic self-worth that can lead to a belief that school 'isn't for me'.

Table 1 highlights the multiple factors that influence young people's connection to school.

Table 1 *Factors influencing young people's connection to school*

School issues	Family and personal issues
■ Poor relationships and conflict with teachers ■ Falling behind in work ■ Feeling pressure or stress in the classroom ■ Limited access to help ■ Teasing, bullying, not fitting in ■ Negatively judged by teachers and peers ■ Poor and/or multiple transitions ■ Limited opportunities to experience success ■ Perception of curriculum as irrelevant ■ Difficulties with literacy ■ Fear of failure ■ Disciplinary problems	■ Family conflict, and in some cases violence and abuse ■ High mobility of family ■ Family history of negative experiences with school ■ Difficulties in supporting school work ■ Lack of transport ■ Parents with mental illness or drug-related issues ■ Families under financial pressure ■ Working to support the family ■ Trouble managing work and school ■ Alcohol and other drugs ■ Mental health

A large number of early school leavers do subsequently continue their education. It is estimated that in 2003, about 6 per cent (approximately 455) of young participants in adult community education were below the school leaving age. While there is a complex interplay of personal, social and contextual factors underlying these statistics, many young people experience damaged relationships or a breakdown in the relationships with school and between the school and the family.

A framework for action

It is important to ensure that 'those students who currently derive the least benefit from their middle schooling years are provided with enhanced opportunities to attain academic and social outcomes from their learning that are of value in the difficult transitions and pathways that many need to negotiate' (Luke & Elkin 2003, p. 16).

The framework for action must be consistent with prevention strategies, that is:

> solution- not problem-focused
> designed to build on assets and strengths rather than deficits
> proactive rather than reactive
> designed to strengthen partnerships.

Outcomes for young people

Some young people growing up under difficult circumstances require more intensive and creative engagement and flexible learning arrangements, although this is not an easy task and can not be managed by school personnel alone. It is also important to note that young people in these circumstances recognise that learning is important and offer some important messages about what works.

The evidence points to the importance of preventative and early intervention strategies that offer support and create opportunities with and for young people. Young people need to experience a sense of:

Contribution and citizenship

> opportunities to contribute to things that matter in the school or community and to the young person
> putting thoughts and ideas into action to make a difference
> the experience of being a valued participant in society
> meaningful participation and engagement in learning

Competence, confidence and a sense of control

> academic and non-academic achievements
> a sense of capability and confidence in learning
> mastery of skills

Connectedness

> good relationships at school with peers and teachers
> help from a supportive network of adults during difficult times and practical help with school work
> learning that is relevant and connected with young people's lives and worlds.

What's in these guidelines?

These guidelines provide strategies for:

> schools
> young people and their families
> partnerships with other education providers and agencies
> community networks.

It is clear that there are no single solutions. Good practice is built on a variety of different strategies and starting points.
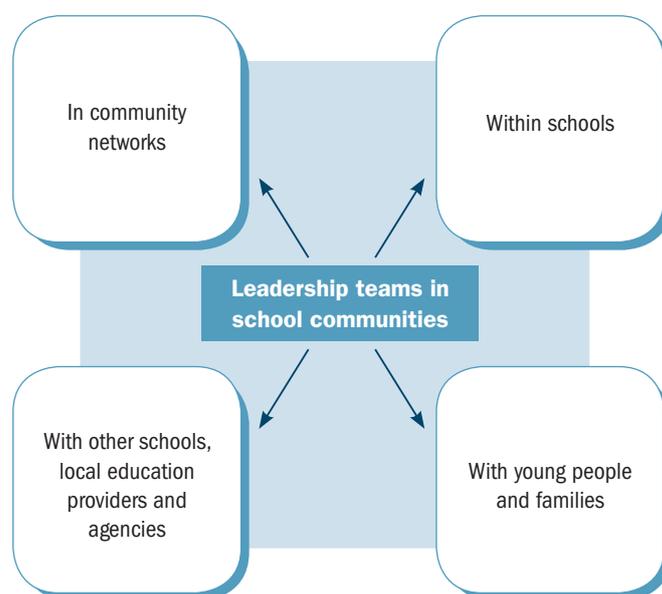
Figure 1   *Layers of practice for keeping young people connected to school*

The strategies in these guidelines span prevention and early intervention (see Figure 2). Most are not new but are unlikely to be effective by themselves. What is required is the selection of appropriate strategies for each of the following: individual young people and their families, schools – in partnership with other education providers and agencies, and in community networks. Strategies that are coordinated and planned are likely to provide better support for keeping young people connected to school.
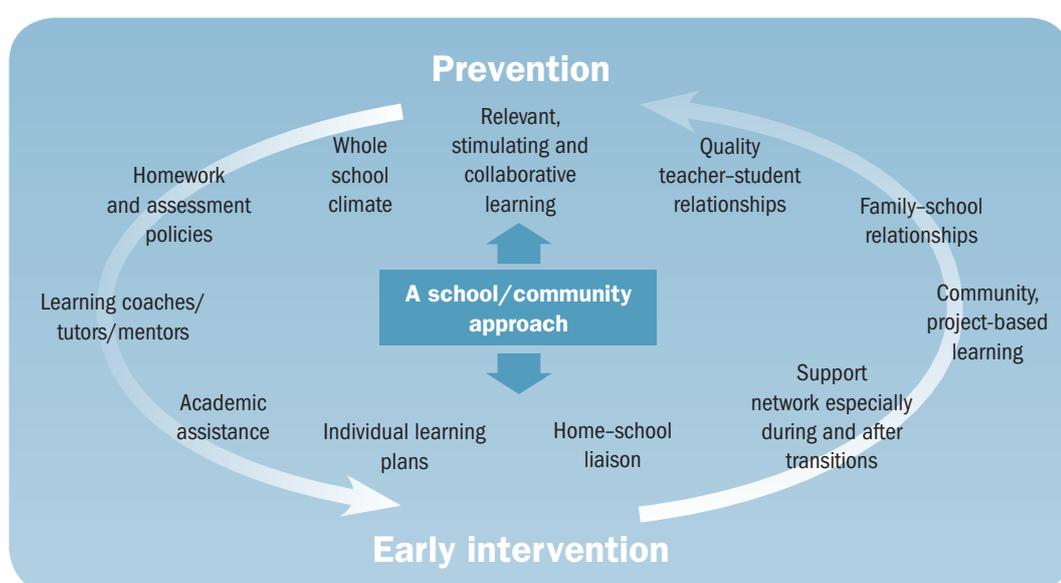
Figure 2   *Community approach to prevention and early intervention*

The strategies are designed as processes for change (see Figure 3) to enable teams in schools and communities to reflect on, review and strengthen practices for keeping young people connected to school. Addressing the following questions is a good starting point:

> What is the most important and urgent problem area and where do we think we can innovate successfully?
> What do we currently know about this problem area?
> What are we already doing?
> Where are the strengths?
> Where are the gaps? What do we need to do to close a gap?
> What can we do to add value?
> What are our successes? Add one more.

(Adapted from Hargreaves 2003)

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Reflect, evaluate        →        Assess the current
and clarify goals                 situation, gather
and purpose                       evidence

              A framework
               for action

Select appropriate       ←        Identify and review
strategies and                    priorities and
take action                       evidence
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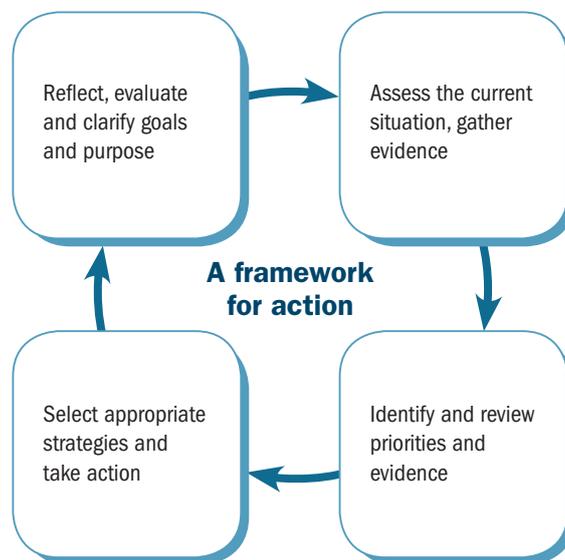
Figure 3 *Process for change*

If there aren't fundamental shifts in how people think and interact, as well as how they explore new ideas, then all the reorganising, fads, and strategies in the world won't add up to much (Senge 2000, p. 20).

Principles of good practice in supporting innovation and change

The evidence highlights the importance of partnerships in deciding, planning and implementing new initiatives or building on current ones in the school or community to avoid 'innovation overload' (Hargreaves 2003).

Table 2 *Checklist for planning*

Well thought out
Do all parties share an understanding of:

☐ the purpose of what is happening

☐ the accountabilities, responsibilities, direction and ownership

☐ sharing the strategies together with people of like minds (both locally and elsewhere) who are creatively wrestling with the same issues?

Do-able

☐ Will the strategies allow those involved to see early wins?

Multiple benefit

☐ Will the strategies have a multiplier effect, that is, lots of wins on different levels?

Relationship building

☐ Will the strategies strengthen relationships between people and organisations?

Strengths-based

☐ Do the strategies build on the good work that is already happening as opposed to concentrating on the big gaps?

Reach

☐ Will the strategies involve people, organisations or groups who are currently marginalised?

Sustainability

☐ Are the strategies sustainable? Will they bring about lasting change?

Burden

☐ Do the strategies place an unreasonable burden on workers with little positive outcome?

In keeping with the principles of good practice, the strategies in these guidelines require different amounts of effort and time to implement. Some strategies can be completed in a single staff meeting, others will need to be done by small professional learning teams; some will take two or three weeks, others might require a longer-term commitment. All strategies will require:

> different degrees of partnership
> new ideas and different ways of thinking
> a climate to promote reflective practice and professional learning
> a clear vision for the school and the students.

Case studies
When young people disengage

As a starting point, two case studies about young people who have become disconnected from school are presented. These case studies illustrate that leaving school is not a single event but rather an outcome of a process of disengagement. They make it clear that opportunities for prevention and early intervention did occur at many points in both primary and secondary school.

The case studies can be used to stimulate discussion about what happens to young people and ways that schools might reflect on practice, review the strategies, and determine priorities for action.

Discussion starter

The aim of this exercise is to focus discussion and reflection on practices in schools that keep young people under 15 connected.

Who is involved?

All staff at a staff meeting, or relevant professional learning teams.

How does it work?

Staff are divided into small groups of between four and seven people and given either or both case studies to read. School leaders might choose to create their own case study, while being mindful of ensuring confidentiality.

A facilitator is needed to lead the group through the task and to collate the responses of the different groups.

There are two parts to the exercise:

> Part A involves the group assessing and reflecting on current approaches using the group task questions
> Part B involves the group proposing some priority areas for action.

Part A   Assessing the current situation

Each group is assigned a task question for the exercise. It should be stressed that there are no right or wrong responses in this task, but rather an open discussion of perceived strengths and weaknesses of current approaches.

Group 1
What processes do we have in place to find out where students are at when they are new to the school or when they have had periods of absence?

Group 2
What is the mechanism for understanding why a student is late to school or missing school? How can we support our students getting to school when they are experiencing difficult circumstances?

Group 3
How do we know when we are putting too much pressure on students and they start to fall behind?

Group 4
What do we have in place to help students catch up when they fall behind or when they miss school?

Group 5

What are the ways in which students like Michael and Mel could show that they were achieving at this school?

Group 6

How do we know whether students are engaged or bored with what they are learning?

Group 7

How might our homework and assessment policies help or hinder students like Mel and Michael?

All groups

After group responses have been collated, all groups could discuss the following question: Are there other observations about the case study that should be noted?

CASE STUDY   Michael

Michael wants to get to Year 10. He thinks he'd like to do bricklaying. His cousins are 'brickies' and he talked to them about it. They made it sound attractive although he recognised that 'you'd have to get up early'. His recent school attendance has been sporadic and recently he has missed up to three months of school. He cites family fights and his dad's work trips as the main reasons for his absence from school. The trips with his dad involve extended stays with family members in country Victoria and interstate. At one stage, he was intending to go to school in Adelaide but didn't enrol anywhere. He feels a bit out of it when he returns to school and gets behind in activities such as the novel they are studying. He finds that the class has moved ahead and he doesn't know what is going on.

His father also has diabetes. Michael helps get him started with a cup of coffee 'but dad takes a while to get going in the morning'. Michael lives about 3 kilometres from the school. He used to ride his bike but it was stolen and now he has to walk. He could catch a bus but doesn't like to because some of the other kids give him a hard time. He estimates that it takes him about an hour to walk to school. He gets into trouble for being late and thinks that the teachers don't care about or understand why he is late.

Michael is good at PE and he likes to create things. He enjoys cooking in home economics and the pracs that they do in science, but he becomes frustrated when there is a lot of writing to do in subjects such as English, languages and history. He likes computers, but says his typing skills aren't good so he is slow to complete the work. When too much work is presented at the one time, he finds it difficult to concentrate and gets bored. He says that teachers put too much pressure on him to finish the work and that there is no one there to help. Michael reckons teachers think he's 'dumb' and that there are few teachers who help him catch up when he's been away. He thinks that they don't have time. Sometimes Michael enjoys working in groups because the other students give him assistance. He says that it is better when he has smaller classes with teachers who explain things clearly, don't rush through it, allow students to ask questions, and give clear explanations. These are times when he feels he can do the work.

CASE STUDY   **Mel**

Mel hasn't been going to school. She's started going to a program provided by adult community education. She said that Year 7 was okay, but at the start of Year 8 she had a lot of trouble at home. There were lots of family fights and her mum and dad split up and there have been ongoing problems at home. She found it hard to remember anything she learned at school and to get any homework done because she had to help her dad with her younger brother and sister. Eventually, Mel and her younger sister went to live with her grandmother who struggled to pay for books, uniforms and fees.

Mel was good with maths, but not so good with English. She liked English, especially listening to stories, the debates and role plays, but she had difficulty with spelling and writing. Although Mel thought she was quite bright she didn't think she was making much progress at school and found it hard to get along with people there. She felt like she didn't really fit in. She got picked on for most of term 1 and 2 in Year 8, and thinks it's because her family didn't have much money.

In class, Mel often got into trouble for not completing her work and found it hard when she couldn't answer questions in front of the whole class. She thought that some teachers thought that she was stupid and she hated how they criticised her in front of the other students. It was also difficult to do group work because she had to talk and relate to other girls who she thought were being really bitchy. Mel began to think that being at school was a waste of time and couldn't understand why she had to learn 'this stuff'. In some classes she started to muck around. Gradually she started to get in with the wrong crowd and was seen as a trouble-maker. She was placed on a good behaviour bond after being caught shoplifting.

She thinks that she was kicked out of school for misbehaving. She had quite a few suspensions for talking in class all the time, being rude to teachers, not doing the work, smoking at school and being late too many times. She thinks that the teachers didn't care, and that 'they're busy and stuff … they've got too many kids and they couldn't be bothered with me anymore'.

Her experience with adult community education has been positive. She feels that it is a friendly environment and people accept you for who you are. She says that teachers listen and that everyone can have a say and not feel judged. She says that she can talk to people about her problems or take time out and teachers understand. She knows that she has to do the work, but likes the fact that she can do it at her own pace. She has an idea about what she wants to do and feels that the teachers will help her. She says that her Mum thinks she won't make it 'the way I'm going', but Mel doesn't think that's true. 'I'm just doing it differently from other people my age.'

PART B Identifying priorities and reviewing the evidence

Each group is handed a copy of Good practice strategies (see Table 3, pages 12–15). The table lists all the strategies that are outlined in these guidelines. It can be used to review the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches and possible opportunities for improvement.

Groups can use the questions following to assess their approach to the strategies listed and propose ways forward. The group might wish to add further strategies to the table as appropriate.

> What are we already doing that supports students like Michael and Mel to stay connected at this school?
> Where are the strengths?
> Where are the gaps? What do we need to do to close a gap?
> What can we do to add value?
> What are our successes? Add one more.

Table 3 *Good practice strategies*

Strategies in schools

■ Assessing the school climate:
  • young people's perceptions of school
  • using audit tools
■ Promoting quality relationships:
  • strengthening teacher–student relationships
  • supporting transitions
  • restorative practices
  • family–school relationships
■ Promoting relevant, stimulating learning and opportunities for participation
  • planning relevant, stimulating and flexible learning options
  • student action teams
■ Promoting a sense of capability, achievement and control:
  • collaborative small-group learning teams
  • academic assistance: tutoring or learning coaches
  • academic assistance: cross-age tutoring
  • reviewing homework and assessment policies and practices

Strengths ....
Weaknesses ....
Opportunities and areas to address ....

Strategies for working with individual young people and their families

- First steps: connecting with key adults
- Developing an individual profile of learning needs, health and wellbeing:
  - Resilience Framework
- Assessing learning needs, styles and interests
- Identifying a student–family support network
- Individual learning plans
- Learning portfolios
- Home–school liaison

Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Opportunities and areas to address

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Strategies for strengthening partnerships between schools, other education providers and agencies

- Shared planning of learning programs and/or review of existing programs
- Developing protocols to support partnerships
- Establishing, developing and maintaining productive partnerships

Strengths

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Weaknesses

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Opportunities and areas to address
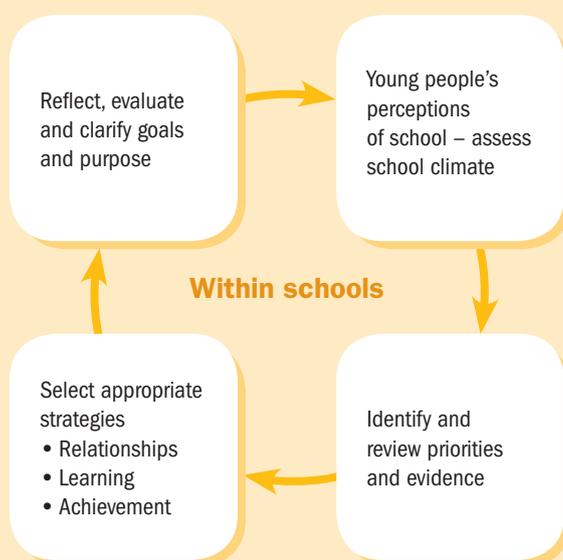
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Strategies for strengthening community networks

- Creating a clear purpose: a shared agenda
- Mapping learning options: auditing current provision
- Sharing good practice
- Assessing priorities: a shared response

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Weaknesses

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Opportunities and areas to address

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Strategies within schools

This section focuses on strategies that can be used in schools to improve outcomes for young people who have poor patterns of attendance and are at risk of leaving school early. There are many possibilities for action. There is no 'one size fits all' or menu of 'add-on' programs that will address retention. Adding on programs for young people at risk fails to tackle the fundamental changes that are required to engage all young people.

The strategies are designed as processes for change (see Figure 4) to enable teams in schools to reflect on, review and strengthen practices for keeping young people connected to school.

Reflect, evaluate and clarify goals and purpose

Young people's perceptions of school – assess school climate

Within schools

Select appropriate strategies
• Relationships
• Learning
• Achievement

Identify and review priorities and evidence

Figure 4 *Process for change within schools*

The underpinning principle of good practice in schools is a belief that all young people can and want to learn and that teachers make a difference (Russell 2002).

The evidence

The evidence from the literature and from practice indicates that effective strategies at the whole-of-school level address the school ecology or climate. The evidence shows that strategies in the following areas are the most effective.

Promoting quality relationships:

> strengthening teacher–student relationships
> supporting transitions – particularly for those young people who have experienced multiple transitions
> adopting restorative practices
> strengthening family–school relationships.

Promoting learning experiences that are relevant and stimulating and offer opportunities for meaningful participation:

> planning learning for relevance, choice and flexibility
> student action teams.

Promoting a sense of achievement, capability and control:

> collaborative learning
> academic assistance
> cross-age tutoring
> reviewing homework and assessment strategies.

Assessing the school climate

STRATEGY 1 *Young people's perceptions of school*

The aim of this strategy is to gather information about student perceptions of both the social and learning environment of school to identify areas of strength and areas that can be improved.

Who is involved?

School leadership team, professional learning teams and students in selected year levels, for example all Year 5 students or all Year 8 students.

Why is this important?

The quality of the school environment is central to effective learning and the wellbeing of young people. Engagement – the extent to which young people identify with their school and derive a sense of wellbeing from their learning – is a crucial determinant of success in school (Audas & Willms 2001).

The following areas are important determinants of connection to school and engagement in learning:

> relationships in the school and learning environment, for example, liking school, liking teachers, liking classes, feeling valued, teachers knowing the students, being treated fairly, dealing with bullying behaviours in the school
> relevance of and interest in learning, for example, learning that connects with the lives of young people, is interesting, meets learning needs

> capability and control in own learning, for example, experiencing a sense of achievement, having expectations of achievement, having a choice in learning and assessment, having input into the classroom program
> availability and accessibility of help if needed, for example, social and academic support, helping other students, receiving help from other students
> opportunities, for example, contributing to and participating in class, school and community activities, decisions and projects.

How does it work?

Student opinions are gathered about the climate of the school. Consideration needs to be given to the year level and the number of respondents.

There are tools available from DE&T, for example:

> Student Opinion Surveys – Attitudes to School
> Middle Years tools.

Other tools that can be used to explore student perceptions include:

> Australian Council for Educational Research – School Life questionnaire
> Centre for Adolescent Health: Gatehouse Project – Adolescent Health questionnaire.

The team's task is to make sense of the data and identify what is working well and what needs to improve. Schools can use this analysis to set priorities and target strategies to achieve better outcomes for all young people.

> Work with your data. Begin by looking at the data. If we are going to make things better here we have got to be open and honest. When I went in and went through our data the first time I recognised that this was my benchmark, this is how it is and this is where we are working from. If we're going to make improvements, this is what we've got to do. We've got to see it as it is, from the point of view of students, parents and teachers. For me that was really useful because you can now see the steps, the changes – see improvement happening (Principal).

STRATEGY 2   *Using audit tools*

The aim of this strategy is to assist groups of teachers and students to review strengths and weaknesses of the classroom and school climate in terms of keeping young people connected to school.

Who is involved?

Professional learning teams in consultation with groups of students from different year levels.

Why is this important?

This strategy promotes dialogue within professional learning teams, and between teachers and young people. It allows teams to reflect on what is working well and what could be improved.

How does it work?

Professional learning teams use the tool 'Looking at the school climate' (see Tool 1, page 66) to review current practices, policies and structures that impact on promoting:

> quality relationships
> relevant and stimulating learning
> opportunities for participation
> a sense of capability, achievement and control.

These reviews will enable schools to:

> identify strengths and weaknesses
> prioritise areas to be addressed
> choose appropriate starting points.

Implementing the strategy requires paying attention to what students and teachers have to say and letting it inform the way in which teachers can strengthen practice.

Promoting quality relationships

STRATEGY 3   *Strengthening teacher–student relationships*

The aim of this strategy is to allow professional learning teams to reflect on how well they know their students and to build relationships with young people, in particular with those who may be struggling to stay connected to school.

Who is involved?

Class teachers and professional learning teams.

Why is this important?

The research is clear, teachers matter and good relationships with teachers are a key factor in keeping young people connected to school and learning. The more students like their teachers and feel that their teachers care about them, the more they enjoy school and find it interesting (Russell 2002).

Young people who struggle to stay connected to school want teachers to:

> be understanding and supportive of the whole person
> be confident and knowledgeable
> use a relaxed teaching style
> have a sense of humour
> communicate well and explain things clearly
> show kindness
> know their students
> help them with thinking and learning
> give them time to learn.

How does it work?

The quality of teacher–student interactions is dependent on the 'pile of goodwill' (Lewis 1997).

There are many competing demands on teachers' time, however the need to build relationships with young people who are not well connected with learning is a key issue.

Use the following questions to consider how relationships with young people who are struggling to stay connected to school might be strengthened.

> When was the last time I spoke to that student in a friendly, supportive manner?
> How often have we spent time together talking about something that is important to the student?
> When was the last time I did something nice for or with that student?
> What is the student's favourite film, music, school activity, football team, sport, etc.?
> Who are the student's best friends, worst enemies, or casual acquaintances?
> What does the student feel he or she is good at?
> What does the student think of his or her schoolwork and learning in other subjects?
> What are their real interests in learning?

(Adapted from Lewis 1997)

| STRATEGY 4 | *Supporting transitions* |

The aim of this strategy is to review how schools support young people, arriving at a new school or coming back to school after a period of absence, to connect to learning and experience supportive relationships.

Who is involved?

Teachers, new students entering the school, students who miss school for a period of time, students entering secondary school and families.

Why is this important?

Educational transitions result in significant shifts in interpersonal relationships and academic expectations. Some young people experience transition as a 'new start' with positive outcomes. Some young people who become disconnected from school have experienced less positive transitions during their school life. Young people who have experienced multiple transitions in primary school might require additional support in the transition to secondary college.

Poor transitions are largely a result of:

> a mismatch between what a student has learned and what they are expected to know and do, leading to a sense of failure, boredom or embarrassment
> failure to establish supportive relationships with teachers and/or peers.

How does it work?

This strategy requires a team in the school to review the practices and procedures for supporting and tracking the progress of young people who have newly arrived at the school, had periods of absence or experienced multiple transitions.

Use the following questions to help with the review.

> How do the teachers link with the family during transition?
> How is the family made to feel comfortable with the school?
> How does the school communicate early successes to the student and the family?
> Who is responsible for 'keeping an eye on' and supporting students who have recently arrived at the school?
> Does the school have a clear process for assessing the learning needs, interests and styles of young people who have recently arrived at the school?

The following case studies illustrate transition processes from different points of view.

CASE STUDY — Barry

'I had to move everywhere. A refuge. Different share houses. So I went to lots of schools. I was on and off at primary school. Good day then bad day. I liked the last primary school. It was the best. It was a country school. You got out heaps and there's big wide space. I was scared to come to secondary school. I just thought it was big and a bad school.'

The secondary school organised a support worker, knowing the student's background, culture and nervousness about secondary school. The worker organised meeting teachers and a tour of school before starting.

'I was naughty, got in trouble for making too much noise, not doing what I was told.'

The Assistant Principal developed a good relationship with Barry and allowed some flexibility for him to take time out. By term 2, Barry began a one-day-a-week program at an alternative setting as another way of being supported through Year 7. Barry was happier and 'doesn't mind the school now'.

CASE STUDY — A school's experience

This school is a multi-campus P–12 school. The school has a high retention rate with very few students leaving before the age of 15. The school focuses on individualised programs providing opportunities to promote success. The school invests significant effort in developing a culture of acceptance and establishing a strong family focus, particularly during transition. This is very important as students new to the school often come with negative experiences from their previous school. Staff visit parents and work with them to help design programs that will have the most value for students. There are two family support group meetings for the year, during which areas such as academic progress are looked at in relation to wellbeing, emotional development and relationships.

STRATEGY 5   *Restorative practices*

The focus of this strategy is on relationship management (prevention) and relationship repair (intervention).

Who is involved?

Effective use of restorative practices requires a whole-school approach.

Why is this important?

Early school leaving can be actively accelerated in schools where a primary focus of discipline policy is on rule violations or on controlling student behaviour by punishment or threat of punishment. The assumption is that punishment will change behaviour and act as a deterrent. This may be true for some people, however for others it not only fails to achieve intended outcomes but also fails to teach acceptable behaviours. Such approaches can lead to an environment where student relationships with teachers are based on enforcement. The restorative approach couples control with support; and confronts and disapproves of a wrongdoing while affirming the intrinsic worth of people and their relationships with each other.

How does it work?

Restorative practices involve the use of transferable values and principles to promote social equity in relationships, empathy and personal accountability. This approach provides the language and strategies to restore damaged relationships and repair harm done to individuals and the community. Strategies include peace circles, no-blame conferences and community conferences.

These guidelines do not detail the strategy since it requires a comprehensive professional learning program, trained facilitators and a commitment at all levels of the school to support the underpinning principles. More information about restorative practices can be obtained from DE&T's regional offices.

CASE STUDY   Restorative practices pilot, 2002

A regional support staff member reported positively on her experience using restorative practices in a community conference ran for Jay, a Year 7 student whose poor attendance and disruptive classroom behaviour had caused a P–12 college enormous difficulty. The conference involved Jay's teachers, his mother and members of the local community, including police. Through a process of storytelling and reflection, conference participants were able to discuss the impact of Jay's behaviour on himself and others. The conference was able to develop a workable contract that committed Jay and others to a gradual reconnection to school. Eighteen months after the conference, Jay invited her to a meeting to tell her how he was going. 'I had only seen Jay once in the past 18 months and I couldn't get over how much he had changed. He was confident, his demeanour and outlook had changed. He spoke well and talked about how his life had changed.' (DE&T 2003)

STRATEGY 6 *Family–school relationships*

The aim of this strategy is to strengthen family–school relationships.

Who is involved?

School leadership team, teachers, families and young people.

Why is this important?

There is widespread agreement that families have a central role in young people's educational development and that meaningful home–school collaboration helps to facilitate better educational outcomes. However, schools can be daunting and intimidating places for some families. Further strategies for working with families whose children have become or are becoming disconnected from school are outlined in 'Strategies for working with individual young people and their families' (see page 33).

> Connecting parents of children who are socially or economically disadvantaged should begin long before a young person is referred for school problems … this type of proactive approach is needed to build two-way communication built upon mutual respect and trust (Raffaele & Knoff 1999, p. 449).

How does it work?

The question of who will play a leadership role in strengthening family connectedness to school and the collaboration between home and school needs to be considered. This role will involve strategic planning, development and implementation of coordinated strategies. Table 4 provides an overview of successful strategies.

Table 4 *Successful strategies in working with families*

Prevention and early intervention	Strategies
Awareness	■ Family newsletters: • ensure diversity of students' achievements are reported • ensure availability in different languages of school community – families are usually willing to assist with this ■ Local newspaper stories about school activities ■ Handbook to begin each school year – foreground excitement about learning, programs and opportunities, and background policies and rules ■ One-page handouts on child and youth development, school policies, etc. ■ Special letters or phone calls to invite parents to school events ■ Home visits to express interest in and improve students' comfort and progress at school ■ Web-based learning portfolios showcasing student work
Cooperation	■ Families sharing learning, planning and progress – learning portfolios, expos and celebrations ■ Welcoming school environment for families, visitors and students alike ■ Social events for families to meet other families ■ Telephone contact to report on student successes and improvements ■ Family drop-in 'space' where families can get information, meet and help other families ■ Parent and carer opinion surveys to identify needs and issues
Collaboration	■ Home–school liaison when planning learning program and practical support ■ School welfare personnel assisting families with community or welfare agencies to identify and arrange outreach services ■ Parent and carer participation in school improvement planning and action ■ Parent and carer networks to support families with transport rosters, child-care, etc.

Promoting relevant, stimulating learning and opportunities for participation

STRATEGY 7 | *Planning relevant, stimulating and flexible learning options*

The aim of this strategy is to create learning options within school that cater for the diversity of young people.

Who is involved?

Professional learning teams, young people and, in some cases, community members.

Why is this important?

Quality pedagogy and teacher–student relationships are the most significant factors in improving academic and social outcomes (Russell 2002). A student's sense of engagement and enthusiasm increases when the activity is relevant, connects with their lives and is intellectually demanding (Lingard et al 2003). The emphasis on practical problem solving with real outcomes and engaging with the 'real world' is highly valued by students.

How does it work?

There are many examples of schools creating relevant, stimulating and flexible learning options for young people. There are different tools to assist in the development of these learning options, for example, the Victorian Middle Years Pedagogy Research and Development Project. These programs provide processes for reviewing and improving practices in Middle Years teaching and learning.

Relevance of learning

When planning a program of learning either by yourself or in partnership with your students or others, it is important to understand their world. There is a plethora of information and research out there regarding adolescent emotional, physical and intellectual development. To plan for this age group it is important to have a sound basis for your thinking and to observe your students in the classroom as teenagers in the world outside your classroom.

Occasionally immerse yourself in their world – reach for their magazines, their music, their films and videos. Talk with them about their lives. Once you have visited their world and brought back some artefacts, it's time to use them. If we truly see ourselves as teacher of children rather than subjects, we will find ways to teach them about life in everything that we do. Wherever it is possible to talk about and develop work around their world, regardless of the learning area, do it.

I think that we need to be consciously bringing small parts of both teacher and student worlds together to discuss, question, share, enjoy and validate. More and more teachers are constructing situations in which students are involved in making meaning and developing their own knowledge. This is the responsibility of all teachers. If we encourage students to be accountable for what and how they learn, in a meaningful way, then learning becomes more relevant to them.

(Lawlor 2001, p. 40)

> At one secondary college, a prominent focus was given to Year 7. During terms 2 and 3, students in each Year 7 class went through a process of creating new designs for four specified areas in the school playground and then transforming them into attractively landscaped areas. This activity, the School Landscaping Project, was reinforced by classroom activities on learning and thinking styles (Think Fest), group work, problem solving and rich learning tasks. Students also contributed to the school newspaper. The Key Learning Areas of English, SOSE, Mathematics and Science were integrated through timetabling and allowed teachers to work across areas in professional learning teams.
>
> (William Buckland Foundation/Education Foundation 2003)

STRATEGY 8   *Student action teams*

The aim of this strategy is to provide a student-centred and active educational approach to community-based learning and connection to schools.

Who is involved?

A group of students working together with teachers on school and community projects.

Why is it important?

Key challenges that face schools are enhancing student engagement in learning and reducing the risk of alienation and isolation. Student action teams address these challenges while increasing knowledge, skills, attitudes and connectedness to school.

How does it work?

The selection of activities to be pursued by each student action team can be decided by the team and will depend on the issues that arise in their school and local area. A 'how to' manual has been developed to help schools establish and maintain student action teams. Information about student action teams can be accessed at <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/mys/engagement/studentactionteams.htm>.

Student action teams are based on the following concepts:

> students can make serious and important decisions
> students can do important and valuable things – they have the skills, expertise and a knowledge of their community
> important action can be taken as part of student learning in school – community-focused research and action is an appropriate educational approach for schools.

Promoting a sense of capability, achievement and control

STRATEGY 9   *Collaborative small-group learning teams*

The aim of this strategy is to create opportunities for students and teachers to support each other in learning.

Who is involved?

Middle Years classes and professional learning teams.

Why is this important?

The reorganisation of classrooms into small groups of four students improves student learning, especially if this is accompanied by teaching approaches that are oriented towards group goals and collaborative teaching teams.

How does it work?

Students work in four-member heterogeneous learning teams. Students work in pairs or as a learning team to assist each other and work together in activities such as:

> finding out new information
> planning group presentations
> cooperative writing processes
> critical thinking
> problem setting and solutions
> partner reading
> making models and charts.

Teacher teams were formed and year level classes were divided between the teacher teams. It was hoped that 'kids would become more cooperative' and that it would 'make schools less alienating' and 'help kids feel like they belong'. The nature of staff working together changes as teachers developed a team approach to deciding how best to deal with the problems of student learning, behaviour and engagement. Year level coordinators, in particular, took on a more specific role to liaise with student support services and parents for particular young people in need of further support and more specialised care. This structure allowed for a more coordinated approach to caring and supporting students, and frequently action was taken before difficulties became major problems.

An integrated unit of work 'Inventions, innovations and discoveries' was implemented and engendered a tremendous sense of achievement and commitment from the students, parents and teachers, and the school community as a whole. The unit was structured to allow for students to display and demonstrate their work and achievements of their small group at an 'expo' in the city town hall. Students presented their team projects to an audience of over 1000 visitors, including parents, relatives, the general public and students from neighbouring primary schools. This provided a powerful illustration of meaningful engagement in learning and the students' presentations, oral, visual and demonstrations were creative and impressive.

(Glover et al 1999)

STRATEGY 10   *Academic assistance: tutoring or learning coaches*

The aim of this strategy is to provide academic support for young people.

Who is involved?

Teacher, student and, in some cases, a learning coach at school or from the community.

Why is it important?

Some young people need greater levels of support to help with their learning. One of the main reasons for young people leaving school is falling behind in their work, the frustration of failing in class and feeling that there is little point in trying. Young people who most need academic assistance are often those least likely to access such assistance.

How does it work?

Academic assistance can be provided by adults in the community who are trained volunteers to work with individual or small groups of young people to assist with their learning. The use of computer technology is highly valued by young people developing literacy skills.

Academic assistance works best when:

> it is designed to meet a valued goal
> it is delivered in a small group or individually
> it is designed to mesh with what young people are learning in class
> the class is arranged into small-group learning teams as outlined in the previous strategy.

Academic assistance is designed to meet a valued goal, rather than providing low-status, low-track remedial programs in which there is often little expectation that assistance will lead to high-level performance (Fashola & Slavin 1998, p. 179).

STRATEGY 11   *Academic assistance: cross-age tutoring*

The aim of this strategy is to provide opportunities for young people to improve academic and social competencies and to give them a sense of achievement by supporting them in positions of responsibility as tutors of younger school students.

Who is involved?

Year 7, 8 or 9 students and Prep, Year 1 or Year 2 students, and coordinating teachers across sites.

Why is this important?

In developing their tutoring skills, young people also develop their academic and social capabilities. Furthermore, students gain a sense that they are making a contribution to something important and making a difference.

How does it work?

> Young people are invited to take part in special tutoring classes that help them to improve their tutoring skills.

> The tutors work with one or two Early Years students in a local primary school, with support from a secondary school teacher (or learning coach) for about four hours in total per week for one term.

> The students must have supervision and be provided with support when required.

> Events are held to recognise the role of the student-as-tutor and the achievements of the program.

> These events provide a further opportunity to engage with families.

STRATEGY 12	*Reviewing homework and assessment policies and practices*

The aim of this strategy is to review how homework and assessment policies and practices might further disadvantage those young people who are juggling issues at home and experiencing difficulty with learning.

Who is involved?

School leadership team.

Why is this important?

Young people who become disconnected from school report falling behind in school work as a significant factor. Young people experiencing difficulties with aspects of learning often find it hard to complete work in class and domestic circumstances can mean that they have difficulty working at home. An over-reliance on completion of written work at home, as a demonstration of learning, further exacerbates the problem.

How does it work?

The questions following can be used by a team in the school to review homework and assessment practices and policies and assess how these might lower a sense of achievement and result in failure for young people.

> To what extent is there a reliance on the completion of projects at home to assess student achievement?

> Does homework mostly depend on written completion or is there homework that is about observations, students' interests and everyday experiences which students can bring to the class?

> How do assessment practices reflect the diversity of learning styles?
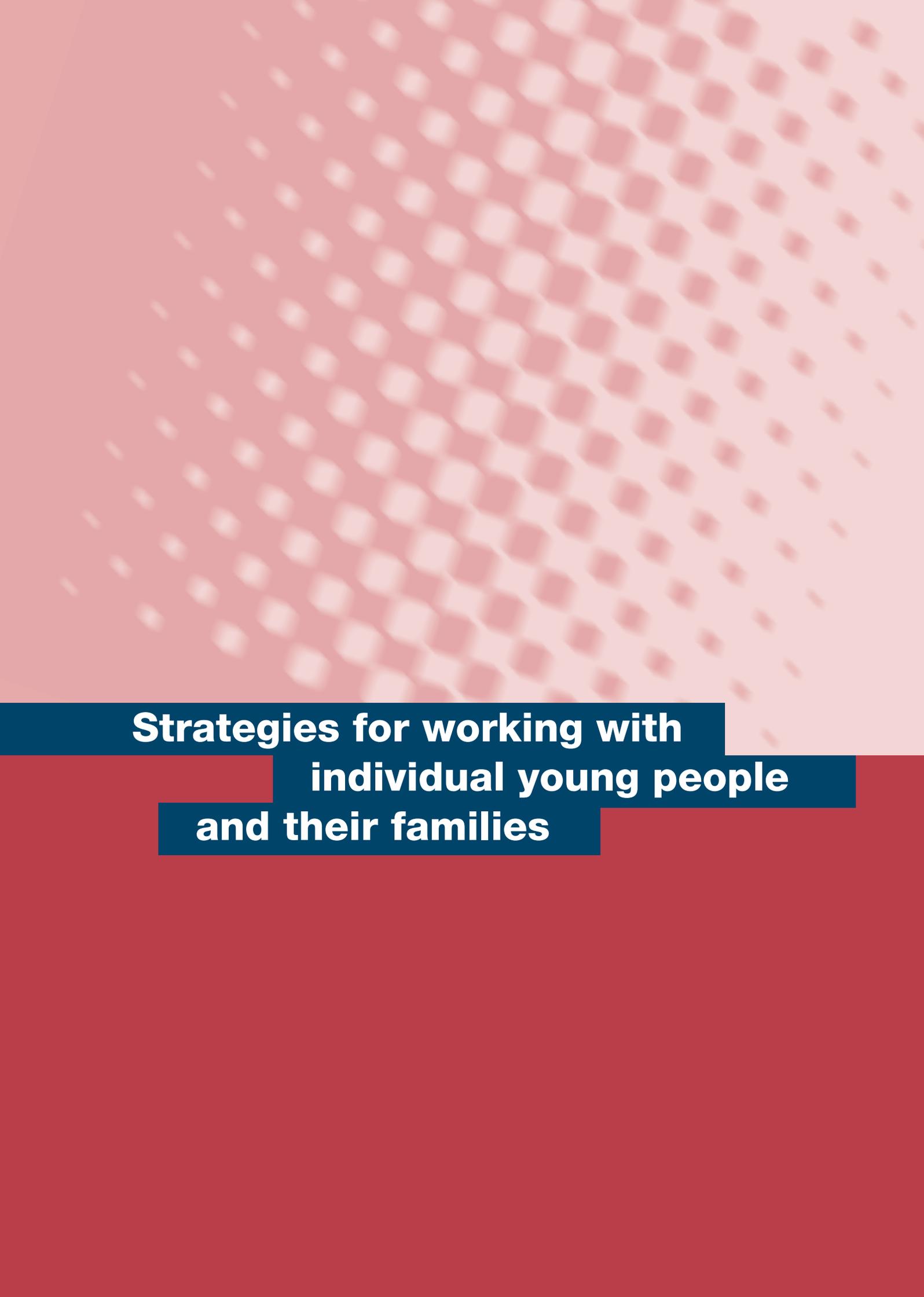
Strategies for working with individual young people and their families

This section focuses on strategies that can be used when working with individual young people and their families. Schools will play a leadership role in these strategies and they can be used in partnership with other education providers and agencies.

Teachers know when a student is at risk of disengaging from school. The signs are varied and do not always predict a negative outcome but could include, for example, falling behind in work, missing class, being late for lessons, harassing other students, withdrawing from activities, appearing alone, showing disruptive or violent behaviour, or being distracted, upset or angry at school.

The strategies are designed as processes for change (see Figure 5) to enable teams in schools and communities to reflect on, review and strengthen practices for working with individual young people and their families.

Figure 5 *Process for change: working with individual young people and their families*

The evidence

The evidence from literature and practice emphasises that early intervention is vital. School policies need to be clear about what to do when a teacher is concerned about a particular student.

The evidence highlights the importance of:

> building on the strengths and past achievements of young people
> ensuring that learning occurs in conjunction with health and wellbeing support
> involving young people in their own assessment and development of a learning plan
> having key adults in a support network, including a learning coach, tutor and/or mentor
> strengthening school relationships.

Assessing the current situation

STRATEGY 1 | *First steps: connecting with key adults*

The first step is for someone who already has a good relationship with the student to have a conversation with him or her (and family if possible) about how things are going. It is important that this conversation occurs in a non-judgemental manner.

> I want someone to genuinely listen and take me seriously … someone who understands and is there to help (Young person).

Some young people need a greater level of support and intervention than others. Effective intervention can only occur if the student's needs are understood.

A procedure to assist young people struggling to stay connected to school

Answering the following questions can help to build a picture of the student in question.

> Which teacher or adult in the school has a good relationship with the student and could have this conversation?
> What's happening in the student's life that might be affecting attendance and/or engagement and achievement at school?
> What are the student's learning needs?
> How effectively is the student able to engage with the class program?
> What strategies have already been tried or what is already in place to support the student?
> What additional strategies are needed to support the student and family at this time?
> How can these strategies be activated?
> How will they be monitored and when will they be reviewed?

Step 1 The staff member who is concerned informs the student wellbeing nominee, for example, the student welfare coordinator, pastoral care teacher, or year level coordinator. The questions in Tool 2 (see page 68) can be used to establish the next step.

Step 2 The student wellbeing nominee talks with the student in order to begin the process of understanding their learning needs and health and wellbeing issues.

If the matter is not resolved:

Step 3 The student wellbeing nominee and the student agree that there needs to be a planning meeting and that the student can invite others including parents, favourite teacher, advocate or friend.

If the matter is not resolved:

Step 4 The student wellbeing nominee and support teacher negotiates with the student and family (if appropriate) for more intensive support.

(Adapted from beyondblue schools research initiative 2004)

Friends/peers	School/learning
Family/living situation	Self/wellbeing

Learning options

Learning plan and health and wellbeing plan

**Supportive network/group
Partnering – family, young people,
school, agencies**

Protocols between schools and other education providers and agencies

Practical support – transport, tutor/coach, home–school liaison, family support

Duty of care, communication, roles and responsibility

Figure 6 *Individual profile: learning, health and wellbeing issues*

STRATEGY 2 | *Developing an individual profile of learning needs, health and wellbeing*

The aim of this strategy is to build up, over time, a picture with the student of their strengths, likes and dislikes, what is going well and not so well at home, school and with friends, and the state of their health and wellbeing. It should be done in conjunction with Strategy 4: Identifying a student–family support network.

Who is involved?

The Resilience Framework (see Tool 2, page 68) presented in this strategy is designed to be used by staff qualified in student welfare and the secondary school nurse.

Why is this important?

Assessing a student in this way provides an opportunity to build up a picture of their life and use this information in partnership with the student, their family and others in the support network to design an individual learning and support plan.

If negative factors outweigh positive factors in three or four of the 'worlds' – school, home, peer and inner worlds – the student is going to struggle to stay connected to school and will need intensive support. The positive side is that if there are protective factors or strengths in two or more worlds, they may compensate overall for other difficulties.

How does it work?

The questions and guidelines for the Resilience Framework are flexible and the conversation should be as natural and authentic as possible. It is **not** a 'tick the box' assessment, nor is it a diagnostic tool. The focus is on active listening and understanding what is going on in a student's life at school and home, with their peers, and with their own health and wellbeing.

Important school policy considerations when using this tool include:

> privacy
> confidentiality
> management of information between organisations
> referral procedures
> appropriate support.
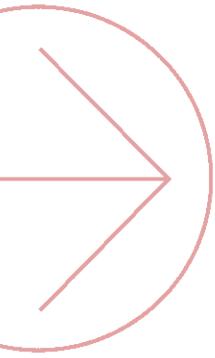
STRATEGY 3 | *Assessing learning needs, styles and interests*

The aim of this strategy is to discuss with young people what they perceive their strengths to be in different facets of learning, how they like to learn and what they are interested in learning.

Who is involved?

A teacher who has a good relationship with the student. Young people are often more likely to have these conversations when they are doing other activities, for example, working in the art room or workshop or after sports, rather than sitting down in a face-to-face interview.

Why is this important?

Assessing a student in this context provides an opportunity to discover their strengths and use this information in partnership with the student, their family and others in the support network to design the individual learning and support plan.

It is important to think about the kind of skills and competencies that are going to enable young people to 'get on' rather than just 'get by'.

How does it work?

Formal testing is likely to be a barrier at this early stage and could further exacerbate feeling under pressure and a negative experience of school. It is better to focus on building relationships with teachers and understanding learning needs, interests and styles through conversation rather than trying to measure learning deficits in what would be a very uncomfortable 'test environment'. Tool 3 (see page 71) is designed to assist in these conversations.

Supporting individual young people

STRATEGY 4	*Identifying a student–family support network*

The aim of this strategy is to create a network of key adults to create opportunities for a student and support their academic and social development.

Who is involved?

Implementing Strategy 2 and Strategy 3 will have resulted in two people (a welfare team member and a teacher) having conversations with the student and their family. There could also be a relationship with other workers in the community. Depending on the needs identified in both of these processes, and the existing relationships, it might be a good idea to invite key players to be part of a support network who can meet regularly to review progress.

Why is this important?

Partnering as a way of providing social and academic supports for young people is crucial, and ensures that students are embedded in a supportive network of individuals. There are people with all sorts of expertise in the school community – how can they be brought together to support learning and wellbeing for young people? Teachers play a particularly important role in this network because they can bring about changes within the classroom and school that will make a difference for individual young people.

Supportive communication helps young people and their families develop a sense of control over stressful circumstances because they:

> see learning options
> gain skills and competencies
> recognise that help is available
> know that they are moving ahead.

> Especially if they are having problems, young people feel better about themselves when they are learning (Teacher).
>
> Work with these kids in proactive ways. Setting higher expectations than has been accepted before. Not case management – but youth and community development (Community worker).

How does it work?

Once a support network is established, the profile of individual learning needs, styles and interests is completed, and conversations about health and wellbeing issues are underway, members of the support network in partnership with young people and their families can begin to create a learning plan with appropriate support mechanisms.

Figure 6 shows the steps in the support network process:

> - use the individual profile to establish priorities
> - map this against learning options available in the community
> - design the learning and support plan with the student and family.

STRATEGY 5 | *Individual learning plans*

The aim of this strategy is to develop an individual learning plan that addresses particular educational needs of a student in or out of school.

Who is involved?

The school's role is to facilitate and support student engagement with the process.

Roles are critical to this partnership. If left entirely to the student welfare coordinator, for example, the plan is likely to have a welfare emphasis. Plans also need to have a strong learning focus to create future opportunities for young people.

Evidence from the communities and from the literature points towards the importance of learning coaches in supporting a learning plan. Learning coaches could fulfil a number of roles such as mentor, facilitator or teacher. Such people could be non-teaching staff and potentially act outside school times or boundaries. Older and respected members of the family or community could be supported and validated in this role.

Why is this important?

A learning plan developed in partnership with individual young people and their families allows for:

> - tailoring strategies to fit an individual's social, emotional, learning, behavioural, support and family needs
> - co-construction of the plan which helps to create a sense of control and capability
> - students to tell and record their learning

> a portfolio of achievements and successes in different learning environments which offers an opportunity for students to plan and contribute to decisions that affect them as learners
> informal and ongoing feedback on learning that supports progress and achievements
> further development of existing strategies such as Individual Education Improvement Plans and Home–School Support Groups for Early Year Literacy and Numeracy, and Managed Individual Pathway plans
> provision of learning as a combination of school education, work education placements or inclusion in adult community education or community/work settings.

How does it work?

The learning plan is a document similar to a resumé. The processes are outlined in the following sections.

It is of enormous importance that the staff and community workers who come together to support such plans have agreed working protocols and a good understanding of roles, responsibilities, expectations and lines of communication. Professional learning between and with teaching staff, including teacher exchanges, can be of enormous benefit in breaking down barriers and in developing effective relationships.

STRATEGY 6 *Learning portfolios*

The aim of this strategy is to acknowledge and celebrate student achievement.

Who is involved?

Student, teachers, learning coach/mentor, and parents or carers.

Why is this important?

Portfolios give parents a clearer understanding of what young people have achieved and how they have achieved it. Parents and carers have a greater insight into how to talk with the children about learning and are also developing a clearer understanding of what teachers are working towards in a holistic sense. It is a clear step in developing a learning community that extends beyond the school gates.

How does it work?

Portfolios include published pieces and drafts, and other examples of student achievements over a semester. Each student is allocated a time and their parents or carers are invited to witness their child demonstrating what it is that they have learned at a round table. The logistics of organising such an event are a challenge but the learning that flows far outweighs the difficulties.

(Adapted from Lawlor 2001)
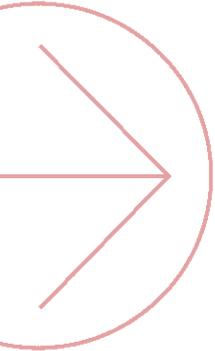
STRATEGY 7 | *Home–school liaison*

The aim of this strategy is to strengthen and, in some cases, rebuild the relationships between families and schools and to support families.

Who is involved?

A home–school liaison person, a small number of young people and their families, and teachers at school.

Why is this important?

Some parents of young people who have poor patterns of attendance at school have quite negative experiences of school themselves. Families find themselves struggling to meet school expectations and being in conflict with their children over school matters. This strategy strengthens the relationship between home and school and supports parents to work towards keeping young people connected to school.

How does this work?

To develop collaborative home–school partnerships, time is needed for parents and teachers or a school liaison person to develop mutual trust and work together.

> Fundamentally, parents want what we all want for our kids, the best (Principal).

Guiding principles for engaging families:

> keep the focus on success and improvements in the student's learning in school
> listen
> be non-judgemental
> recognise the expertise that parents have
> work towards seeing the family's perspective and encourage them to become engaged in the decision making
> offer practical help, for example, transport, links to other services
> be sensitive to and show respect for the cultural backgrounds and difficulties experienced by young people and their families.

CASE STUDY · Home–school liaison

The facilitator had a case load of around 6–10 students (just over half were boys) and worked with families, children and schools. She assisted with parenting skills and helped to shift perceptions about who was in control and relationships with schools.

'I would ring parents and meet the family together. Try to work out what is going on then take the child out. We would go ten-pin bowling, mini-golf and usually end up at McDonald's. I try to have fun with them, gain their trust. They will open up. They know I am working for them. I let them know that I was not forcing them to go back to school.

Then I'd go back to the family and have a conference – the child knows I am working with them, their families and the schools.

The role entailed a lot of advocacy. The schools were frightening for parents who would support their kids under any circumstances. They saw themselves as the victims.

There was a great deal of relationship building between schools and families. Parents feared they were to be attacked. There is often a cycle of negativity – parents had negative school experiences when they were students. The program had some good outcomes. One student completed Year 7 and 8. Some of the other kids are going to make it.'

(Second Chance Program, North Geelong Network)

Strategies for strengthening partnerships between schools, other education providers and agencies

Many of the successful learning programs provided alongside school programs are designed for young people in Years 9 and 10. The options for younger students are less developed and fewer in number, which often translates into young people spending lengthy time out of school, high transience between schools or short-term attendance in community programs. Ideally, young people are connected to learning programs before they lose contact with school. Once students disconnect from school, efforts to reintegrate are difficult and very time-consuming. Furthermore, if left until this stage, relationships can be so damaged that young people and their families may want no further contact with the school.

The need for planning school–community partnerships for this younger age group is clearly evident. Taking a school–community perspective broadens the possible responses by drawing on collective resources and expertise. This section provides strategies to support the planning process and partnership arrangements.

An underpinning principle of good practice is to build the partnerships before young people become disconnected. Learning options that are offered outside or alongside the school must be considered as real learning options for young people, not as 'alternatives' or 'add-ons' or 'less than'.

The strategies in this section are designed as processes for change (see Figure 7) to strengthen partnerships between schools, other education providers and agencies.

Figure 7 *Process for change: strengthening partnerships between schools, other education providers and agencies*

The evidence

The evidence from literature and practice highlights the importance of:

> early targeted and well-supported learning programs that provide for a combination of learning options in and out of school

> engaging young people in real projects that matter to them, which tap their inherent drive to learn, ability to do important work, and the need to be taken seriously

> strong connections between these learning programs and other individual support requirements, for example, youth worker, social worker, health professional

> the school of origin remaining a central source of support and facilitating student learning in partnership with young people, their families and other education providers and agencies, and guided by individual learning plans

> avoiding program stigmatisation by ensuring that programs are integral to the curriculum offerings as a whole, and are not an 'add-on' or 'less than' option

> a clear set of protocols to make explicit the roles, responsibilities, expectations and lines of communication

> using an evidence-based approach for program planning and review.

In keeping with 'Principles of good practice in supporting innovation and change' (see page 6), it is more beneficial to have fewer well-coordinated, integrated and planned programs with a set of specific goals linking several schools and agencies, than too many fragmented programs that stretch existing resources.

Program planning

| STRATEGY 1 | *Shared planning of learning programs and/or review of existing programs* |

The aim of this strategy is to use an evidence-based approach to plan and/or review programs offered to young people.

Who is involved?

Teachers from schools, other education providers and community agencies.

Why is this important?

Many of the programs in adult community education and school settings that are successful in keeping young people connected to learning have a set of common key features built into the design and delivery of the program.

> Individual programs need some but not all of these features.

> Programs with more features are likely to provide better supports for young people.

> By mapping these features it can be seen how:
  • different programs contribute to different outcomes
  • different organisations can combine to use each other's expertise and resources and extend the opportunities available to young people.

How does this work?

This strategy provides a checklist (see Tool 4, page 72) that can be used as a tool for reviewing strengths, weaknesses and opportunities within existing programs or when planning new ones.

The following case studies illustrate ways in which schools and other education providers have been able to offer a more collaborative approach to support the learning needs (environment and pedagogy) of young people.

CASE STUDY   Literacy and numeracy programs

Young people from the school attend the community house for two half days per week during school hours. They undertake a flexible program to gain literacy and numeracy skills. The lessons are run in groups of up to ten students. Young people are referred to the program if they have poor academic achievement or significant behaviour problems.

The lessons are run by a qualified secondary teacher who keeps in contact with the teachers at the school. The school informs the community house of the broad content of the school work for the week ahead and the young people are supported to get a head start. Teachers from the school are encouraged to attend and do so on a rotational basis.

The program aims to create a home-like atmosphere. It's not structured as school and students are given more freedom. They are allowed to have drinks and food whenever they want them. They are treated like adults. The outcomes are very promising and include high attendance rates. All students have gone on to senior college, apprenticeships or employment. None have dropped out of school and relationships with school have improved.

Key steps included:

- having a named contact at school and at the community program
- supporting students who are at risk of leaving school early to attend the community program
- setting ground rules in partnership with the young people at the community program
- tailoring community program learning to meet the needs and interests of the students and keep them connected to learning at school
- acknowledging achievements through certificates and celebrations.

Critical success factors included:

- initiating the program and creating a partnership
- creating good links with the teachers
- ensuring a secondary school trained teacher running the community program
- treating the young people like adults
- keeping the groups small
- using individualised learning approaches.

Challenges

The emotional and social needs of young people. This highlights the potential for further expansion of the program in partnership with health professionals.

CASE STUDY — Participating in the community

The Focus Centre aims to successfully reintegrate young people (Years 4–9) who are at risk of disconnecting from school. The program has the capacity to work with 20 young people. The idea for the centre came from the schools in Bendigo. A group of school principals were concerned that young people who were disconnected from school and the community had nowhere to go. After a public meeting and a few years work with The Smith Family, the Focus Centre came into being in March 2003. There are two 0.6 EFT positions at the Focus Centre and these workers are employed through Eaglehawk Secondary College with funding from the Innovations and Excellence Program.

The Focus Centre works with the idea of a three-fold curriculum based on the principles of the Autonomous Learner model. The curriculum encompasses learning in terms of relationships, community, and academic curriculum. An individual education plan is developed for each student and involves the family. This is reviewed fortnightly, and the student continues to spend time at the school that they are enrolled in.

In this program, young people learn through finding their 'passion' and this interest is used to inform the education program. There is a strong emphasis on participation in community and working with their school and broader community on various projects. The skills and projects the young people work on will be taken into primary schools as part of enrichment programs. The development of strong and supportive adult relationships is a key element of the program, and access to social workers and counsellors is available if required.

CASE STUDY — Linking to work – building course, Eaglehawk Secondary College

A building construction course is provided for 20 students in Years 9 and 10. This class includes those at risk of leaving school, but also those with a passion for building. A normal school timetable is used and includes 12 periods with a registered builder. Other subjects are made relevant to the building world. Students study building maths, building literacy, computer and manual drafting, design, and small business management.

The approach is practical, relevant to student interests and involves an experienced tradesperson. The fact that it is available to all students reduces the risk of marginalising some students.

CASE STUDY   **Adopt-A-Class – Beacon Foundation, Brooks High School**

In the Adopt-A-Class Program a business 'adopts' a class. The teacher and students of the class develop a relationship with the business thus enabling the students to become immersed in the world of work. The specific program is negotiated between the teacher and the business person and may encompass a variety of activities such as whole class, small groups or individuals visiting the business, as well as reciprocal visits from the business person. The program was declared a 'first of its kind' when it was introduced to Brooks High School in Year 8 in 1998 using a grant from AusIndustry. Adopt-A-Class is now fully integrated into the curriculum in Years 8 and 9 and is funded from school resources.

Students gain insights into the working of the business and learn about employer expectations. This has particular validity in a community where there is a significant rate of second generation unemployment and young people have not experienced 'work talk' in their homes. It is a learning situation for the teacher also, and an opportunity to bring the curriculum alive using the business as a resource.

STRATEGY 2   *Developing protocols to support partnerships*

The aim of this strategy is to create protocols between schools and other education providers.

Who is involved?

Schools and other education providers and agencies.

Why is this important?

Agreements and protocols between organisations are needed to make explicit some of the shared understandings and practices used to support the learning and duty of care of young people. The process of developing protocols is important as it generates the necessary dialogue between partners to ensure that there is agreement and understanding of the key issues.

How does it work?

Established protocols identify:

> what is available
> when it is available
> what it will achieve
> where it might lead
> what one has to do to access that option
> who to contact
> who will be responsible for the student
> duty of care
> resource allocation
> how it connects to school.

The following case study provides some guidelines for the development of protocols between schools and other education providers.

CASE STUDY Creating protocols

For a number of years, several organisations have been working together to keep young people connected to education. This community was concerned that young people under 15 were attending adult community education but were not returning to school. Once students were involved with adult community education many schools were not keeping track. Young people did not fit specific programs and went missing within the system. If they returned, they might not find their place within the school.

Aims and objectives

Agreed protocol between schools and other education providers (in this example the Adult and Community Education Board).

Main questions

- At what point should a young person attend an ACE program?
- How does the school engage with adult community education?
- What is the school's responsibility when a young person attends an ACE program?
- How do they return to school?

Outcomes

- Protocol and shared understandings.

Key steps

- Invitations were sent by DE&T's regional offices to all secondary schools to participate in a forum.
- A half-day meeting was held between all schools in the district – principals, assistant principals and student welfare coordinators attended (at least two from each school) to identify schools' needs and to engage in a more systematic approach. If schools had not been involved in planning, then it would be unlikely that any of the strategies would be used.
- The following points were discussed at the forum:
  - the information a school would need from local ACE organisations, young people and/or parents
  - processes adopted by different schools
  - information collected by different schools, for example, guides for young people with disabilities
  - the possibility of a shared process for code of conduct that is worked through with young people
  - the implications for privacy
  - how to engage young people in clarifying rules and responsibilities
  - components to be developed – code of conduct; referral form; under 15 checklist; individual learning program plan; learning review form; agreement form for schools and ACE organisations
  - what steps to take and who has responsibility for what.

- A draft was circulated to all schools and a working group established to provide feedback.
- The community launched the protocols showcasing the successes of young people.
- Further forums were planned through the network to ensure shared beliefs and understanding.
- The processes are monitored through the working group.
- ACE organisations listed the programs that they can deliver in schools.
- A mixture of electives was offered to all younger students, not just those identified at risk.
- The forum identified priorities for local action and agreed upon the next steps and responsibilities.
- Working groups were established.
- Draft protocols were developed building on existing materials from Managed Individual Pathways, the Youth Pathways program, and the Department of Human Services (DHS)/DE&T partnership agreement.

Critical success factors

- Schools need to recognise and value other legitimate learning environments, for example, adult community education.
- All agencies need to understand schools and how hard the staff work, often while facing many different needs.
- A small working group comprising membership of each organisation is needed to manage the processes of planning, delivery and monitoring.
- The regional DE&T representative needs to issue invitations to the schools, and be an active participant in the process.
- The cluster of schools should be involved from the outset.
- School leaders – principals, assistant principals, sub-school coordinators, year level coordinators – are likely to be the most proactive.
- Communication within the school needs to be systemised so that practices, structures and beliefs can be shared. Year level coordinators are important in this dynamic.
- There needs to be a shared belief that schools should do everything in their power to keep young people connected to their school.
- Adults should provide linking and bridging roles between schools, education providers and agencies.

| STRATEGY 3 | *Establishing, developing and maintaining productive partnerships* |

The aim of this strategy is to help organisations reflect on the partnerships they have established and monitor their effectiveness.

Who is involved?

Schools, education providers and community agencies.

Why is it important?

Partnerships bring together a diversity of skills and resources to provide innovative and flexible learning environments and to strengthen the quality of support to young people and their families, especially during times of difficulty.

How does it work?

If partnerships are to be successful, they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of the partners, and be carefully planned and monitored (McLeod 2003). The Partnership Analysis Tool developed by VicHealth is a tool for organisations entering or working in a partnership to assess, monitor and maximise the partnership's effectiveness. It is available from VicHealth at <www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>. The tool is designed to provide a focus for discussion between agencies and comprises three activities:

> how to assess the purpose of the partnership
> how to develop a map of the partnership
> provide feedback using a checklist.

Strategies for strengthening community networks

There are some exciting networks in communities that have been working together for many years and have been concerned with young people at risk of leaving school early. These networks are cross-sectoral and are an important vehicle for bringing together a diversity of skills and resources for a more integrated approach to planning, allocating resources and delivering programs for young people at the local level.

This section provides strategies for community networks to assist in the review and provision of learning options in the community for young people under 15 years of age, and for strengthening connections between learning and health and welfare.

The strategies are designed as processes for change (see Figure 8) to strengthen community networks.
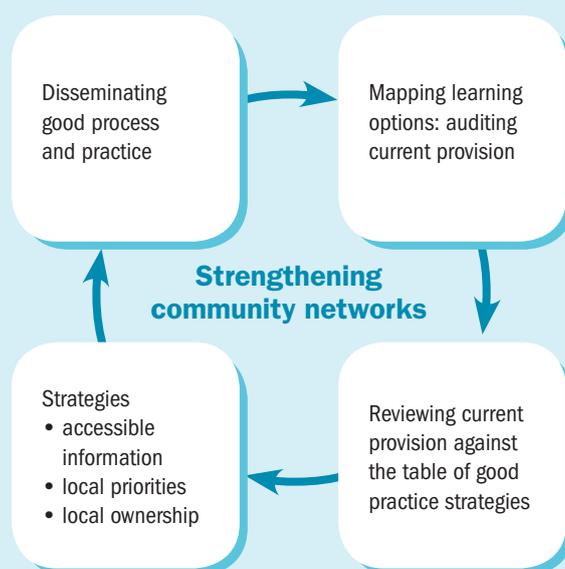
Figure 8   *Process for change: strengthening community networks*

The evidence

The value of the local community network is that it provides a bigger and better picture of young people's needs in the community, the extent of the problems and opportunities, and enables communities to map the territory together. Local community groups need to ask questions such as those listed below.

> What are the networks that already exist in this community?
> Are there networks concerned with young people under 15?
> To what extent is membership overlapping?
> What are the goals of these networks?
> How are the networks linked?
> Are there any existing partnerships conducting research and evaluation?
> How could school retention initiatives build on these?

I've discovered that people will attend meetings once a month and it will not make one bit of difference to the way they do business. You've got to work at networks, it's not enough just to know each other, you've got to know the experience of others and you've got to have a common task (Community member).

Networks that have generated meaningful engagement and participation have:

> drawn together people from different sectors who wish to stimulate local activity
> developed a clear sense of purpose and shared goals
> developed a history of working together on practical solutions
> brought together school leadership teams with other agencies spanning employment, business, local government, health, welfare, crime prevention and education
> ensured tangible benefits for the members.

The Barwon Adolescent Task Force (BATForce) is an example of a community network. Its aim is to enable and support workers within the network to collaborate in policy and planning, and in the provision of a comprehensive range of services and programs to meet the diverse needs of young people in the Barwon region. Detailed information about this network, its history, objectives, organisational structure, funding, key initiatives and membership can be found at <http://www.batforce.org.au>.

| STRATEGY 1 | *Creating a clear purpose: a shared agenda* |

The aim of this strategy is to assist the network to develop a shared agenda for action.

Who is involved?

Network members.

Why is this important?

If partnerships are to be successful, they must have a clear purpose, add value to the work of partners and be carefully planned (Moodie in McLeod, 2003). Mismatched expectations cause frustration. So, it is important to analyse and name what it is that people are aiming to do or explore together. Confusion about desired outcomes can result from a lack of clarity in agenda. Different ways of seeing the problem result in different approaches to solutions. The importance of a shared framework for action allows for a diversity of activities, yet at the same time creates a common purpose and a sense that people are working towards common goals.

How does it work?

A network is in a strong position to:

> map existing learning options and create a directory of programs and resources
> increase the range of opportunities for engaging young people in learning, using the resources of different schools/settings for more specialised learning
> create shared project-based learning across sites which have real outcomes for young people and the community
> articulate why certain programs are chosen and what they are designed to achieve
> specify learning goals and how these programs build opportunities for essential and authentic learning – these must be clear to teachers, young people and families, and other community members who are engaged with the projects
> forward plan the timing of activities so that teachers and young people know what options are available and when
> connect learning programs with health and welfare agencies to provide timely and responsive support to young people and their families
> avoid program stigmatisation by ensuring that programs are integral to the curriculum offerings as a whole, that is, part of the timetable and not an 'add-on' or 'less than' option
> create community opportunities for young people to share their learning with others through, for example, presentations, celebrations, forums and multimedia documentation.

CASE STUDY **Outcomes for young people**

The goal is to keep young people connected to school.

The objectives are to:

- provide innovative and flexible learning environments through expanding options in education for young people under 15 years
- increase young people's participation, engagement and achievement
- strengthen the quality of support to young people and their families, especially during periods of transition and times of difficulty
- promote a culture of partnerships between schools and other education providers and agencies in the provision of education and services to young people under 15 years
- create supportive environments in which all can thrive and learn
- enhance the positive mental, social and emotional wellbeing of all who work and learn in schools.

To enable young people to experience a sense of:

- contribution and citizenship
- competence, confidence and a sense of control
- connectedness.

STRATEGY 2 *Mapping learning options: auditing current provision*

This strategy aims to identify learning options available to young people in the community.

Who is involved?

Network members.

Why is this important?

There are no 'one size fits all' programs that will cater for the diversity of young people in our communities. Local mapping and planning that capitalises on local resources and interests (people and places) is an essential part of good practice.

Experience from this research suggests that learning options outside school are limited for young people under 15, however there appears to be a groundswell of community and government sector interest in the provision of programs for early school leavers. Ideally, young people are connected to alternative programs before they lose contact with their school. People in the pilot communities reported that once students had disconnected from school, efforts to reintegrate became difficult and time-consuming. If left until this stage, relationships can be so damaged that young people may want no further contact with the school.

How does this work?

Individual organisations complete the mapping learning options sheet.

The following information is collated and shared with the network:

> what is available and for whom
> what it will achieve
> when it is available
> where it might lead
> what has to be done to access the option
> what the links are with health and welfare services
> who the contact is.

In keeping with 'Principles of good practice in supporting innovation and change' (see page 6), it is more beneficial to have fewer well-coordinated, integrated and planned programs with a clear set of well-specified goals linking several schools and agencies, than too many fragmented programs that address problems in isolation and stretch existing resources.

In this way, the network can share and combine resources to ensure innovative and flexible learning options and quality support to young people and families.

Accessible information

This information can be collated, publicised and distributed to all agencies working with young people and families. It may be necessary for schools and education providers to review and revise the range of programs available to young people. BATForce offers a website where this information is shared <http://www.batforce.org.au>.
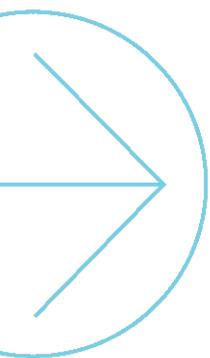
STRATEGY 3 *Sharing good practice*

The aim of this strategy is to facilitate the dissemination of good process and good practice.

Who is involved?

Network members.

Why is it important?

Networks have a key role to play in supporting innovation and development. Sharing practice is a crucial step in building relationships, awareness of what each other are doing and disseminating the 'how to'. This is hard work, but when done well it multiplies people's efforts. Community networks:

> build relationships between local practitioners and organisations
> build relationships with local young people
> provide awareness of local issues from different perspectives
> create links with local resources – concerned people, social capital, volunteer hours, business support in cash or kind
> offer real examples of what works and what does not work.

How does it work?

The case study following contains a good example of a sharing process used in a network in its early stages of development. Good record-keeping is important. When roles and faces change, it is vital that people are able to access information about what is happening and what has gone before.

CASE STUDY   A sharing and dissemination process

One community developed an active network focusing on keeping young people connected to education. They meet monthly and new faces appear at every meeting. The community worker and network coordinator describe the aim as 'nurture the network, then other things will follow'.

This has entailed:

- regular gatherings
- a focus on hearing what the different organisations are doing ('five minutes of fame') and what people are learning along the way
- keeping the discussion of issues to a minimum – 'people will tend to get bogged down on issues'
- keeping the focus on sharing information.

Outcomes:

- awareness of what others are doing in the community
- common issues becoming clear through people's stories of their experiences – when there are people from ten different organisations in a room listening to the same story there are layers of responses
- as people connect with an idea, they start asking each other for help
- when people hear about what others are doing and needing, they offer practical resources and solutions
- people are picking up a good idea modelled in one place and trialing it in another, with support
- the minutes of the meeting become a scrapbook of what is happening.

Key steps:

- set the agenda for the gathering in advance and line up several people for the 'five minutes of fame' timeslot
- change locations and hosts for each meeting – this draws others into the network and gives everyone a chance to 'tour' what everyone else is doing
- keep people in the loop with informative minutes.

Critical success factors

- Have a big picture, a common language and shared purpose and goals.
- Build on what is already in place.
- Recognise that good network process takes energy and time from a facilitator.
- Have an open exchange of beliefs and understandings about young people.
- Recognise that it is a slow generative process, that is, 'two steps forward, one step back'.

▷

- Have a clear purpose and focus for meetings.
- Focus on solutions, not on problems and finger-pointing.
- Call on DE&T regional offices, and in some cases local councils, for energy and support.

Top tips
- Set the climate so that people feel welcome.
- Establish a non-judgemental atmosphere.
- Prepare well in advance and structure meetings carefully.
- Keep agendas, meetings and minutes to a strict format and time.
- Drop off the minutes and make personal contact – a good way to link with others.
- Focus on what is achievable, that is, have realistic tasks and timeframes.

Barriers
- 'Meeting-itis'.
- Lack of ownership of the innovation by schools or other agencies.
- Lack of representation or acceptance of responsibility by schools or agencies.
- Difficulties with short-term funding.
- Lack of time for evaluation so people can't see achievements.
- If money is located in one organisation, people expect that organisation to do the work. Should be community-driven and led.

STRATEGY 4 | *Assessing priorities: a shared response*

The aim of this strategy is for the community network to assess priorities and share resources at a network level.

Who is involved?
Network members.

Why is this important?
Through the network, individuals and organisations have access to resources and expertise that they might not otherwise access. There can be a pooling of resources to overcome barriers that individual organisations might experience.

Examples include:
> having access to community mentors or volunteers
> sharing transport
> creating business links.

In working together to assess priorities, new solutions are generated. The essence of successful practice is local ownership and addressing priorities of local importance. The most disempowering experience groups can have is tackling a big problem and seeing no results. It is best to focus upon something that is already happening, or the missing pieces of the puzzle in projects that are already in place, and to add value by choosing focused projects that people are passionate about and where it is possible to get results.

How does it work?

At a network meeting, members review good practice strategies already implemented. From this, the network can identify key issues and areas to address. There are many different possible starting points. Not all networks will or should move to collaboration; in some cases networking will be the most appropriate response. The nature of the partnerships will vary according to need and purpose (McLeod 2003).

> Networking involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This requires trust between partners. For example, youth services within a local government area may meet monthly to provide an update on their work and discuss issues that affect young people.
>
> Coordinating involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose. For example, the youth services may meet and plan a coordinated campaign to lobby the council for more youth-specific services.
>
> Cooperating involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, a high level of trust between partners and sharing the turf between agencies.
>
> In addition to other activities described, collaboration includes enhancing the capacity of the other partner for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Collaborating requires the partner to give up a part of their turf to another agency to create a better or more seamless service system.
>
> (Adapted from McLeod 2003, following Himmelman 2001)

One of the difficulties with community networks is that the responsibility for following up on tasks lies with people who are already fully committed or over-stretched with commitments to their own organisation.

Successful networks have:

> short-term working parties
> a community facilitator.

Community processes take time. Inevitably, with pilot projects, just as things get moving the project is complete. The ongoing support of networks becomes an issue for communities. New kinds of inter-agency support or facilitator roles are needed to enable innovative work in school–community initiatives.

A community facilitator acts as a human bridge, linking people from different sectors, ensuring communication and information flows, and providing administrative support for the network. The community facilitators bring energy and commitment and local knowledge into the network.

A facilitator provides:

> a visible point for action and space for initiating, coordinating and following through with processes of mapping, planning and monitoring
> enormous efficiency since the facilitator's energy becomes a source of links between other people who then continue to do things together
> nurturing and 'managing' the network.

CASE STUDY

Different starting points – different processes; common purpose – common outcome

Each of the three communities involved in the School Retention Initiative pilot chose different starting points. Each community chose to focus upon the things that were already happening, or the missing pieces of the puzzle in projects that they were already doing, and to add value by choosing focused, achievable projects.

In each of the communities, schools used multiple strategies to tackle the ongoing issues of keeping young people connected to learning within schools.

Community A worked at a whole-of-community level to strengthen the network for working with this younger age group. In a geographically spread-out district, resource sharing and networking were the most significant issues faced by schools and agencies working with young people. The network held an open forum once a month to get to know and understand what everyone was doing and to share ideas. New people from different agencies came to every meeting. People used this space to link up and share resources and program plans.

Community B worked at the level of building school–agency partnerships. They used their existing network to strengthen links with schools to build a set of protocols between the schools and ACE programs. They piloted a set of protocols that were developed by the partnership and created an information pack for community members that could be given to parents of young people who needed extra options outside school.

Community C used the year to work at the level of educators' partnerships with young people and their families. They focused on developing a template for individual learning plans and partnership protocols. The plans were 'owned' by the young people themselves, providing impetus for learning. In cases where young people needed alternative settings for learning, these could also be carried as portable records of aspirations and achievements in the cross-over between schools and other agencies.

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Tools

Tool 1

Looking at the school climate: increasing a sense of capability, achievement and control in learning

Level	What strategies are in place to promote a sense of capability, achievement and control?	What decreases the likelihood of a young person having a sense of capability, achievement and control?	Areas to address
Curriculum, teaching and learning			
School organisation			
Community links and partnerships			

Looking at the school climate: enhancing relationships

Level	Prevention: What opportunities do students have to build relationships with teachers, students and other school-based personnel?	Intervention: What action is currently taken when a young person's social isolation, or absence from school is recognised?	Risk: What policies, programs and practices decrease the likelihood of positive relationships for students?	Areas to address
Curriculum, teaching and learning				
School organisation				
Community links and partnerships				

Looking at the school climate: promoting relevant and stimulating learning and opportunities for participation

Level	Prevention: What action is taken to promote engagement and participation? Are any students excluded from this?	Intervention: What action is currently taken when a young person is not engaged or participating?	Risk: What policies, programs and practices decrease the likelihood of meaningful engagement and participation?	Areas to address
Curriculum, teaching and learning				
School organisation				
Community links and partnerships				

Looking at the school climate: priorities for action

Theme	Priorities
Promoting a sense of capability, achievement and control in: • curriculum, teaching and learning • school organisation • community links and partnerships	
Promoting quality relationships in: • curriculum, teaching and learning • school organisation • community links and partnerships	
Promoting relevant and stimulating learning and opportunities for participation in: • curriculum, teaching and learning • school organisation • community links and partnerships	

Tool 2

Resilience framework to review a young person's health and wellbeing

Cooperative assessment with the student

Tips to remember when talking to the young person

- Avoid focusing on deficits and problems. Talk to the young person as someone who is managing their life rather than someone who is not coping.
- Be empowering. Shake hands, speak to the young person first (even if they agree to having someone else present).
- Explain confidentiality clearly.
- Focus on listening rather than questioning.
- Don't take anything for granted. Clarify what the young person wants. Negotiate with and support them.
- Pay attention to body language and appearance and any changes in these that occur.
- Introduce yourself, state the purpose of the visit, how it came to be (who referred), how you work, what you already know.
- Be yourself in a friendly, yet neutral, way.
- Ask the young person what they have been told and what they think about it.
- Remember that the questions and guidelines for this framework are flexible. Try and keep the conversation as natural and authentic as possible.

Introduction

- Give the young person the pamphlet explaining your role.
- Introduce yourself and your role in this interview, in the school and in the broader context.
- Talk about why they are here, ask their point of view.
- Talk about confidentiality, discuss limits, check the young person understands.
- Invite the young person to help you to fill out the boxes on page 69, and always check with them that what you have written is okay.

Interview

The interview can be based on the questions below. However, it is important to remember that these are not prescriptive.

Summary

- Summarise with the young person their strengths and capacities. Keep in mind the Four worlds (see page 69).
- Together identify and discuss issues of potential concern to the young person and to you.
- Ask the young person if they would like you to help them do something about it.
- Offer to investigate options.
- Arrange for the young person to come back to discuss the next step.
- Let the young person know about your availability and that your door is open.
- Identify a person in the school that the young person trusts and can go to if needed.
- If appropriate, ask permission to speak to parents/teachers/others and discuss with the young person what you will and will not tell these people.

Further actions

- What actions involving the young person, their teachers, coordinators, family and/or other organisations are appropriate?
- What can be done at the whole-of-school level for this young person and others in a similar position?
- What actions involving interaction between the school and broader community are appropriate?
- Ask yourself what your role is within current teams and structures that will allow you to support this young person and others with similar concerns?
- Who can you access for consultation and/or supervision?

Suggested questions

Four worlds

Friends, peers and family

- Who are the important people in your life? Tell me about them.
- Who are you close to?
- What about friends at school?

School

- What do you like about school? What are you good at?
- How do you get along with teachers at your school?
- Who's your favourite teacher?
- How are you finding the work?
- Are there any things that you find hard that you would like help with?
- Is there bullying at school?
- Have your grades changed lately?

Family

- Who is in your family?
- Who lives with you?
- How does everyone get along?
- Who are you close to?
- Are cultural traditions and values important to your family? What about to you?
- Is your family religious? What about yourself?
- Have you thought about spirituality for yourself? What does it mean to you?

Self

- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What do you get out of doing these things?
- Who else is involved?
- Have the things you do in your spare time changed?
- Do you go to parties? What do you think of them?
- Do people you know drink or use drugs? Do you? What does it do for you?
- Are you romantically interested in someone? Can you tell me about that?
- What about sex?
- Do you use condoms? Other forms of contraception?
- How do you think your best friend would describe you?
- How would you describe yourself?

- In your experience what does it mean to be male/female?
- How are you feeling inside? Does anything make you feel better or worse?
- Do you have someone to go to if you're upset or need to talk things through?
- What pushes your buttons? What do you do then?
- Do you sometimes feel really low? How often? How low? Give yourself a rating on a scale of 0–10.
- (If their rating is 0–4.) Do you have thoughts of hurting or killing yourself?
- How would you describe your health generally? Are you eating okay and sleeping okay?

GP link and others involved

- Do you have a GP you like and can see easily?
- Have you sought help elsewhere before?
- Are you seeing anyone now?
- What other organisations are you involved with or have been involved with in the past?

Tool 3

Assessing learning needs, styles and interests

Communication	Strengths	Areas to work on
What sort of things do you like reading? Do you get a chance to listen to stories? When do you enjoy writing? What sort of writing would be useful for you right now? Do you find writing difficult? Can you give me an example? Do you find class discussions helpful? Do you like presenting your ideas to the class? Do you like to learn from pictures, diagrams and movies? What happens when teachers give you things to read, or write things on the board?		
Generic competencies	**Strengths**	**Areas to work on**
Do you like working with others or do you prefer to work on your own? Do you like working out problems? Are you good at maths? What do you like? What do you find interesting? What helps you do things like projects? Do you like to try things out and see how they work? Do you like making things? Could you give me an example? Are you good at memorising things? Do you find it takes a while to 'get' new ideas? Would you say you were organised? What would help? What are you like with computers? Do you find it easy to write things using a computer? What do you find interesting and would like to know more about?		
Futures	**Strengths**	**Areas to work on**
Have you any ideas about what things you'd like to do when you're a bit older? What would help you be able to do that? Would you be interested in getting some experience in a part-time job? What sort of experience? What sort of activities would you like to get better at? Are there new things you'd like to be able to do?		

Tool 4

Checklist for shared planning of effective programs or reviewing existing ones

Name of program: _____

Schools/Agencies involved: _____

Features of effective programs	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities
• Small 'class' groups • Accessible location			
• Experiential learning in real projects • High degree of flexibility in place of learning with a set of well-specified goals			
• Network of key adults who the young person knows and trusts – support network • Attention to individual social, emotional and health needs, for example, support from youth worker or social worker or health professional, home–school liaison • Safe and secure setting in which the young person is treated with respect			
• Connections maintained with peers, teachers and learning at school, particularly in areas of strength and interest • Strong relationships between teachers in different settings • Opportunities for one-to-one academic assistance/tuition			

Features of effective programs	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities
• Achievements acknowledged through celebrations, presentations and certificates • Engagement of family in communicating and celebrating successes • Educational pathway with options – where to next?			
• Strength-based approach to building capacities of the young person including: – extending social networks – meeting new people – developing generic competencies, social and emotional competencies, interpersonal skills and teamwork – learning how to navigate multiple cultural contexts – learning essential life and vocational skills – having opportunities for decision making and problem solving – contributing to making a difference in things that matter in the community and to young people – planning for future life events – having opportunities for skill building and mastery (it is important to ensure that these are in areas that will enable young people to 'get on') – having opportunities to demonstrate skills, talents and what has been learned to peer and adult audiences – strengthening sense of personal efficacy and a sense of social place.			

Adapted from Eccles et al, 2002, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*

Tool 5

Mapping learning options

Name of program	Target group	Learning outcomes/objectives	When is it available?	Pathways it leads to	Contact person	Links with health and welfare	Other relevant information

Tool 6

Community network action plan

Strategies	Priorities	Objectives	What needs to be done?	Who is involved?	Where will this happen?	Timelines	Resources/PD required	Performance indicators
Within schools								
With young people and their families								
For strengthening partnerships between schools, other education providers and agencies								
In community networks								

Tool 7   My Learning Plan

Keeping connected

Staying in charge

Starting date ....

Room for comments

About me!

My nickname ....

My birthday ....

My address ....

....

....

....

Mapping strengths
Favourite subject at school

....

Hobbies ....

Sports ....

Clubs ....

Work experience ....

....

Skills ....

Things I am proud of ....

....

I learn best when:

☐ I have things explained properly to me

☐ I have things demonstrated to me

☐ I read about something

☐ I have an opportunity to talk about what I am doing

☐ I do something myself or work it out myself

☐ I work with a partner or in a group

☐ I am sitting still or working quietly

Good contacts in my community

For example,

Coach ....

Teacher ....

....

....

....

....

Skills, strengths and qualifications I have:
Part-time work

Job ....

Type of work ....

Hours per week ....

Job rating ....

What skills have you gained from part-time employment ....

....

Employer's comments ....

....

Work experience

☐ Have you ever done any work experience?

Employer ....

Type of work ....

Length ....

Rating ....

What skills have you gained from work experience? ....

....

Employer's comments ....

....

References

Other program experience (for example, ACE, EMU)

Program ....

Type of program undertaken ....

Length of experience .... Rating ....

What skills have you gained from this experience? ....

....

Program supervisor's comments ....

....

Certificates/awards granted by this program ....

Planning meeting

What did we talk about?

....

....

What did we decide?

....

....

Who was there?

....

....

Next meeting date ....

Planning meeting

What did we talk about?

....

....

What did we decide?

....

....

Who was there?

....

....

Next meeting date ....

Planning meeting

What did we talk about?

....

....

What did we decide?

....

....

Who was there?

....

....

Next meeting date ....

Planning to learn

What do I want to achieve?

....

....

What do I want to know more about?

....

....

What steps/actions are needed to get there?

....

....

What questions do I need to ask?

What resources will I need?

How will I document or show others?

Who will I share this with?

How will I know I have been successful?

Who was helpful in achieving my goal?

☐ My teachers

☐ My friends

☐ My effort/me

☐ My family

☐ Other teachers or adults

☐ Other people outside the school

☐ The school

What were some of the things that got in the way and made it difficult?

....

....

Achievements and progress

• ....

• ....

Date: ....

Achievements and progress

• ....

• ....

Date: ....

Achievements and progress

• ....

• ....

Date: ....

Where to next?

Where to next?

Where to next?