DESIGNATED TEACHER HANDBOOK

Guidance for Designated Teachers to support the educational engagement of children in out-of-home care

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# dESIGNATED teacher role

As an additional support to schools and students in out-of-home care and, in conjunction with LOOKOUT Centres, the Designated Teacher will ensure students are engaged in their education and meeting their learning goals.

LOOKOUT Centres are an additional resource to support schools, Child Protection Practitioners and case workers to meet their obligations under the *Out-Of-Home Care Education Commitment: A Partnering Agreement between DHHS, DET, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria* (the Agreement)*.*

This includes ensuring that all students have:

* an Individual Education Plan (IEP) government schools, or a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) catholic schools
* a Student Support Group (SSG)
* a Learning Mentor
* a referral to Student Support Services for an Education Needs Analysis (ENA)
* appropriate and structured contact between schools, case workers and carers.

The Designated Teacher is the first point of contact within the school for all out-of-home care matters.

## The Designated Teacher will:

* promote a culture of high expectations and aspirations for students in out-of-home care
* make sure the student has a voice in setting learning targets
* be a source of advice for staff about differentiated teaching strategies appropriate for individual students
* ensure all Koorie students are linked with a Koorie Education Support Officer (KESO) (government schools) and support the care team to prioritise a Cultural Support Plan
* ensure that students in out-of-home care are prioritised for additional learning supports
* develop carer capacity to understand the importance of supporting learning at home
* have lead responsibility to ensure each student in out-of-home care has a quality IEP
* ensure referrals are made to additional learning assessments when required (e.g. speech and language)
* promote implementation of all elements of the Partnering Agreement.

A Designated Teacher is nominated by their principal and trained by LOOKOUT Centre staff to be an advocate for and champion of students in out-of-home care at their school. Designated Teachers will be found in Government schools and within Catholic and Independent schools.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/designatedteacher.aspx>

# Out of Home Care Education Agreement: A Partnering Agreement

The Partnering Agreement is a commitment between:

* the Department of Education and Training (DET)
* the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
* the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV)
* Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
* Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
* the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CfECFW)

The Partnering Agreement reflects action aimed at breaking the link between disadvantage and educational outcomes by supporting more students to stay in school and reach their educational potential. The Partnering Agreement strengthens the shared commitment between partners to improve education and health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in OOHC.

The Partnering Agreement:

* outlines the supports required to address the educational and social/emotional needs of students in OOHC during the years they attend school
* promotes common practices across Victoria and provides a framework to monitor educational engagement and achievement
* provides guidance about key areas in which students in OOHC require support, including school enrolment, transition planning, attendance and engagement (including flexible learning options), achievement, case planning and school retention
* outlines a process for implementing the Partnering Agreement and monitoring outcomes
* affirms the Victorian Government’s commitment to the principle of self-determination, including strengthening the role and influence of Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, particularly in their relationships with government
* promotes the agency and involvement of children and young people in OOHC in decision making and in actions that affect them.

The Partnering Agreement aims to ensure that:

* processes are in place to actively support the educational achievement of every child and young person in OOHC
* there is a coordinated approach to supporting the educational, health and social, cultural and emotional needs of children and young people in OOHC
* all parties understand each other’s roles and responsibilities and work cooperatively and in the best interests of the child and young person
* strategies are implemented to improve outcomes related to student enrolment, attendance, educational achievement, case planning, retention and school completion and educational transitions.

The Partnering Agreement requirements include:

* allocation of a teacher or staff member, in consultation with the student, as a Learning Mentor to each student in OOHC enrolled in a school
* a Student Support Group (SSG)/Program Support Group (PSG) for each student
* an Educational Needs Analysis (ENA) for every child or young person who has been in OOHC for at least three months (consecutively or for a period that adds up to three months) or longer to identify their individual learning needs and to inform their Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Personalised Learning Plan (PLP). If there are immediate concerns about a child’s overall presentation and rate of progression, this process should start earlier
* an IEP/PLP for each student which is current, meaningful, regularly reviewed and updated, contains clear educational expectations of the student and meets quality criteria
* prioritisation of referrals by schools for students to education-related health and wellbeing services to ensure that services are readily accessible and responsive to the needs of these students
* priority attention for applications to the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) for students in OOHC enrolled at a government school.

[https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/OOHCpartneragreement.aspx](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx)

# student engagement and learning

The Designated Teacher has a significant role in promoting the educational achievement of every student in out-of-home care attending the school. They make a positive difference by promoting a whole school culture where the personalised learning needs of every student is catered for and their unique personal, emotional and academic needs are prioritised.

The Designated Teacher is responsible for supporting school staff to understand complex factors impacting the learning and engagement of students in out-of-home care. In particular, the emotional, psychological and social impacts of loss and separation from families or origin, the complex reasons for that separation and, that some students may find it difficult to build relationships of trust with adults because of their experiences. The Designated Teacher will seek additional support, reasonable adjustments and inclusive practices to support the learning and engagement of students in out-of-home care.

## The Designated Teacher will:

* contribute to the development and review of school wide engagement and inclusion policies, with a lens of out-of-home care
* promote a culture or success and aspiration and access to further education
* ensure student voice in planning and decisions, including SSG and IEP learning goals
* be a source of advice on trauma informed practice
* prioritise available additional student supports
* ensure carer is involved in SSG and IEP/PLP development

**Effective and high quality Individual Education Plans**

When used effectively an, Individual education Plan (IEP) or Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) improves the educational experience of students by helping everyone gain a clear and shared understanding about the teaching and learning provision necessary to best meet educational needs. A good IEP sets high quality expectations of progress and puts in place the additional supports needed in order to succeed.

The Designated Teacher should work closely with the Student Support group and other teachers as necessary to:

* identify the young person’s strengths and weaknesses
* identify barriers to learning
* set short and long term SMART goals
* set strategies and actions to support achievement
* include information on how the progress of the student is to be monitored and supported
* identify indicators of success
* monitor and evaluate IEP
* ensure student voice.

# transitions

As the first point of contact within the school, the Designated Teacher has a key role in supporting students in out-of-home care to make a smooth transition into school. Including making sure there are effective arrangements in place for the speedy transfer of information between relevant agencies and the child’s school records, via CASES and Student Support Services, to a new school.

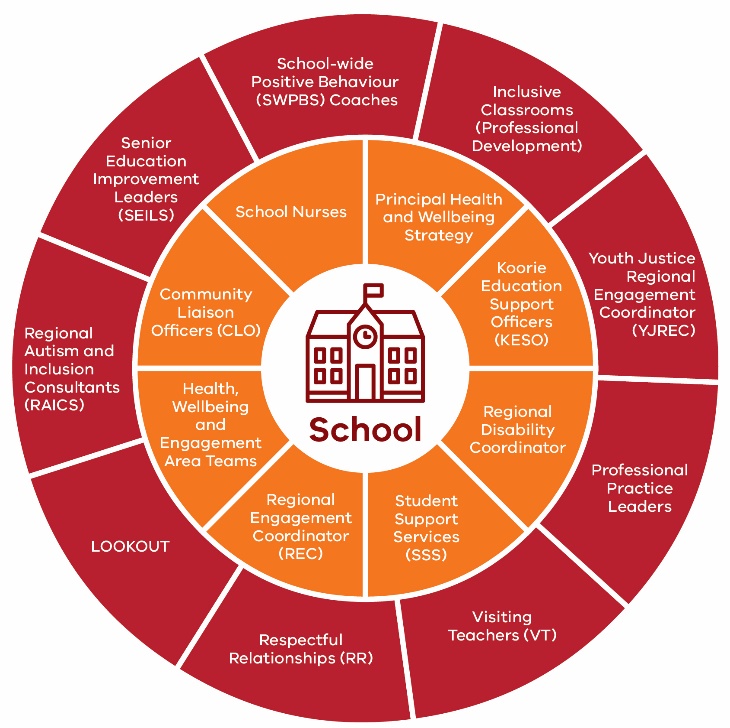
It is important to draw upon the expertise and knowledge of those supporting the student to plan for a smooth transition to school. Utilising a transition statement for collecting and sharing information to assist Designated Teachers, carer(s), Child Protection and case managers to have a shared understanding of the student’s educational strengths and needs and how these transfer to a new educational setting. A transition statement can be completed during a Student Support Group meeting with the student and key stakeholders.

# working with others

**TEAM AROUND THE LEARNER**

The Designated Teacher is the first point of contact within the school for the LOOKOUT Centre and carers. Schools will already have arrangements in place for how they engage with outside agencies. Designated Teachers do not replace the role of school and wellbeing staff in working with external agencies to support students in out-of-home care. The Designated Teacher will work collaboratively with teaching and wellbeing staff and other agency representatives to support each student to remain connected and engaged with their education.

Designated Teachers may utilise a Team around the Learner framework to ensure a collaborative approach to supporting the learning and engagement of children in out-of-home care. Collaboration with the Department’s regional and area based teams enables departmental staff to provide a comprehensive response to the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care. The Department’s regional and area based teams hold a broad range of experience and expertise in supporting children and young people in their health, wellbeing and education.



Designated teachers, in partnership with Child Protection, can identify who has responsibility for signing consent and permission so children can participate fully in education and are not disadvantaged.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/behaviour/engagement/Pages/team-around-the-learner.aspx>

# lookout survey

## Out-of-home care Reporting

The out-of-home care reporting is a twice yearly collection of data relating to the education status of students in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC). The data is collected via an online survey. Data collection occurs in Term 1 and Term 3, looking back on the previous semester.

Schools are verified through data matching and are emailed via the school email address with a personalised link to a web-based home page with a list of student IDs for their school. Each student ID is linked to a survey. There is a feature for schools to report on additional students that were notified about as being in OOHC or believed to be in OOHC.

School principals often delegate the out-of-home care reporting to Designated Teachers.

Data collection includes:

* enrolment at the school or Flexible Learning Option
* attendance
* ATSI and Cultural Plan
* Learning Mentor
* Student/Program Support Group
* Education Needs Analysis
* Individual/Personal Education Plan
* DHHS notification
* suspensions

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LOOKOUT Centres will provide ongoing professional learning for Designated Teachers. An annual LOOKOUT conference compliments and supports the knowledge and practice of early childhood, primary and secondary school educators to ensure best possible educational outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. The conference includes a series of keynote presentations and interactive workshops providing an opportunity to network with colleagues across sectors and share best practice.

LOOKOUT Centres may provide Area or Region based Designated Teacher Communities of Practice professional learning during school terms.

# HEAR FROM DESIGNATED TEACHERS

The exciting thing for us is that we all sit around a table, we all sit around the table together, we all strategies around that individual child. We put them at the centre and hopefully, their every need is being met as a result of all the partners that are there. *Melinda, Principal*

As a teacher, when we think about strategies for supporting young people in out-of-home care in school, the first thing I talk to my staff about is the relationship. Before anything else, you need to be able to build that relationship with the young people we work with. Trust is really important and feeling safe is really important. *Kellie, Designated Teacher*

I think a lot of it is about the relationship you build with the carer. And of course, the relationship you build with all the other agencies that are involved with the Partnering Agreement. *Melinda, Principal*

One of the strategies that we make sure we use is really fostering that friendship with their peers. So when we group them for the following year, we make sure we’ve got them with someone they’ve really connected with. *Michelle, Principal*

A huge amount of work goes into emotional regulation. And often that involves calm spaces for these children and developing in them strategies where they know what zone they are in in terms of what they are feeling. *Melinda, Principal*

For children in out-of-home care, it is particularly important that we set high expectations for them because the more they succeed the more their efficacy builds, which means if they have succeeded today, if they have achieved this goal today, they want to come back and achieve tomorrow. *Melinda, Principal*

When we talk about goals and aspirations with our young people, I think that with a lot of young people there is a lot of hesitation and self-doubt and all of those natural feelings. With our young people, we have those conversations fairly regularly so it becomes common language. It is important that they understand that we value them and that we believe in them and that we are proud of them. *Kellie, Designated Teacher*

The three-way interview we would have at the end of the term when they come with their carer and their teacher, they lead the interview, they talk about their learning, they can articulate their next goals and they can talk about how they have achieved the goal that they are at. That’s what we call high expectations. *Melinda, Principal*

Often with Student Support Group meetings, making sure our kids have a voice at that table is really important. So often the student will be involved in those meetings. *Kellie, Designated Teacher*

I think to feel heard means so much to them. It means that they have got someone who cares about them that is willing to listen, that is willing to dig deep and to really understand them. *Michelle, Principal*

View video below:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/lookout.aspx>

# best practice examples

**Designated Teacher, Tarneit Senior College**

I have been a Designated Teacher at Tarneit Senior College since the start of 2018. Since receiving Designated Teacher training my Learning Advisor from Lookout has been my number one support. She has been able to answer any questions I have regarding student needs and pathways. As Designated Teacher I love helping students succeed. I see this role as a way in which I can help some of our most disengaged and disadvantaged young people experience success.

As Designated Teacher, I was able to effect positive educational change for a student in out-of-home care (OoHC) who was at significant risk of disengagement and not completing the course requirements last year. With individualised support and relationship building this student is currently involved in VCAL and has significantly improved her attendance and engagement with school. She still has significant challenges but is opening up to me and her mentor so much more which means we can help her achieve her goals.

**Designated Teacher, Wyndham Park Primary School**

I have been a Designated Teacher at Wyndham Park Primary School since 2017. As Designated Teacher I receive guidance and support from Assistant Principal, Julia McCahon and an allowance from the Wellbeing budget. In a school of 405 students, we consistently have between 3 – 5 students in OOHC.

A highlight of this role is tracking the progress of students and ensuring they are getting what they need to excel and achieve as valued members of our school community. I enjoy supporting Learning Mentors to take an active role in students’ learning. At the end of every term we organise a special luncheon for our children in OOHC to celebrate successes and further build relationships with Learning Mentors, Leading Teachers and the Principal Team.

An example of effecting positive educational change for students in OoHC is our work with Anna\*. When she was in Grade One Anna’s circumstances changed. She was removed from her family and placed in OoHC. At this time supports were put in place to ensure Anna could become engaged in her learning, something she found challenging due to her social and emotional needs. Wyndham Park Primary School created support plans and applied for Program for Students with a Disability (PSD) funding. Regular Student Support Group (SSG) meetings helped Anna’s Care Team decide what supports were needed. At the end of one SSG, when she was in Grade Two, Anna attended to give her perspective (Student Voice and Agency). She explained that she wanted to improve in Reading. This became one of Anna’s goals in her Individual Education Plan (IEP).

We put the following supports in place to ensure Anna could reach her goal;

* weekly check ins with her Learning Mentor to celebrate her learning
* weekly 1:1 Hope Mentor sessions
* TEACHaR program (Anglicare)
* Intervention with Education Support 1:1 and small group programs (LLI)
* ‘Wrap around’ Wellbeing Team support and Behaviour/Social intervention groups, tailored to meet her Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) needs
* OOHC Student Celebration luncheons at the end of each term

During Grade Three, Anna progressed up ten reading levels. Anna was able to read chapter books, which gave her a new love of learning. At the end of the year Anna moved back into care of her family and she has continued to enjoy reading both at school and at home.

\*not her real name

**Designated Teachers, Williamstown High School**

Our school is a multi-campus secondary school with an enrolment of approximately 1500 students. We have a Designated Teacher at both our campuses, with a small number of students in OoHC across both campuses. We have both been Designated Teachers since Lookout was first established in 2016.

We receive support from Lookout and we find their Professional Learning invaluable, particularly the sessions in relation to DHHS and writing ILP’s. The Lookout team are readily accessible when we have had queries, needed advice or support (particularly around working with DHHS and community service organisations) and facilitating the building of relationships with carers and the young person. The support we have received from Anglicare in relation to our students who are in OoHC has been excellent. Support has included family support, school support and direct support of the young person.

There are many rewarding aspects of being a Designated Teacher. Seeing the growth in confidence and connectedness of young people both in peer relationships and relationships with their teachers is a highlight. As is being part of a team that makes a difference for young people in need and working collaboratively within the team to achieve the best outcomes. The journey often has bumps and detours but to be able to be instrumental in helping young people reach their goals and experience success is such a motivating force.

When thinking about where we effected positive educational change for students in OOHC, three students come to mind. One is now studying Bio-Med at the University of Melbourne, the second successfully completed his VCAL certificate whilst living in lead tenant and the third is currently happily engaged in senior VCAL after spending all of Year 10 saying that he wanted to leave school.

**Designated Teacher, Seabrook Primary School**

I trained as a Designated Teacher in 2016. I found the training and network meetings valuable preparation for the role. Ongoing support is always readily available by phone or email from my Learning Advisor and the Lookout team. Our school is a large Victorian primary setting with 1100 enrolments from Foundation to Grade Six. We are accredited to teach the International Baccalaureate-a multicultural inclusive professional learning community. Our school currently has two students in OoHC.

I don’t have a teaching responsibility so organisation and liaison with external agencies is a little easier and it allows time to write up the Student Support Group (SSG) minutes to distribute. I am continuously moving around the school and take informal opportunities to link in with our students who are in OoHC, as well as some who were in OoHC and are now reunited with a parent or caregiver. I have found the students we need to support are frequently highly sensitive to being singled out so I try to maintain subtle interactions; respectfully forming bonds with these students very slowly.

Facilitating professional support is important through the Student Support Group process, as is preparation of an Individual Education Plan and liaison with Student Support Services to organise an Educational Needs Assessment. Provision of psychological counselling is offered in liaison with external agencies and through our On Psych psychologist. We are the team around the child.

Liaison with external agency staff and caregivers is imperative to address trauma. We do this through the provision of harm minimisation strategies; ensuring that immediate sourcing of new uniforms and shoes, school bags, winter coats/summer hats and stationery is provided discreetly with respect to children’s privacy.

I have observed two students (siblings) proudly setting up coloured pencils we had individually labelled with their names. Another little one showing off his brand new black school shoes courtesy of State Schools Relief; little gestures do truly mean a lot. With wonderful support from DHHS and Child First agencies, one of our students in OoHC has been provided with the same new MAC computer as peers. Our school has lent iPads for use at home or in our Library with access the school internet after school. We have encouraged and facilitated camps, excursions and incursion attendance. We found the money for a sleeping bags and casual clothes. Variety Club have helped us to provide bicycles and attendance at the annual Christmas Party.

These practical interventions are such an important part of helping reassure our students in OOHC to feel that they belong, that they are included and important members of our school community. We nominate and facilitate attendance for students at the annual OoHC celebration of achievement awards ceremony in November each year. We keep facilitating the building of happy experiences and memories.

The role of Designated Teacher is very rewarding professionally and personally. As a school community we try to ‘make things right’ for vulnerable children. We do this by ensuring they feel welcomed and included from first point of contact with our school. We have a duty of care to assist them to recover from the multiple challenges, trauma and losses they may have experienced through welcoming kindness and generosity of spirit.

New students in OoHC often arrive exhibiting withdrawn characteristics, lacking in confidence, reluctant to be involved in all extra-curricular activities and possibly presenting a general demeanour of sadness or heightened sensitivities or anxiety. As Designated Teacher, it is a highlight to observe positive changes occurring for students over time. It is wonderful to see an enthusiasm to attend school, an enjoyment of success in learning achievement a development friendships. They become happy, confident and settled.

Two students in OoHC, who were with us in 2017, came back into our school community in 2019. One of the most rewarding moments was when they both ran to say hello to me with excited shrieks upon their return. They have both settled in beautifully, as if they had never left.

# useful links

**Making SPACE for learning** - a resource guide from the Australian Childhood Foundation on trauma informed practice in schools.

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/resources/>

**Calmer classrooms** - a guide to working with traumatised children in schools.

<https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/calmer-classrooms-guide.pdf>

**Great expectations** - supporting children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve at school.

<http://www.baltara.vic.edu.au/uploads/3/1/4/7/31475277/great_expectations.pdf>

**Caring classrooms** - a guide for parents and the school community.

<http://www.baltara.vic.edu.au/uploads/3/1/4/7/31475277/caring_classrooms.pdf>

**SMART Online Training** - an online learning course by Australian Childhood Foundation on Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma.

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/training-development/smart-online-training/>