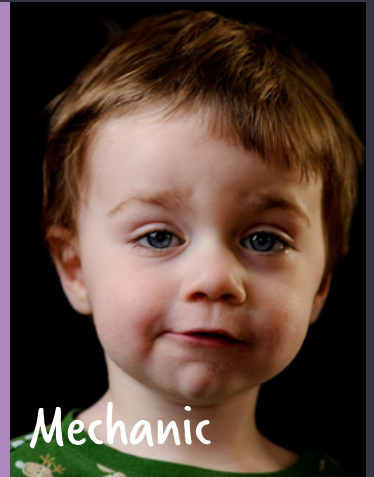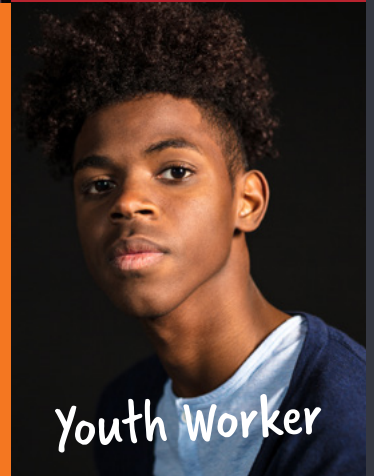# LOOKOUT Centre Handbook

Vet

Mechanic

Landscaper

Teacher

Photographer

Youth Worker

'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.'
– Nelson Mandela

We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands the LOOKOUT Centre team journeys onto. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal people to country and t our respect to their Elders past and present. We have a deep desire that LOOKOUT as an education response can redress some of the harm caused to our first Nations People.

ACRONYMS

ACAC	Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled OrganisationCASES21
CCYP	Commission for Children and Young People
CECV	Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
CP	Child Protection, a unit of the Department of Health and Human Services
CPP	Child Protection Practitioner
CRIS	Client Relationship Information System (DHHS)
CSO	Community Service Organisation
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
EJI	Education Justice Initiative
ENA	Educational Needs Analysis
FLO	Flexible Learning Option
HEAC	Health and Education Assessment Coordinator
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ISV	Independent Schools Victoria
KEC	Koorie Education Coordinator (DET)
KESO	Koorie Engagement Support Officer (DET)
PLP	Personalised Learning Plan (Catholic schools)
PSD	Program for Students with Disabilities
PWO	Primary Welfare Officer initiative
PSG	Program Support Group (Catholic schools)
SSG	Student Support Group
SSS	Student Support Services
SWC	Student Welfare Coordinator
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VAEA	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

CONTENTS

EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT – OUR STUDENTS IN CARE

LOOKOUT Education support centres and the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care.

In Victoria, on any given day, there are over 10,300 children and young people living in statutory out-of-home care. Most of these children are of school age. For many, their education journey will be characterised by multiple changes to their living arrangements and many changes in their education setting.

With each education setting change, there is a disruption to learning. With each disruption to learning, there is an increased chance of falling behind, of missed connections with peers and friends, and a greater chance of poorer education outcomes, lack of engagement with education or training, and increased chance of leaving education early. This trajectory can set children and young people up for poorer future social, emotional and economic stability.

However, the experience of being in care need not define the future for children and young people. Education can be the golden ticket that provides the greatest possible opportunities for social, emotional and economic success. We, as educators and carers, can create the conditions for education to change the direction of a child or young person's future.

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres (LOOKOUT Centres) aim to lift the educational outcomes and wellbeing of children and young people in statutory out-of-home care and permanent care by:

- raising the profile of the 2018 *Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment: Partnering Agreement* (Partnering Agreement) and awareness of the importance of the actions and support contained in the agreement among those working with the child or young person
- improving monitoring and reporting on children and young people in out-of-home care
- building the capacity of the workforces supporting these students (such as Designated Teachers and Case Managers) to understand the needs of the child or young person, and to help them stay engaged and supported at school
- strengthening relationships between the service systems at a local and central level to improve collaborative working and case planning.

LOOKOUT Centres are not physical structures and do not deliver curriculum. LOOKOUT Centre staff are based in regional and Area offices of the Department – working with schools, Case Managers, Care Managers and carers across their region.

Centres are led by experienced school principals and are staffed by multidisciplinary teams of education specialists, allied health professionals, Koorie Cultural Advisers and data and administration officers. They work in close collaboration with regional and Area-based staff, drawing on the collective effort of school improvement and wellbeing teams to raise the achievement and expectations of children and young people in care.

Education changes lives for the better. And for children and young people whose lives have so often been characterised by trauma, abuse, neglect, and separation from family – education cannot wait.

We are all responsible for ensuring that children and young people in out-of-home care get the best education our system provides.

THE LOOKOUT CENTRE HANDBOOK – CARE TYPES AND CONTEXT

1. WHAT IS THE LOOKOUT CENTRE HANDBOOK?

1.1 Audience

The LOOKOUT Centre Handbook (the handbook) is intended to guide the work of LOOKOUT Centre Principals and staff for school aged children and young people. The handbook also provides guidance for department staff (in the Department's central, regional and Area teams), Case Managers, Community Service Organisations (CSOs) providing out-of-home care services, and carers. Schools, particularly Principals and Designated Teachers, may use the handbook to understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to LOOKOUT Centres, and children and young people in out-of-home care.

The handbook is a guide to how the LOOKOUT Centre and those professionals responsible for educating and caring for our students in out-of-home care should fulfill their responsibilities. It does not replace any statutory obligations under which education and care professionals perform their role, specifically those detailed in:

- The Partnering Agreement between the Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (see section 1.4.2)
- The 2018 *Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-Of-Home Care* between DET, DHHS, Municipal Association of Victoria, Early Learning Association Australia, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Community Child Care Association, Victorian Healthcare Association and Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated.

1.2 Early Childhood LOOKOUT

From 2019 all LOOKOUT Centres commenced piloting an extension of services to the early childhood sector to support children in out-of-home care aged 0-5 years.

To support this new function an Early Childhood LOOKOUT Centre Handbook is under development. The Early Childhood Handbook will be made available on the LOOKOUT website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcresources.aspx

1.3 Definitions and types of out-of-home care

In Victoria, there are four main types of out-of-home care placements for children and young people who have been removed from their families by court order due to substantiated care concerns (statutory out-of-home care). Placements are managed by DHHS and include foster care, kinship care, residential and lead tenant care, and permanent care.

For Aboriginal children removed by court order, an approved Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) may be authorised to take on responsibility for the child's case management and case plan.

The LOOKOUT Centre monitors the enrolments of students in foster, residential and lead tenant and kinship care. It also monitors the enrolment of students during the first 12 months of Permanent Care Orders. It does not monitor the enrolments of students who are known to child protection but not living in out-of-home care, or students who are on permanent care orders over 12 months.

Further information on Child Protection Orders specific to out-of-home-care is available at: https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/jurisdictions/child-protection/court-orders

1.3.1 Foster care

Foster carers are community members who are recruited, screened and supported by CSOs to provide short and long-term 24-hour care for children and young people in their own homes, in a family environment. A foster carer generally has a Case Manager from a CSO.

1.3.2 Kinship care

Kinship care is the care provided by relatives or a member of a child's social network when a child cannot live with their parents. Children and young people are generally placed with a family member or close friend (such as a grandparent or a close and trusted community member) to provide care. Aboriginal kinship care is care provided by relatives or friends to an Aboriginal child who cannot live with their parents, where Aboriginal family and community and Aboriginal culture are valued as central to the child's safety, stability and development. Kinship carers may not have a dedicated Case Manager.

1.3.3 Residential care

Residential care placements provide both short-and long-term accommodation to children and young people in supervised shared accommodation. Care is provided by paid staff and managed by CSOs. Up to four children and young people can live in these houses at any one time. Typically, children and young people with the most complex needs live in residential care; however factors such as the availability of foster carers can contribute to a placement being made into residential care. All houses have a Unit Coordinator and all children and young people have a Case Manager.

1.3.4 Lead tenant

Lead tenant placements provide medium-term accommodation and support to young people aged 16-18 years who have been placed away from the care of their families by Child Protection. Lead tenant programs provide a safe semi-independent living environment in which young people are supported by one or two approved adult volunteer lead tenant/s who provide day-to-day guidance and mature role-modelling. The lead tenant volunteer also works collaboratively with program staff members in monitoring and responding to the wellbeing of young people.

1.3.5 Permanent care

Permanent Care Orders aim to provide long-term security and certainty for children, young people and their carers about the child and young person's future care when a decision has been made that they cannot live safely with their birth parent/s.

Children and young people subject to Permanent Care Orders do not have ongoing involvement from DHHS or the CSO/ACCO by which they were previously supported, however, schools retain responsibilities to support children and young people on Permanent Care Orders for up to 12 months.

After 12 months, schools should review this process for each child or young person to determine whether further support is required. Schools should have a conversation with permanent carers about their willingness for their child to continue receiving support as stipulated in the OOHC Education Commitment Partnering Agreement.

1.4 Policy Framework

LOOKOUT Centres are an Education State initiative delivered by the Department. Many of the service delivery reforms delivered through commitments in the DHHS *Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children* have implications for how the LOOKOUT Centre works with Case Managers and staff in CSOs, and influence the services and supports that the LOOKOUT Centre provides to carers.

1.4.1 The Education State

Making Victoria the Education State means providing a quality education for every child, regardless of their background, circumstance or postcode. The Education State agenda covers the whole life cycle of education, from early childhood through to schools and into adulthood. It also includes reforms across each area of education.

Ten school targets have been developed as part of the Education State vision to focus on the range of factors that support students to develop and be their best.

These targets are organised under four themes:

- **Learning for Life**
  Excellence in reading, maths, science and the arts, and in critical and creative thinking
- **Happy, Healthy and Resilient Kids**
  Building resilience and physical activity in our children
- **Breaking the Link**
  Ensuring more students stay in school and eliminating the connection between outcomes and disadvantage
- **Pride and Confidence in our Schools**
  Making sure every community has access to excellence, in every school and classroom.

1.4.2 The Partnering Agreement

The Partnering Agreement provides guidelines for Victorian schools and Case Managers from child protection and CSOs. 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 out-of-home care in decision making and in actions that affect them.

The Partnering Agreement applies to:

- staff who work in government, Catholic and independent schools; including Principals and other school leaders, Teachers and Flexible Learning Options staff. It also guides the work of student wellbeing staff – such as Student Welfare Coordinators, Primary Welfare Officers, Student Support Services officers, Chaplains, School Nurses and wellbeing staff employed locally by schools such as Youth Workers, Psychologists and Social Workers

- Case Managers who work within the DHHS Child Protection program or for CSOs that are contracted by DHHS to provide case management services. The role of Case Managers is to coordinate the development and monitoring of a child's case plan. This includes direct case work with children and families, developing links with key services and coordinating care team meetings

- regional and Area (government sector) or diocesan (Catholic sector) staff who have responsibility for providing advice to schools and Case Managers about the requirements of the Partnering Agreement.

While the Partnering Agreement can guide the work of staff in independent schools, these schools are individual legal entities and subject to their own policies and procedures. The principles, processes and requirements outlined within the Partnering Agreement are supported and endorsed by ISV but cannot be mandated. There are elements of the Partnering Agreement, such as regional, Area and diocesan organisational structures, for which there is no equivalent for independent schools. ISV provides guidance and advice to schools that require assistance in the interpretation or implementation of any part of the Partnering Agreement. LOOKOUT Centres also work with independent schools to ensure they are supporting the educational achievement of children in care.

Detail about the roles and responsibilities in the Partnering Agreement and the LOOKOUT Centres is in section 5 of this handbook.

1.4.3 Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026

The Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026 is a strategy to ensure that all Koorie Victorians, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people from other parts of Australia who live in Victoria, achieve their learning aspirations.

Marrung is an integrated 10-year plan and is key to helping Koorie Victorians succeed in their education and realise the full benefits of the Education State reforms across early childhood, schools and vocational education and training. Marrung requires all services to embed Koorie aspirations and outcomes as core business. It includes key actions to support improved outcomes by supporting services to be more inclusive and responsive to Koorie learners, building an education system that values and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. Marrung contains high level priority actions, targets and measures to increase participation and engagement across all sectors to improve outcomes for all Koorie children, young people and adult learners.

1.4.4 Roadmap for reform: strong families, safe children

DHHS-led initiative

Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children focuses on prevention, early intervention and creating services that are coordinated and work together to meet the needs of vulnerable families and children. Roadmap for Reform also recognises the importance of taking action to ensure self-determination for Aboriginal communities in the care of their children and families, and supports children and families to be involved in decision making about the services they need. The goal of Roadmap for Reform is for Victorians to be better supported throughout their unique life cycle of need and be able to access a range of services, including wellbeing and prevention through to other service interventions, incorporating intake, assessment, planning and treatment.

One of the major transformation efforts under the Roadmap for Reform focuses on the out-of-home care system. Reforms to the out-of-home care system include:

- moving children out of residential care and into supported home-based care using Targeted Care Packages

- increasing the capacity of foster and kinship carers

- introducing a new out-of-home care outcomes framework that measures the outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care and identifies areas most in need of improvement

- building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations who wish to assume responsibility for contracted case management of Aboriginal children in out-of- home care or to assume custody or guardianship responsibilities under section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

LOOKOUT CENTRES: PURPOSE, ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES

2. WHAT ARE LOOKOUT CENTRES?

2.1 Purpose

LOOKOUT Centres boost the capability of schools, Case Managers and out-of-home care services to deliver on the goals and intended benefits of the Partnering Agreement. LOOKOUT Centres play a key role in improving educational outcomes for children and young people living in out-of-home care. Centres do so through providing professional development opportunities to a range of staff and carers, by challenging enrolment decisions that are not in a student's best interests, and advocating for opportunities for students to participate fully in school life (including camps, excursions and extra-curricular activities).

LOOKOUT Centres are based on an innovative virtual model, with staff based in the Department's regional offices and providing professional supports to schools, Case Managers, Care Managers, CSOs and carers across their region. LOOKOUT Centres operate state-wide as part of a multidisciplinary service response, building on the expertise and professional practice of the Department's regional, Area and school staff. Underpinning each LOOKOUT Centre is a commitment to a multidisciplinary approach to working with, supporting and raising the expectations of the professionals and carers in the lives of children and young people living in out-of-home care.

While the LOOKOUT Centres support schools, Case Managers, Care Managers, CSOs and carers to fully realise their role in a child or young person's education, they do not replace the responsibilities that these adults hold in relation to their care and education.

LOOKOUT Centres include Koorie Cultural Advisors who work with students, community, case workers and schools to ensure that Aboriginal students' needs are reflected in cultural plans which are embedded in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs). All Koorie Cultural Advisors are Aboriginal workers with experience in the education system, strong connections to communities in which they work, and a commitment to connecting children and young people to culture.

LOOKOUT Centres are not Flexible Learning Options or alternative settings. They do not enroll students or deliver curriculum.

The responsibility for curriculum delivery remains with the school or setting in which the student is enrolled. Instead, the LOOKOUT Centres focus on professional development, advocacy and expert advice and support to build the capability of those professionals who work with children and young people in care, making sure that education is at the centre of decisions made about their care, placement and future.

The establishment of the LOOKOUT Centres enables more effective monitoring and timely reporting of data relating to students in OOHC. DHHS and DET compile together data to create a LOOKOUT Centre student roll, which is monitored and updated at regular intervals to ensure the most current dataset for students in OOHC.

2.2 Why do LOOKOUT Centres focus on students living in out-of-home care?

Research[1] tells us that children and young people who come in to care do so due to circumstances such as neglect, abuse, family violence or breakdown, parental substance misuse or parental mental illness. These experiences can lead to trauma, often are associated with the loss of a loved and trusted adult, and can mean that children and young people struggle to form stable and strong relationships with friends and adults. All of these experiences can adversely affect a child's or young person's capacity to learn or to engage well at school or an education setting. For Aboriginal students, the loss of family connection is often exacerbated by the loss of connection to community and to culture, and for this reason Aboriginal students in care require additional and specific supports during their time away from family.

LOOKOUT Centres are designed to provide support and professional development to those who work with children and young people in care so that they understand the impact that trauma, loss and attachment can have on learning. The LOOKOUT Centre's role is to work with the professional team around the child to make sure that practical evidence based strategies and supports are in place to keep them engaged in school and learning. While this may not make up for the difficult start in life that many children and young people in care experience, it can make their education more stable, supportive and successful.

TRAUMA

Children who are placed in out-of-home care are likely to have experienced a range of early-life adversity, such as trauma, abuse, neglect and antenatal substance exposure. Trauma is the psychological and physiological result of heightened stress that accompanies experiences of threat, violence and life-challenging events. Children are more vulnerable to trauma than adults.

It is vital to look for strengths in children impacted by trauma, as with all students. While experiences of trauma have significant and long-lasting impacts on a student's capacity to learn and socialise, none are insurmountable (Child Safety Commissioner, 2007).

Children who experience serious trauma are more likely to have difficulties with learning, memory, attention and/or ability to regulate their own behaviour. It should be kept in mind that not all children who experience adversity go on to develop these difficulties.

Traumatised children may not easily understand their own feelings or those of others around them. Children affected by trauma may be challenged by:

- a persistent sense of fear
- disconnection from feelings
- difficulty naming and managing emotional responses
- being angry without understanding why
- difficulties with relationship skills and understanding others.

This may lead to difficulties at school such as:

- difficulties engaging in class and learning activities
- concerning behaviour
- higher rate of school absences
- increased dropout rate
- more suspensions and expulsions
- impairments in developing and maintaining social relationships
- anxiety and/or withdrawal.

Children do not choose to have these difficulties and need to be supported if they have experienced trauma. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies children in care who have experienced trauma can be supported though:

- safe environments and rich experiences that stimulate and enrich brain growth
- providing support children and caregivers to understand the link between traumatic events and cognitive difficulties
- positive relationships and connections in children's lives
- targeted and trauma specific interventions during childhood and adolescence
- ensuring that specific cognitive difficulties are addressed directly.

Further information on supporting children in care who have experienced trauma can be found by following this link: https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/effect-trauma-brain-development-children

LOSS

For many children the move to out-of-home care will involve the loss of many or all things familiar and secure. The manner in which they will respond to loss will depend on their personality and previous experience. However, panic, heightened anxiety, self- blame, anger, total or partial withdrawal, feelings of abandonment, distress, bewilderment and despair are all common feelings children experience at this time.

While the aim of all members of the care team is to lessen negative impacts of placement and trauma for the child, staff should be aware of displays of anti-social behaviour and try to handle it with sensitivity. Often the behaviours may be the normal response which a child experiences when under great stress. Children will perceive separation in different ways depending on their age and ability to verbalise their feelings and their capacity to understand the reasons why they are in care. (Child Protection Manual, 2016)

These are often not easy situations to manage, particularly in the early stages and during placement changes. Teachers and staff working with the student may require support, particularly from their school's wellbeing staff and the Designated Teacher. LOOKOUT Centres can also provide assistance, advice and training to school staff to help manage such situations.

ATTACHMENT

Children's attachment experiences are thought to be the foundation for their later social, emotional and cognitive development. Consistent, reliable and responsive caregiving is associated with an optimal attachment experience. Ideally the child comes to expect that their caregiver will be available when needed, and learns that they are able to use their actions to control their needs being met (e.g., through attachment behaviours such as crying or holding out their arms). This attachment experience is learnt by the developing child and forms the basis for self-concept, self-esteem, and emotional, social and cognitive development, through the formation of an internal working model of self and others.

There is a general agreement that disorganised attachment is strongly associated with the experience of child abuse and neglect (i.e., the child's inability to clearly signal distress to an unreliable and frightening caregiver results in an incoherent internalised model of self and others). Disorganised attachment is of concern because it means that a child has not been able to develop any consistent means of eliciting comfort and support from the caregiver. It is more likely to occur in vulnerable populations, such as children in care.

There is every reason to assume that children with disorganised attachment can be helped to develop more organised and predictable internal working models. Exposure to consistent, safe, responsive and predictable environments, including at home and school is important. The social networks of children in care can be impoverished for a range of reasons including family isolation and frequent moves. Teacher and peer relationships can act as important attachment relationships for school-aged children and every attempt should be made to foster children's social relationships where these are positive and nurturing (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016).

Further information is available at: https://aifs. gov.au/cfca/publications/childrens-attachment-needs-context-out-home-care
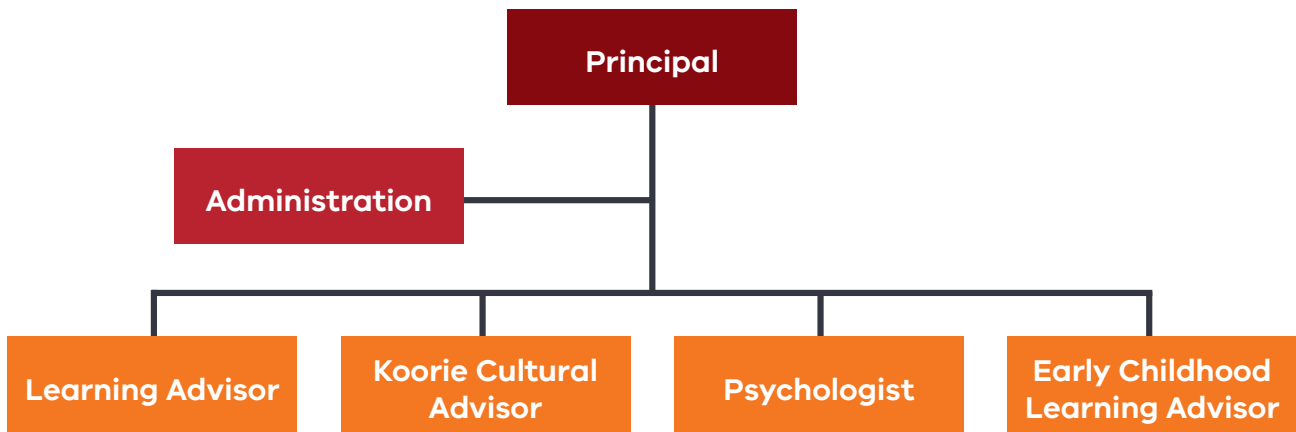
Figure 1. LOOKOUT Centres staff structures

2.3 Roles and responsibilities

LOOKOUT staff facilitate a greater focus on the educational needs of students in out-of-home care and draw on educators, health and wellbeing staff, SSS workers, Koorie education teams, and school improvement teams to make sure that students have access to the services and supports to which they are entitled. LOOKOUT Centres are not expected to take sole responsibility for children and young people in out-of-home care.

As the name suggests, the team 'looks out' for students in out-of-home care by identifying them, maintaining the student roll, and monitoring their progress and transitions. LOOKOUT Centre staff also draw on the Department's Area and regional teams to provide resources, interventions and supports as required. Teams work collaboratively with LOOKOUT Centre staff in recognition of the shared responsibilities staff have to students in out-of-home care.

LOOKOUT Centres provide support to students in out-of-home care across the government, Catholic and independent school sectors.

2.3.1 LOOKOUT Centre Principal

LOOKOUT Centres sit within the Regional Services Group workforces in the Early Childhood School Services Division of the Department.

Each LOOKOUT Centre is led by a Principal and includes a multidisciplinary team with the skills required to support the unique needs of children and young people in out-of-home care.

LOOKOUT Centre Principals:

- work closely with staff from the Department, DHHS and non-government providers of out-of-home care services to ensure LOOKOUT understands and supports the educational needs of children and young people in out-of-home care

- monitor school enrolments, transitions, partnering agreement requirements and indicators of educational engagement and achievement for school-aged children in care

- intervene if the placement will not provide suitable educational opportunities or meet the needs of the student according to their IEP, and in cases where a concern has been escalated to the LOOKOUT Centre Principal

- build the capacity of schools and education providers to address disengagement for this cohort and partner together to develop innovative and evidence-based supports, aimed at continued education and educational achievement (for example, through professional development of Designated Teachers and trauma informed training)

- provide oversight and leadership for the activities of the regional LOOKOUT Centre, identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

2.3.2 Learning Advisor

The Learning Advisor works with schools to ensure that all students in out-of-home care are enrolled in school or an appropriate education or training setting and are effectively supported with an IEP, Educational Needs Analysis (ENA), Student Support Group (SSG) and additional resources to which they are entitled. The Learning Advisor may participate in SSG and/or care team meetings where required to help resolve complex issues and ensure students in care receive priority access to services.

They also deliver professional development to schools, Case Managers, CSOs and carers with a focus on the education and wellbeing of students in out-of-home care. Learning Advisors provide information and advice to schools and Case Managers about services and programs available to support each student in OOHC.

2.3.3 Koorie Cultural Advisor

The Koorie Cultural Advisor works closely with schools in the region to advocate for the educational and cultural needs of Aboriginal students in out-of-home care, and provide specialist advice where required.

The Koorie Cultural Advisor draws on the capacity and expertise of the Koorie Education Coordinators (KEC) and Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESO) to have a comprehensive and consistent approach to supporting Aboriginal students in out-of-home care. The KESO should attend the first SSG meeting for each Aboriginal student in out-of-home care and continue to attend in complex matters, as determined by their professional judgement.

The LOOKOUT Centre Koorie Cultural Advisor provides advice and guidance to Case Managers to ensure the development of appropriate cultural plans for all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care.[2] A cultural support plan is a tool Case Managers use to maintain or strengthen Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children's connections to their families, communities and culture.

In order to deliver on the actions and recommendations of Taskforce 1000,[3] the Koorie Cultural Advisor fosters productive and collaborative working relationships with ACCOs, peak agencies and the KECs and KESOs in order to collectively improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children and young people in statutory care.

2.3.4 Psychologist

The Psychologist provides professional advice and support to principals, school communities and networks, carers and CSOs. Drawing on their training and expertise in psychology, their role is to effectively advise and support the development of IEPs, ENAs, and SSGs and liaise with SSS staff. The Psychologist may participate in SSG and/or care team meetings where required to help resolve complex psychological/behavioural issues.

The Psychologist also delivers professional development to schools, targeted training and interventions to Case Managers and CSOs with a focus on the education and wellbeing of students in out-of-home care.

2.3.5 Early Childhood Learning Advisor

The Early Childhood Learning Advisor supports early childhood service providers, local government, CSOs and DHHS to ensure all children in out-of-home-care have access to and are supported to attend three and four year old funded kindergarten, and to transition to school. They work with the Learning Advisors to ensure consistency of support and sharing of information. They deliver professional development to early childhood service providers with a focus on education, transition and wellbeing of children in out-of-home care.

2.3.6 Administrator Officer

The Administration Officer manages the daily administrative requirements of the LOOKOUT Centre, including administrative support to the LOOKOUT Centre Principal.

2.3.7 Department (Centrally based)

The LOOKOUT Centre initiative is premised on collaboration, including across agencies and within government departments. The Regional Services Group provides support and is responsible for implementation of the program. They are also responsible for providing a consistent LOOKOUT Centre model and establishing this across the state.

The Early Childhood and School Education Group (ECSEG) is located centrally and is responsible for ensuring that the LOOKOUT Centres are informed by and link with, state-wide out-of-home care policies, programs and frameworks, and does so in close collaboration with DHHS. ECSEG seeks opportunities for systemic improvement to the LOOKOUT program, and educational engagement and achievement of students in care.

LOOKOUT CENTRES: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

3. WHO DO LOOKOUT CENTRES WORK WITH?

3.1 Working in partnership - team around the learner

LOOKOUT Centre staff work closely with schools and staff across the Department, DHHS, carers and the community services sector.

Co-location and collaboration with the Department's regional and Area based teams enables the LOOKOUT Centre team and departmental staff to provide a comprehensive response to the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care.

In regions, this includes working with the Early Childhood and School Support Division and the School Improvement Division. In Area based teams, this includes working with the Health, Wellbeing and Specialist Services Branch, Education Improvement Branch and the KESOs in the Service Support Branch. 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.

LOOKOUT Centres sit within Schools and Regional Services workforces in the Early Childhood School Services Division of the Department.

In keeping with the multidisciplinary approach of the Department's Area based model, the LOOKOUT Centre works with and across the regional and Area teams, collaborating with Health, Wellbeing and Specialist Services, Education Improvement, and Service Support staff. LOOKOUT Centres bring focus to the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care and collaboratively work to embed a culture of shared responsibility across the Department's regional and Area-based workforces.

Figure 2 illustrates how LOOKOUT Centres link with both regional and Area based teams. Each LOOKOUT Centre utilises their student data to develop priority cohorts among the children and young people in care across the region. While there may be some variation across the state and between LOOKOUT Centres, priority is usually given to students who are:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- in residential care
- disengaged or not attending school regularly
- not enrolled
- experiencing frequent or lengthy suspensions
- are at risk of or have been expelled
- transitioning to Secondary school
- known to youth justice
- of a non-English speaking background.

Figure 2. LOOKOUT Centre in relation to the regional and Area context

3.2.1 The Designated Teacher in schools

Designated Teachers are a responsibility introduced to Victorian schools as part of the LOOKOUT Centre model. Designated Teachers play a pivotal role with LOOKOUT Centres by monitoring students within their schools. Designated Teachers will:

- have oversight of IEPs and ensure they are of high quality and regularly updated at least twice per year
- see that SSGs are established and meet at least once a term
- ensure students have a Learning Mentor.

The Designated Teacher handbook is available on the LOOKOUT Centre webpage at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/designatedteacher.aspx

3.2.2 Care team

Led by the Care Manager (see below), a care team is the group of people who jointly plan for and support the care of a child or young person in out-of-home care. The team work together to determine and undertake the tasks that parents ordinarily do to provide good care for a child or young person.

Residential care

For children in residential care, the care team has a slightly different composition than children in foster or kinship care. The care team is comprised of a CSO staff member who leads the care team, the Case Manager (this may be the child protection practitioner, the CSO based contracted case manager if the case is contracted, or a disability or other CSO based Case Manager if the placement is authorised via a child care agreement), the key residential care staff and the child's parents (unless considered inappropriate).

The house supervisor (or equivalent title) is the staff member responsible for the overall care provided in the residential care household (if not already involved as the CSO-based care manager) and must be a member of the care team established for every child resident in that household. Other key adults closely involved in the care of the child (for example, the child's grandparent, respite care worker, Aboriginal elder or other significant adult) may also be members of the child's care team.

Residential carers and other CSO staff are expected to play a vital role in contributing to each child's case planning goals being achieved. They are to provide appropriate levels of support and supervision to each child through the care and placement planning process and will cooperate and collaborate with all services involved with the child.

The CSO providing the residential placement manages, actions and reviews day-to-day care arrangements for children. This means that CSOs hold the lead responsibility for care planning regardless of whether case management responsibilities have been contracted to the CSO.
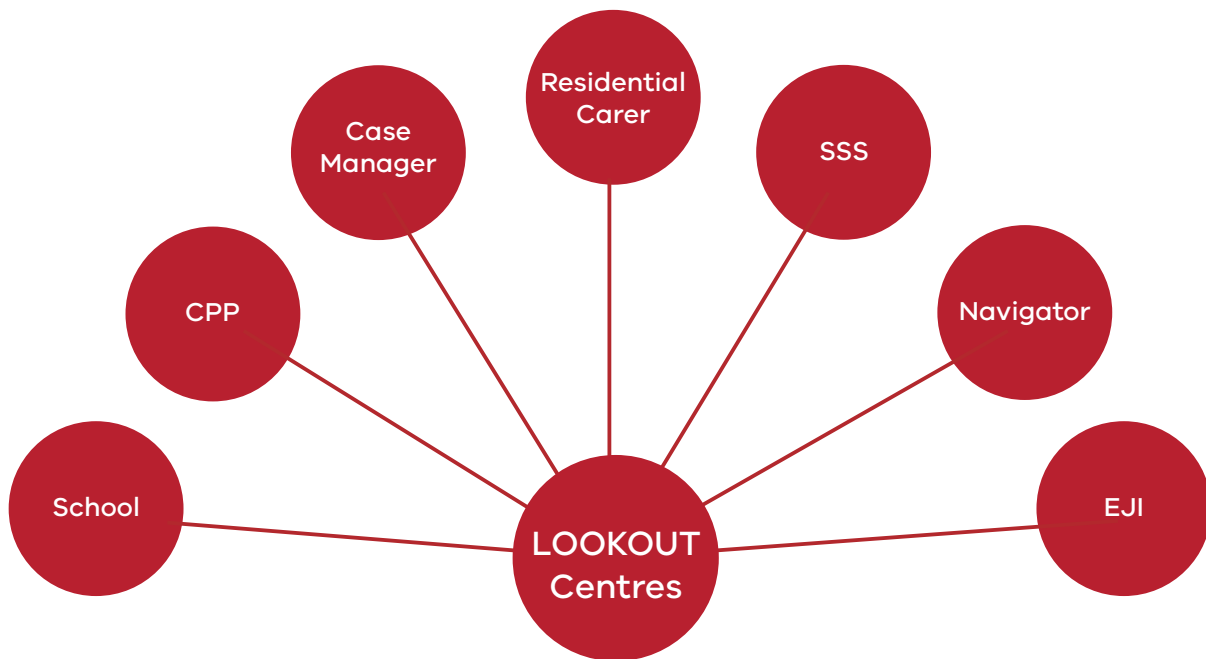

Figure 3. Working in partnership – LOOKOUT Centres as part of the team

3.2.3 Case manager

The Case Manager is the person responsible for implementing the child's statutory case plan, and includes both DHHS Child Protection Practitioners (CPP), and Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC), CSO and ACCO Case Managers. Case management is usually undertaken by child protection (DHHS). Case management of children and young people subject to a Children's Court order can be contracted to a CSO or ACCO.

If case management is contracted to a CSO or to an ACCO that is not delivering ACAC, DHHS maintains statutory responsibilities for the case (for example, case planning, reviews, court applications and other legislated requirements).

Children who are case managed by an ACCO that is delivering ACAC (e.g. VACCA) are not case contracted, rather the case manager in the ACCO has the same statutory delegations as a DHHS CPP.

Key responsibilities of Case Managers for students in out-of-home care include (but are not limited to):

- ensure that up-to-date information, including an accurate school name, year level and attendance level, is recorded in the education screen on the DHHS Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) or Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP)
- provide information about the child or young person's history, care arrangements and relevant education history to the school as soon as possible, including a record of school(s) or early childhood centre(s) the child has attended
- participate in the SSG at a minimum of once per term, and in any suspension or expulsion conferences involving members of the SSG
- maintain proactive engagement with school contacts and ensure continued involvement with the student's IEP
- work with the care team to complete a cultural plan for Aboriginal students
- upload all school assessments, plans and reports to CRIS
- work with the care team to ensure family contact arrangements, non-urgent or critical child protection related assessments and interviews occur outside of school hours, to avoid disruption to learning.

Further information about the responsibilities of the Case Manager is available in Partnering Agreement at:
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx

Further information about the Case Manager and CPP functions within DHHS is available at:
http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/our-workforce/operating-model/workforce-structure-and-roles

3.2.4 Care manager

Care managers are sometimes referred to as key workers. A child's care manager is someone in the placement agency who has been allocated a key role to support a child. The care manager could be a residential service key worker, a foster care agency worker or kinship support service worker.

Care managers have responsibility for a child's day-to-day care, including ensuring their needs are met in the areas of education, health, wellbeing, identity and relationships. Care managers coordinate the care planning process and make sure the case plan and care plan are aligned. Care managers may call meetings (care team meeting) of professionals to discuss a child's care.

If the child is in a departmental placement or a kinship placement and not receiving kinship support from a CSO, the child protection case manager is also the child's care manager.

3.2.5 Carer

A carer is an integral part of the care team and may refer to kinship, foster and permanent carers. A carer has day-to-day responsibility for a child or young person in out-of-home care and endeavours to ensure their safety and wellbeing. A carer must be able to form a positive relationship with the child or young person that provides nurturing support, stability and guidance. By definition, a carer is not the child or young person's parent. A kinship carer is assessed and approved by child protection, a foster carer or permanent carer is accredited and approved by a CSO (Child Protection Manual, 2016).

3.2.6 Student Support Services

Student Support Services (SSS) do vital work in supporting students' health and wellbeing – particularly the most vulnerable students. SSS are critical to building an excellent education system that reduces the impact of disadvantage.

SSS assist children and young people facing a range of barriers to learning to achieve their educational and developmental potential, by providing a range of strategies and specialised support at individual, group, school and network levels. SSS operate as part of the Department's area multi-disciplinary teams to:

- work in collaboration with services within the community to identify and intervene early with children and young people who have additional needs or are at risk of disengagement
- develop the capacity of the workforce within schools to meet the requirements of children and young people with additional needs, or who are experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability, so they achieve successful education and wellbeing outcomes

- facilitate the co-ordination and development of ENAs (in some limited cases this may be undertaken by a third-party rather than a SSS staff member)
- target the delivery of individual support services to those who require specialised expertise, assessment and intervention in order to overcome barriers to learning
- respond to emerging student wellbeing needs and contribute to identified school and network priorities
- respond to critical incidents involving students, staff and school communities
- facilitate and strengthen partnerships between the SSS, early childhood services, community organisations, and health, family, child, mental health and youth services in order to provide greater options and coordinated service provision for children, young people and their families.

In Catholic schools, the closest equivalent to SSS is Learning Diversity/Learning Adjustments, which performs assessments and wellbeing staff within Catholic schools.

Further information about SSS is available at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/studentsupport.aspx

3.2.7 Koorie Engagement Support Officers

KESOs are Department staff who work with education and family service providers, key stakeholders and the Koorie community to improve early childhood participation, student engagement and wellbeing, student retention and achievement and access to higher education and further training pathways.

KESOs are a critical link between the Department, agencies and communities to improve outcomes for Koorie children and young people. They work with education providers to deliver advice on the establishment of culturally inclusive learning environments and provide guidance to assist the coordination of services to support re-engagement of at-risk Koorie children and young people.

3.2 Working in partnership – engagement programs and providers

3.2.1 Navigator

The Navigator program is an Education State initiative that supports young people aged 12–17 years who have attended less than 30 per cent of the previous school term. It aims to increase the numbers of young people connected to school and engaged in learning.

Navigator was launched as a pilot in eight areas across the state (Mallee, Central Highlands, Western Melbourne, Hume Moreland, Goulburn, Ovens Murray, Southern Melbourne and Bayside Peninsula), and will be expanded statewide over three years from 2019-2021. In January 2019 Navigator will commence in Brimbank Melton, Loddon Campaspe and Inner Gippsland areas.

Within each area a Navigator Coordinator (departmental employee) manages the implementation of the program locally and a Navigator Provider (contracted CSO) undertakes case management support with disengaged young people.

The LOOKOUT Centres may refer eligible students living in care to the Navigator program.

Further information and area updates are available on the Navigator website: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/navigator.aspx

3.2.2 Education Justice Initiative

The Education Justice Initiative (EJI) is a program run by the Department and supported by the Children's Court of Victoria. The program aims to improve educational outcomes and to disrupt patterns of offending by providing appropriate supports to reconnect court-involved young people with education. The program is available on Children's Court sitting days in all headquarter courts, Koorie Children's Courts and higher volume Children's Courts across Victoria.

Key activities of EJI staff include:

- informing young people, families and support workers about education options
- facilitating enrolments in schools, alternative settings, and vocational courses
- liaising with schools and the Department to resolve education issues and connect children to necessary support
- providing information to the court about education issues and plans for individual children.

EJI also provides secondary consultation to Youth Justice and the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service. EJI accepts referrals from young people and their families, police, youth justice and diversion workers, legal practitioners, magistrates, community organisations and others at court.

If a young person referred to EJI lives in out-of-home care, EJI staff contact the relevant LOOKOUT Centre to discuss the young person's education issues, plan next steps and determine lead responsibilities. EJI staff may also request information from LOOKOUT Centre staff regarding a young person's education for provision to court and other stakeholders as appropriate.

3.2.3 Flexible learning options

School is always the preferred location for educating school-aged children and young people.

The Department expects all schools to be inclusive and pursue a range of strategies to support students in out-of-home care to remain in school and realise their full potential. However, sometimes life circumstances mean that a small number of students aren't able to attend mainstream schools, and they transition for a short and fixed period to a more flexible and individualised setting that keeps them engaged and learning. In these circumstances, it is expected that all referrals from government schools to FLOs follow the below referral process for a child or young person who is in out-of-home care:

- Approval should be based on evidence provided by the school, the student, the family or carer and, if relevant, external services that are supporting the young person, to determine whether the transfer to a FLO is in the best interests of the young person.
- Approval should also take into account what steps have been taken by the current school to maintain the child or young person's engagement in the mainstream setting.

Specific approval is required by the Regional Director for referrals of a child or young person that is:

- is under 15 years of age
- is being referred following an expulsion
- in out-of-home care
- has been involved in the youth justice system
- identifies as Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander, or
- is eligible for funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities.

Regional Director approval is not required for referrals to a Flexible government school or to a Flexible in-school program that is within the referring school.

Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) have an important role to play to support students to increase their engagement and achievement and support them back into school and/or onto further education and training. Different types of learning options are appropriate and required in different circumstances, including within school programs, re-engagement programs attached to schools and community-based programs.

For all of these options it is expected that the program is focused on improving the education outcomes of students through delivery of accredited curriculum, as well as providing wellbeing supports. These programs should also have established links to at least one school, with identified pathways for students between the program and the school. This ensures that enrolling schools continue to have an ongoing responsibility for students in a FLO and that students in out-of-home care are supported to return to school to complete their education in a mainstream setting wherever possible.

Department Area teams can provide more information on high quality options available locally.

TEAM AROUND THE LEARNER – A FRAMEWORK FOR COORDINATED SUPPORTS

Team Around the Learner (TAL) provides a framework for a holistic, team based and individualised approach to support learners at risk of disengaging, or who have disengaged from education and learning. TAL aims to deliver a more streamlined and coordinated approach to supporting learners who may have additional and/or complex needs, such as children and young people in out-of-home care.

The team comprises multidisciplinary professionals who work together as a collaborative network around the child or young person, communicating and sharing information, knowledge and skills. People are brought together to work and coordinate a plan to meet all the needs of the learner, and to support them to prevent disengaging or to support re- engagement in learning.

Most important to the TAL is the focus on the individual student. The TAL is made up of people who are connected to the learner through natural, community and formal support relationships. Team members may include any identified education professionals, health professionals, community members, parents/caregivers, external agencies and community members involved in the life of the learner.

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

LOOKOUT CENTRE STUDENTS

4. WHO DO LOOKOUT CENTRES SUPPORT?

4.1 Who is on the LOOKOUT Centre student roll?

The LOOKOUT Centre student roll includes all school-aged children and young people in statutory out-of-home care in Victoria. Data on out-of-home care status from DHHS is matched with school enrolment data by the Department. The student roll enables greater visibility of the enrolment status of children and young people in out-of-home care, ensuring no one is left behind.

The student roll is the key source of information that underpins and focuses the LOOKOUT Centre's efforts to lift the educational outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care. The roll acts as the springboard, launching various agents to act in the best interest of the child/young person should they not be enrolled, attending or achieving in school.

The LOOKOUT Centre doesn't receive referrals like a traditional service or program. As LOOKOUT supports all students in kinship, foster and residential care arrangements, as well as the first 12 months of Permanent Care, DHHS data provides the basis for the student roll. However, LOOKOUT staff are advised of students in out-of-home care by a range of professionals who work with or have an interest in students in care, such as principals, teachers, Case Managers, foster carers and CSOs. LOOKOUT staff validate this advice against the student roll and confirm any discrepancies with DHHS to ensure that the student roll remains accurate and up-to-date.

The student roll brings together information from DHHS and departmental systems to give an accurate picture of student placement and enrolment status.

4.1.1 Age range of students

LOOKOUT Centres monitor the educational progress of all Victorian children in out-of-home care 0–18 years old. While the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* defines compulsory school age as 6 to 17 years, LOOKOUT recognises that students as young as five begin school and that many students do not complete Year 12 or equivalent until they are 18 years and over.

4.1.2 Legal status

LOOKOUT Centres support children and young people living in court ordered (statutory) out-of-home care only, be that in kinship, foster or residential lead tenant care, as well as permanent care. For school aged children and young people in permanent care LOOKOUT Centres continue to provide support during the first 12 months of entering permanent care.

4.2 Where do students on the LOOKOUT Centre student roll live and go to school?

4.2.1 Education placement

The educational and care experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care are interdependent, with placement changes often meaning a change in school enrolment, and occasionally a breakdown in school enrolment resulting in a change of placement.

Under the *Education and Training Reform Act* parents (and guardians) are responsible for ensuring that children and young people of compulsory school age (6–17 years) are enrolled in an appropriate school or training provider, or registered for home schooling.

Children and young people are included on the LOOKOUT student roll if they are in out-of-home care and of school age. They are monitored by the LOOKOUT Centre in the region in which they are enrolled to attend school or registered for home schooling.

When students change schools, Designated Teachers must make sure the Designated Teacher at the new school is provided with any information they need to assist the transition as quickly as possible. This information should include the IEP along with other school records. This requirement is in addition to the requirements under the school transfer policy.

Further information on the school transfer policy is available on the DET website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/participation/Pages/transfers.aspx

4.2.2 Care placement

DHHS is responsible for making placement decisions for children and young people in care under the *Children, Youth and Families Act*.

Children and young people in out-of-home care often experience a number of placement changes, sometimes at short notice. This is for a range of reasons, including the capacity of carers to continue to provide a home for the child or young person, or the limited number of foster carers available compared to the number of children and young people in care.

Students are monitored by the LOOKOUT Centre in the region in which they are enrolled to attend school, unless they are not enrolled. In this instance, they are monitored by the LOOKOUT Centre in which their care placement is located.

DHHS Best Interest principles

In Victoria, the DHHS Best Interests case practice model provides the foundation for working with children, young people and their families to address issues and to provide a supportive and cohesive response. Effective practice requires the development of good working relationships between services, including working in partnership with parent/s, where possible, with the child's best interests as the priority.

The Best Interests principles contained within the *Children, Youth and Families Act* states that the best interests of the child must always be paramount. To determine whether any decision or action is in the best interests of the child a range of factors must be considered, including:

- protection of the child from harm
- protection of the child's rights
- promotion of the child's development
- the child's views and wishes (if it is reasonably possible to ascertain them)
- the need to strengthen, preserve promote positive relationships between the child's parent, family members and those significant to the child,
- the need, in relation to an Aboriginal child, to promote and protect their cultural and spiritual identity, and connectedness to their Aboriginal family and community
- the child's social, individual and cultural identity and religious faith (if any)
- the child's age, maturity, sex and sexual identity.

Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is a national principle that has been adopted in every Australian jurisdiction and confirmed in legislation. The principle arose in Australia in the late 1970s in a time when policy direction in Australia shifted from assimilation to promotion of self-determination and the best interests of children, and was driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care agencies drawing on the experiences of Native Americans.

It is argued that the principle is not simply about where or with whom an Aboriginal child is to be placed, but also recognises the expertise of Aboriginal people to make the best decisions concerning Aboriginal children and the importance of maintaining Aboriginal children in their family, community, culture and country.

In Victoria, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is enshrined in Division 4 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* by prioritising and specifying the criteria for the placement of Aboriginal children who are unable to remain safely at home.

The hierarchy of placement options for Aboriginal children requiring out-of-home care is specified in section 13 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* as follows:

- as a priority, wherever possible, the child must be placed within the Aboriginal extended family or relatives and, where this is not possible, other extended family or relatives
- if, after consultation with the relevant Aboriginal agency, the first option is not possible or feasible, the child may be placed with:
  - an Aboriginal family from the local community and within close geographical proximity to the child's natural family
  - an Aboriginal family from another Aboriginal community
  - as a last resort, a non-Aboriginal family living in close proximity to the child's natural family
- any non-Aboriginal placement must ensure the maintenance of the child's culture and identity through contact with the child's community.

Children, Youth and Families Act (section 14) requires consideration when placing a child of the self-identification and expressed wishes of the child, ensuring that, if a child's parents are from different Aboriginal communities, there is opportunity for continuing contact with the other parent's family, community and culture should the child not be placed with them. In addition, if the child is placed with non-Aboriginal family members, the Act specifies that arrangements must be made for the child's continuing contact with their Aboriginal family.

Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC)

ACAC is a new program for Aboriginal children and young people subject to a Children's Court protection order. Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* 2005 enables the Secretary of the DHHS to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to undertake specified functions and powers in relation to a Children's Court protection order for a specified Aboriginal child. Once a protection order for an Aboriginal child has been made by the Children's Court, an approved ACCO delivering ACAC may be authorised to take on total responsibility for administration of the child's protection order, including case planning and case management.

Further information on ACAC is available at: https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-children-aboriginal-care-program
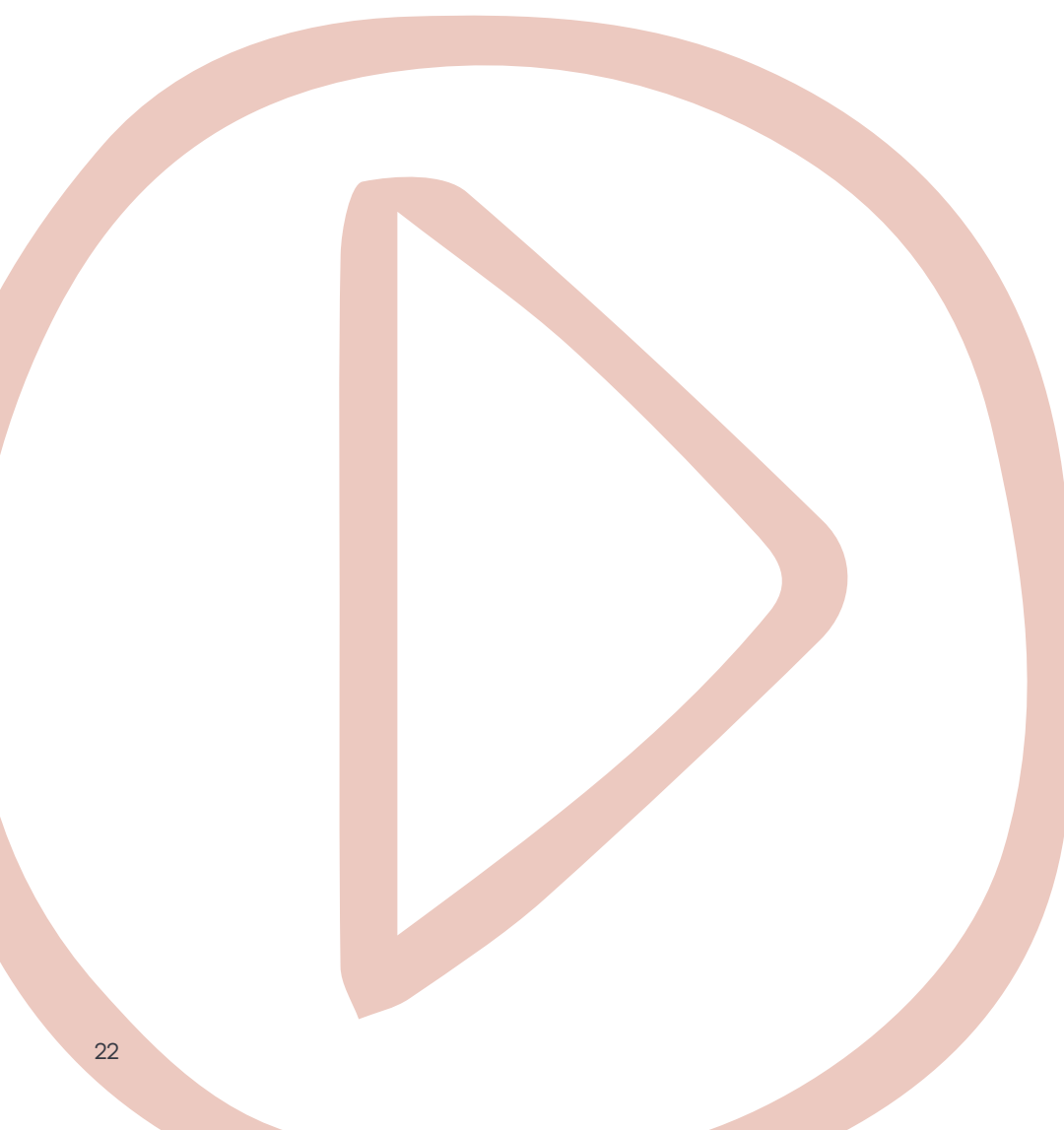
LOOKOUT CENTRES AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

5. HOW DOES THE LOOKOUT CENTRE WORK?

The Centres work to improve the educational attainment of children and young people in out-of-home care by:

- advocating for the best educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care
- working with schools and education and training providers to make sure all parties understand and deliver on their obligations under the Partnering Agreement
- providing advice, support and training to assist education staff to meet their obligations under the partnering agreement, to make sure that students in out-of-home care have the best available resources and opportunities to learn and achieve
- providing professional development to school staff regarding the importance of quality IEP, SSG, Learning Mentors and the impact of trauma on learning and behaviour
- working with Case Managers, which includes DHHS CPP, ACAC Case Managers, or CSO or ACCO Case Managers, and carers to raise the profile of education and embed education as a priority when decisions are made about a child or young person's care
- establishing a Designated Teacher in every Victorian school who is the champion for students in out-of-home-care in their school
- establishing better data linkage between the DET and DHHS, so that students in care can be more effectively monitored and supported, particularly during transitions in care or education settings.

5.1 School responsibilities to students in out-of-home care

Enrolling schools and education providers are responsible for the educational achievement and wellbeing of all students. This is especially true of students in out-of-home care, whose educational journey is more likely to be disrupted through multiple placement changes and multiple school enrolments.

Each enrolling school is responsible for providing a safe, calm learning environment for all students. Creating inclusive schools in which all students are valued and their learning needs are understood and met benefits all students, not just those in out-of-home care.

5.1.1 PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Under the Partnering Agreement, school principals and leadership teams are responsible for ensuring that students in out-of-home care have the following:

- a Learning Mentor
- a SSG which meets at least once a term
- an ENA
- an up-to-date IEP
- prioritisation of referrals to education-related health and wellbeing services
- priority attention for applications to the Program for Students with Disabilities for students in enrolled at a government school.

5.1.2 Enrolment

As stated in the Partnering Agreement, schools must:

- enrol a child or young person without delay – any delay of more than one day must be reported to the Department Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director
- any delay of more than one week needs to be endorsed by the DET Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director
- ensure that accurate information regarding out-of-home care status is recorded in the school's student information record-keeping mechanism (in government schools this is under 'living arrangements' in CASES21)
- meet the requirements of the school transfer policy (government schools) and liaise with the child's or young person's previous school or early childhood education service to ensure the transfer of relevant information including the IEP or Transition Learning and Development Statement (for children entering prep at a government school) establish a SSG in the first week of the child's or young person's enrolment
- establish a SSG in the first week of the child's or young person's enrolment
- support the child or young person to stay at the school or maintain a connection with their school if a change must occur
- when a student leaves the school, meet the requirements of the school transfer policy (government schools) and provide appropriate information to the new school regarding the child's or young person's learning and support needs to ensure a smooth transition.

Departmental regions and Areas, and Diocesan Catholic Education Offices:

- facilitate the timely and effective enrolment of each child and young person in out-of-home care by providing advice and support to schools – there should be no reason to delay enrolment
- work with schools, DHHS and carers/CSOs/ ACCOs to resolve any enrolment difficulties in a timely manner
- support Aboriginal students by ensuring that LOOKOUT Centre Principals notify the KEC of the enrolment and that the KESO is invited to the first SSG meeting.

A child or young person in out-of-home care is generally to be enrolled in the neighbourhood school defined as the closest school to their permanent address or placement. Where a child or young person enters out-of-home care or changes placement, the Case Manager, Designated Teacher, school, parent and carer must give high priority to the stability of the child or young person's schooling and make every effort to support them to continue to attend their current school.

Where this is not possible, the Case Manager, in consultation with the parent and carer, should consult the local Department regional office or the Diocesan Catholic Education Office to identify the closest and most appropriate school.

It is important that the enrolment process occurs quickly and efficiently in order to prevent the student being unable to attend school, as delays to enrolment may increase the likelihood of absences and disengagement.

On enrolment, it is essential that the Case Manager ensure the school principal is advised in writing that the student resides in out-of-home care.

The school principal must then ensure the student's out-of-home care status is entered into the school's student information record-keeping mechanism (for government schools this is under 'living arrangements' in CASES21). The student roll is updated automatically when students enroll in government schools. Catholic and independent schools need to ensure that the LOOKOUT Centre is advised of new enrolments.

5.1.3 Introduction to the school

The Principal is usually the first point of contact within the school for students in out-of-home care. They play a key role in supporting students in out-of-home care to make a smooth transition to their new school, including making sure there are effective arrangements in place for the speedy transfer of information between relevant agencies.

At enrolment, the Principal and case manager should obtain appropriate information and establish the necessary supports to assist the child's or young person's introduction into the school.

A well-planned introduction into a school community is necessary for a child or young person in out-of-home care to effectively engage and regularly attend school. In situations where the child or young person changes school, the current Designated Teacher must ensure the Designated Teacher at the new school is provided with the information they require. The case manager should also assist the Designated Teacher at the new school in accessing appropriate information to support the development of an effective educational program for the child or young person.

Some children and young people in out-of-home care may not have been enrolled or participated in schooling for a period of time. These children and young people need particular attention and support to re-engage in a school or educational program tailored to their needs. The LOOKOUT Centre, in partnership with schools and regional offices of the Department and Catholic education dioceses can provide advice and assistance to Case Managers to identify an appropriate education or registered training program and to support enrolment processes.

5.1.4 Attendance

Daily school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind both socially and developmentally. Children and young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes, and higher incomes across their lives. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age.

Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled, during normal school hours every day of each term, unless:

- there is an approved exemption from school attendance for the student, or
- the student is registered for home schooling and has only a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities.

A Principal or Regional Director (depending on the circumstances) may authorise an exemption and provide written approval for student attendance or enrolment to be exempt or reduced to less than full time.

Arrangements for part-time attendance for any other reason are exceptional, should be **short-term only** and if the arrangement continues longer it must be **reviewed regularly.**

Any part-time arrangements must be made in consultation with the SSG, have a clear rationale that it is in the best interest of the child and identify relevant achievable goals. The school, with the SSG should undertake appropriate planning to increase attendance and gradually transition the student

back into full-time schooling. It is important to listen to the student to find out what would help them to attend and participate more in school. The decision and the plan should be documented in writing, for example through the student's IEP.

Case managers should ensure that a student's case plan includes specific strategies to support full- time school attendance. Case managers should facilitate referrals and engagement with service providers in accordance with the case plan.

A student is considered to be in attendance at school when involved in an offsite curriculum program or other activity organised by the school (for example an excursion or camp), or where the student is engaged in a re-engagement program or another school part-time to make up full-time attendance. In addition, the schools or settings have to have agreed to the time fractions, allocation of Student Resource Package (or other funding) and the educational plan for the student.

5.1.5 Student Support Group

The SSG is the primary mechanism through which schools, case managers, care managers, carers, families and support services collaborate to plan and support the education and wellbeing of a student in OOHC. SSGs are referred to as Program Support Groups in Catholic schools. The aim of the SSG is to ensure that those with the knowledge of and responsibility for the student work together to support engagement, attendance and achievement, and establish shared educational and social-emotional goals.

This group also monitors and evaluates the child or young person's progress. The SSG is responsible for the development of the IEP.

School principals must ensure a SSG is established for all children and young people in out-of-home care within the first week of enrolment to identify and address issues that impact on their educational achievement.

Schools must hold **at least one SSG meeting per term** and more frequently when a student's engagement, wellbeing, attendance or behaviour is of concern. Meetings should be inclusive of the student and all relevant professionals involved and focus on solutions and the individual strengths of the student. The SSG may include the school Principal or delegate, the case manager, SSS, the student's learning mentor, the classroom teacher, the student (where appropriate), the parent/guardian/carer/advocate and other agencies as needed. For Aboriginal students, the KESO will attend the first SSG meeting and should continue to attend in complex matters such as a student with a disability/PSD, multiple accommodation and/or school placements, significant attendance issues and multiple behavioural challenges.

LOOKOUT Centre staff may join a SSG in cases of complex student need, or at the request of a member of the SSG. They may act as an advocate for the student or their carer to ensure decisions are made in the student's best interests.

Schools should conduct SSGs internally even if other support agencies/carers/families are disengaged from the process.

It is important that the student plays an active and age-appropriate role in the SSG and contributes to the decisions and actions that are agreed, either in person or via a trusted adult (e.g. Learning Mentor). It is important that there is transparent and immediate action in response to any problems identified by the school, case manager, care manager, student, carers or (when appropriate) parents.

For further information on conducting SSGs is provided in the DET SSG guidelines at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcstusupp.aspx

5.1.6 Individual Education Plans

The SSG is responsible for developing an IEP to support the educational achievement and engagement of the student in out-of-home care. IEPs are referred to as Personalised Learning Plans in Catholic schools.

The purpose of an IEP is to describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the student. IEPs should be reviewed regularly in accordance with the timeline as agreed by all members of the SSG (or at least once per term).

The Designated Teacher has oversight of the IEP and works to support use of the IEP as an effective tool to promote the student's educational achievement and wellbeing. In conjunction with LOOKOUT Centres, Designated Teachers monitor students' IEPs and ensure students are meeting their learning goals.

If the student is not on track to meet their goals, the Designated Teacher works with the student's responsible teacher and SSG to promote the best way forward with the student to support their progress.

If a student changes school, the current school must forward the IEP to the new school at the time of enrolment.

5.1.7 Effective and high quality IEPs

Where they are used effectively, IEPs improve the educational experience of the student by helping everyone gain a clear and shared understanding about the teaching and learning provision necessary to best meet the student's education needs. A good IEP sets high quality expectations of progress and puts in place the additional supports the student needs in order to succeed. The IEP must:

- identify developmental and educational needs in relation to skills, knowledge, subject areas and experiences
- set short, mid and long term educational attainment targets agreed in partnership with the student and the carer, where appropriate
- be a record of planned actions, (e.g. on homework, extra tuition, study support, including the date by which these should be done), that the school and others will take to promote the educational achievement of the student based on an assessment of their educational needs
- include information on how the progress of the student is to be rigorously monitored and supported
- record details of specific interventions and targeted support that will be used to make sure personal education targets are met. In particular, one-to-one tuition has a particularly significant impact on the progress of students in out-of-home care, therefore this should be employed wherever appropriate as one of the key strategies for raising attainment
- include what will happen or is already happening in regards to any additional support which may be required
- set out how a student's aspiration, self-confidence and ambition is being nurtured, especially in consideration of longer term goals towards further and higher education, work experience and career plans
- ensure student voice
- be a record of the student's academic achievements and participation in the wider activities of the school and other out of school learning activities (e.g. sporting, personal development, community)
- provide information which helps all who are supporting the student's educational achievement to understand what works for them
- have clear accountability in terms of who, within the school, is responsible for making the actions identified in the plan happen.

Further information on IEPs is available on the DET website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcedplans.aspx

5.1.8 Educational Needs Analysis

There has been a substantial amount of research on the impact of abuse, trauma and disrupted attachment on brain development which can impact on school engagement and performance. Research indicates that children and young people in out-of-home care often have low levels of educational achievement and lower mean test scores for reading and numeracy than the general student population. Consequently, children and young people who are in out-of-home care often need targeted support to improve their educational progress and achievement.

Under the partnering agreement every child and young person who has been living in statutory out-of-home-care for at least three months (consecutively or for a period that adds up to three months) requires an ENA. SSS is responsible for developing ENAs for students enrolled in a Victorian government school.

DET and DHHS work collaboratively to develop ENAs for children and young people living in residential care in the following circumstances:

- a child or young person is not enrolled
- a child or young person is attending school intermittently
- an ENA is complex and needs several visits to complete, or
- if any other barriers exist to a child or young person receiving a timely ENA through SSS.

In developing an ENA, SSS and other professionals draw from a wide range of assessments. These can include:

- screening tools
- standardised psychometric assessments (cognitive assessments, educational achievement assessments)
- behaviour checklists
- speech and language assessments
- observations
- social competency.

Detailed guidance on the process for referral, undertaking an ENA, timeframes and follow-up are available in the ENA Guidelines.

Detailed ENA Quality Guidelines have also been developed for private providers who are contracted to undertake ENAs on behalf of DET. These guidelines outline the principles and expectations regarding the ENA process.

To make a referral to SSS to conduct an ENA schools must:

- hold a pre-referral discussion with the SSS Key Contact. The Key Contact may be the SSS representative at the initial SSG as part of the pre-referral process

- gain consent from the parent/legal guardian or mature minor
- submit a referral on the Student Online Case System (SOCS).

Further information on ENAs, and copies of the ENA Guidelines and the ENA Quality Guidelines, is available on the DET website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/ena.aspx

5.1.9 Suspension and expulsion

The Student Engagement policy provides schools with the information and tools they need to use their local knowledge to create and maintain positive, safe and engaging school cultures. The Student Engagement policy includes advice, resources and strategies for schools on:

- developing a Student Engagement Policy
- promoting positive student behaviour
- responding to challenging behaviour.

Disciplinary measures should always be proportionate to the nature of the behaviour and are best employed in combination with support measures to identify and address causes of the behaviour. Suspension and expulsion are serious disciplinary measures and are best reserved for incidents when other measures have not produced a satisfactory response or where there is an immediate threat to another person and immediate action is required.

Suspension is the process of excluding a student from the standard instruction or educational opportunities being provided to other students at the school for part of a day, a full day, or multiple days. Suspension is a serious disciplinary measure and is best reserved for incidents when other measures have not produced a satisfactory response. The procedures for suspension are set out in Ministerial Order 1125.

Expulsion is the process of permanently excluding a student from the school in which he or she is currently enrolled. As the most extreme disciplinary measure available to a principal, it should only be used after other forms of behaviour management have been exhausted and the school can demonstrate evidence that this has occurred. The student's behaviour must also be of such magnitude that expulsion is the only available mechanism.

A school must advise the Department's Regional Director or Area Director if they are considering expelling a student in out-of-home care. Secretary approval is required to expel a child aged eight or less.

Further information about student engagement, suspension and expulsion for Victorian government schools is available at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/participation/Pages/engagement.aspx

5.2 Department of Education and Training related supports to students

5.2.1 Student Support Services

The role of the SSS has been described in detail in section 3.1.6 of this handbook.

5.2.2 Support in schools

Primary Welfare Officer Initiative

The Primary Welfare Officer (PWO) initiative is designed to enhance the capacity of schools to develop positive school cultures and to support students who are at risk of disengagement and not achieving their educational potential. Eligible schools are provided with funding to employ a PWO, who may be an existing or new staff member.

PWOs promote a whole school approach to health and wellbeing within the school community and work in collaboration with students and parents; school staff including principals, teachers, aides, specialist staff, nurses and SSS officers and with broader community agencies.

Student Welfare Coordinators

Schools can choose to employ Student Welfare Coordinators (SWCs) to support their students. The role of the SWC is vital in responding to the needs of Victoria's young people. They are responsible for helping students handle issues such as truancy, bullying, drug use and depression:

- SWCs work with other welfare professionals and agencies to address student needs
- funds have been made available to all government secondary colleges to employ SWCs.

Further information about the PWO initiative and SWCs is available at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/expired/support.aspx

5.2.3 Program for students with a disability

The Department is committed to delivering an inclusive education system that ensures all students have access to a quality education that meets their diverse needs. The Victorian Government has outlined its vision for inclusive school education in the Education State, with the publication of the Program for Students with Disabilities Review and the government's response, *Inclusive education for all students with disabilities and additional needs* (2016).

The Program for Students with a Disability (PSD) is a targeted supplementary funding program for Victorian government schools. It provides resources to schools to support the provision of school-based educational programs for a defined population of students with disabilities, with moderate to high needs. Under the program, resources are provided directly to Victorian government schools to support the provision of school-based educational programs for eligible students with disabilities.

The PSD provides supplementary resources to support schools achieve three broad objectives for students with disabilities:

1. Student learning
Support and improve the learning of students. Key performance indicators include: reporting through the Victorian Curriculum framework, NAPLAN and school based assessment.

2. Student engagement and wellbeing
Support the access and participation of students in an inclusive schooling system. Key performance indicators include: attendance, retention and student school satisfaction survey.

3. Student pathways and transitions
Support transitions for students into, through and post school. Key performance indicators include attendance, retention and On Track data. Specific eligibility criteria apply for the PSD program.

Students living in out-of-home care who qualify for PSD funding are eligible to receive all the supports available to them.

Further information on the PSD program is available on the DET website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/psd.aspx

5.4 Catholic Education Commission Victoria supports to students

CECV is the governing body advising all Catholic schools in Victoria. CECV ensures that Catholic schools comply with relevant legislation and statutory roles.

CECV commits to creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments where human dignity is respected and authentic relationships are fostered. Students in out-of-home care are supported to engage in successful, meaningful learning opportunities that can make a significant contribution to improving overall life outcomes.

CECV is committed to working with schools to ensure the rights of children and young people in out-of-home care are protected and that they are able to realise their full potential through successful school engagement and improved academic performance, as per the requirements outlined within the Partnering Agreement.

Further information on the student supports available in Catholic schools is available at: http://www.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Our-Schools/Student-Services

5.5 Independent Schools Victoria supports to students

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

The principles, processes and requirements outlined within the Partnering Agreement are supported and endorsed by Independent Schools Victoria however they cannot be mandated for individual schools.

While the Partnering Agreement can guide the work of staff in independent schools, these schools are individual legal entities subject to their own policies and procedures. Independent schools have their own enrolment policies and record keeping processes.

Schools work with each student to ensure that they are educated in a way that maximises their potential in education and future life. Schools monitor each student's attendance, academic achievement and wellbeing and liaise with the relevant person with respect to these matters.

ISV supports their member schools by promoting the use of best practice processes as outlined in the Partnering Agreement.

Further information on the student welfare requirements that apply to all Victorian schools, including independent schools, is available at: https://www.is.vic.edu.au/managing-a-school/compliance-%20framework/school-operations/student-welfare

5.6 LOOKOUT Centre's professional development to schools

LOOKOUT Centre staff bring a multidisciplinary focus to their work with schools. With expertise in teaching, psychology and Aboriginal cultural inclusion, LOOKOUT Centre staff can deliver professional development to school leadership teams in the following areas:

- managing behaviours of concern
- leading an effective SSG
- trauma informed and culturally safe classroom practice
- promoting cultural understanding and safety training
- developing and implementing safety plans
- transitions (within and between schools, placements and life stages)
- training and information for foster and kinship carers.

LOOKOUT Centre staff training is typically delivered to school leadership teams in two- or three-hour sessions. Schools seeking training in other areas should discuss their training needs with the LOOKOUT Centre team operating in their region.

LOOKOUT CENTRES AND THE CARE SYSTEM

6. HOW LOOKOUT CENTRES WORK WITH CASE MANAGERS

6.1 Roles and accountabilities under the Partnering Agreement

Responsibility for students in out-of-home care is shared across government departments, agencies and contracted providers. These roles and accountabilities have been mapped in accordance with the Partnering Agreement. A snap shot of these can be found at Figure 4 on the following page.

6.2 Brokerage for education supports

DET has received education brokerage funding from DHHS for students living in residential and lead tenant arrangements. These funds ensure that ENAs occur and that recommendations arising from analyses are put in place.

DHHS Health and Education Assessment Coordinators (HEACs) are responsible for overseeing and managing the education brokerage allocation for children and young people in residential care. HEACs work closely with LOOKOUT Centre staff to identify children and young people who are eligible for brokerage funding and to ensure that the funds are provided for the student.

Education brokerage funding should be tied to implementing an education or vocational plan arising from a formal ENA, rather than being used for ad hoc education related costs.

Within the context of an educational or vocational plan, some examples of appropriate uses for education brokerage include:

- specialised assessments such as neuropsychological or autism assessments
- school or training related equipment
- individual tuition
- homework support
- glasses
- hearing tests
- hearing aids
- speech pathologist or therapist
- iPad/laptop for educational purposes.

Client expenses funding should cover routine educational costs, for example:

- school uniforms
- school fees
- stationery.

6.3 Advice and professional development for Case Managers

LOOKOUT Centre staff work closely with the Case Managers in their local DHHS division. This includes the provision of advice and professional development in the following areas:

- understanding the roles, responsibilities and obligations of the Partnering Agreement
- what makes a high quality IEP and how it relates to care planning
- how to effectively participate in SSG meetings
- assisting carers to support their student's education
- the role of the Designated Teacher in the school
- how to engage effectively with schools.

Figure 4. Summary of key roles and responsibilities for various agents under the Partnering Agreement

	LOOKOUT CENTRE	DET REGIONAL AND AREA OFFICES	DHHS DIVISION AND AREA OFFICES	SCHOOLS, CASE MANAGERS AND CSOS
ROLES	• provide professional development and advice to schools with a focus on the learning and development needs of students • in out-of-home care (in conjunction with experienced area-based/regional staff) • maintain student data to identify and monitor students with particular needs • work in collaboration with DET and DHHS staff to ensure students receive all supports to which they are entitled.	• provide services to support the health and wellbeing of all children and young people, particularly vulnerable cohorts, to enable them to learn and develop to their full potential • work closely with government schools to drive strong school improvement and student outcomes • work with LOOKOUT Centre staff as part of the area-based multidisciplinary team to support students in out-of-home care, including service support, health and wellbeing and Koorie teams.	• provide integrated DHHS services to achieve positive client outcomes at the local level • work closely with LOOKOUT Centre staff and DET Area-based multidisciplinary teams to ensure that the education needs of children and young people are included in care planning and care decisions • ensure that the work of the LOOKOUT Centre is aligned with and promoted through DHHS, Child FIRST, family service organisations, foster and kinship carers and residential care staff.	**Schools must:** • enrol students without delay • establish a SSG, IEP and appoint a Learning Mentor • provide a referral for an ENA for eligible students • participate in care planning **Case Managers must:** • advise the Principal in writing when a student in out-of-home care enrols • participate in SSGs and contribute to IEPs • provide schools with up-to-date advice on any changes.
ACCOUNTABILITIES	• the LOOKOUT Centre has a specific accountability for collecting and maintaining accurate data on students in out-of-home care to tailor supports for students and provide regular reports of student achievement, attendance and engagement • the accountabilities of DET staff to students in out-of-home care are captured in the Education and Training Outcomes Framework and the Regional Performance Monitoring Framework • the regional office is responsible for ensuring that students in out-of-home care are enrolled without delay and are attending school or an appropriate education setting		• accountabilities of DHHS child protection staff to the education of children in out-of-home care is directed by *Children, Youth and Families Act* • practice guidance is included in the Child Protection Manual • accountabilities have not changed with the introduction of LOOKOUT Centres.	• the accountabilities of schools, Case Managers and community service agencies are outlined in the Partnering Agreement • accountabilities have not changed with the introduction of LOOKOUT Centres.

LOOKOUT CENTRES AND CARERS

7. HOW LOOKOUT CENTRES WORK WITH CARERS

7.1 Foster and kinship carers

The responsibilities of foster and kinship carers can vary according to the length of time that a child or young person is placed with them, the age of the child or young person, the depth of experience of the foster carer and the involvement of the parent in the child's or young person's life. Foster and kinship carers should ensure that the child or young person in their care has access to learning, is encouraged to make the best use of it and to fulfill their potential. While this may not always be explicitly stated, this access and encouragement might include:

- working closely with the child's or young person school or educational placement
- taking an active interest in their homework
- encouraging them to value learning
- supporting their attendance at school
- advocating for their individual needs.

The LOOKOUT Centre can help foster and kinship carers by providing advice and support regarding:

- how to be involved in the SSG
- how to navigate the school system and develop a positive relationship with the school, including identifying the Designated Teacher in the school
- providing information sessions on how to be involved with and help students at school
- how to advocate for the needs of the child in their care.

Importantly, in all engagements with foster and kinship carers, the LOOKOUT Centre makes sure that carers have high expectations of the child or young person they care for and that they engage meaningfully with learning at school and at home.

The *Education Guide for Carers of Children Living in Out-of-Home Care in Victoria* provides carers with information about the supports and services to assist them and the children in their care to be connected and engaged in their education and to know where to go to get the support they need when they need it. The guide can be accessed at: https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/education-guide-for-carers-of-children-living-in-out-of-home-care-in-victoria/

Further information and resources for carers is available on the LOOKOUT website at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcresources.aspx

7.2 Residential care

The responsibilities of residential and lead tenant care workers match those of a foster carer in terms of supporting the education of children and young people in care. As with foster and kinship carers, LOOKOUT Centres provide guidance and support to residential and lead tenant care workers regarding:

- how to be involved in the SSG
- how to navigate the school system and develop a positive relationship with the school, including identifying the Designated Teacher in the school
- how to advocate for the needs of the child in their care.

The LOOKOUT Centre holds the same expectations for all care arrangements: that carers and care teams have high expectations of the child and young person in their care and that they engage meaningfully with learning at school and at home. This includes making sure that children and young people of school age are attending school and prioritising school attendance as part of care, and that during early childhood children are appropriately accessing kindergarten, childcare and early childhood services.

LOOKOUT CENTRES – ADVOCACY AND DECISION MAKING

8. REGIONAL LOOKOUT CENTRES STRUCTURE

8.1 Structure

LOOKOUT Centre Principals operate within the Department's regional structure. Under this model, Regional Directors are accountable for their regions' contribution to improved learning and development outcomes and report directly to the Deputy Secretary, Schools and Regional Services. Area Executive Directors are accountable for ensuring the effective operation of the Partnering Agreement in their area.

Each LOOKOUT Centre Principal leads a multidisciplinary team comprising a mix of professionals with the diverse skills required to support children and young people in out-of-home care. The Centre's staffing profile and roles and responsibilities are detailed in section 2.3.

8.1.1 Authority of LOOKOUT Centre Principals

LOOKOUT Centre Principals are authorised as senior members of the Department's regional team to advocate for the best outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. This includes negotiating with school principals, DHHS senior leaders and the Department's Regional Executive to broker the best educational outcomes for students in out-of-home care.

8.2 Decision making principles and issues resolution

Sometimes matters arise between schools, Case Managers, students and carers that require quick resolution. These might involve exclusions from school or placement decisions that have an unintended consequence for a student's ongoing engagement at school.

The LOOKOUT Centre does not replace the responsibilities of schools, Case Managers and carers in relation to a child's or young person's education. However, they may at times be the first point of contact in a matter that needs to be resolved and therefore may facilitate a resolution.

Guiding principles for managing issues relating to a child or young person's education are:

- immediate safety of children and young people is always the priority
- common-sense should prevail
- the issue should be resolved as close to its point of origin as possible
- escalation points should be clear
- resolution should be prompt.

LOOKOUT CENTRES – MEASURING CHANGE

9. DATA AND MONITORING

9.1 The LOOKOUT Centre student roll: the student database

Out-of-home care placements for children and young people are often temporary and transient. As children and young people move from carer to carer, it is common for them also to move schools. This makes it particularly difficult for the Department to keep track of where these students are. In order to provide a more accurate and comprehensive picture of Victoria's out-of-home care population, LOOKOUT Centres have a database linking validated and authorised DHHS data with validated and authorised student enrolment records. This database is consistent with both privacy and health records legislation.

With the consent of DHHS, LOOKOUT Centres securely store and match information that allows the Department and DHHS staff to have a full picture of the education status of students living in out-of-home care.

9.2 LOOKOUT Snapshot Data Reporting

Under the Partnering Agreement, all school sectors have committed to monitoring and reporting on the educational progress of students in out-of-home care. Data reporting from schools is critical to ensuring that students in out-of-home care are receiving the educational supports they need in order to thrive and achieve in school.

LOOKOUT Centres seek data reporting from schools a minimum of twice per year. The dates of the data reporting are timed to coincide with school census data collections.

The results of the LOOKOUT Snapshot data reporting play a critical role in continuing to monitor the educational progress of students in out-of-home care.

9.3 Information sharing

The Department, which includes all Victorian government schools, values the privacy of every person and is committed to protecting information that schools collect.

The LOOKOUT Centre collects and securely holds student enrolment information for students in out-of- home care in full compliance with Victorian privacy law – comprising the *Health Records Act* 2001 and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act* 2014.

The LOOKOUT Centre webpage includes advice to students and parents or guardians regarding:

- the information collected in the student roll
- why it is collected
- what it is used for
- how students, parents or guardians can access their information or make a complaint.

The LOOKOUT Centre Privacy Statement is on the LOOKOUT Centre webpage at: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcsupport.aspx

9.3.1 Health Records Art

The *Victorian Health Records Act* protects health information handled by the Victorian public and private sectors.

Health information is a specific type of personal information. Health information is considered personal information, that is, information or an opinion about the physical or mental health, or a disability of an individual. It includes any personal information collected to provide a health service.

The *Victorian Health Records Act* prescribes 12 Health Privacy Principles (HPPs) that apply to how all health information is handled in Victoria.

9.3.2 Privacy Act

The *Victorian Information Privacy Act* 2000 covers the handling of all personal information except health information in the public sector in Victoria. The Information Privacy Principles (IPPs) regulate how government agencies (e.g. schools) must manage personal information. They cover how and when personal information can be collected, how it should be used and disclosed, and storage and security. The Act also allows individuals to access aspects of the information and have it corrected if it is incorrect.

9.4 Evaluation and measuring success

The successes of the LOOKOUT Centre is measured by:

- improvements in educational outcomes for students in out-of-home care through enrolment, attendance, school engagement, and the proportion of students meeting their own personal goals
- improved student wellbeing and resilience, through consideration of a series of indicators
- more effective service delivery, evidenced through improved compliance with the Partnering Agreement and views regarding collaboration between service systems.

These success measures are consistent with national and state frameworks, including the *National Framework for Out-of-Home Care* and the *Department's Outcomes Performance Framework* and *Regional Performance Framework*. Where possible, measures allow for a direct comparison with the broader student cohort, so that we can see a clearer comparative assessment of student engagement, wellbeing and achievement. Targets are consistent with the Department's Education State Targets.

LOOKOUT Centre Principals report to their Regional Executive Teams. Centres have the capacity to provide reporting on a range of education, wellbeing and system indicators of children and young people in out-of-home care at the Area, regional and state level.

Measures and Benefits Informing Evaluation

BENEFIT: IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES (40%)
Measures:

- percentage of school aged students under statutory orders in out-of-home care enrolled with LOOKOUT Centre
- attendance rates
- explained and unexplained absences
- number and length of suspensions
- number of expulsions
- composite of engagement indicators
- proportion of students on the LOOKOUT Centre roll meeting their annual IEP progress measures.

BENEFIT: INCREASED STUDENT WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE (30%)
Measures:

- proportion of students on LOOKOUT Centre roll indicating increased wellbeing and/or a more positive outlook
- growth in the proportion of children reporting high levels of psychological resilience proportion of students who feel connected to their school
- proportion of students with a positive opinion about their school providing a safe and orderly environment for learning
- proportion of students feeling physically safe at school
- proportion of students reporting a positive opinion about teacher empathy proportion of students reporting a positive opinion of school (and student) morale proportion of students who experience bullying behaviour at school.

BENEFIT: MORE EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY (30%)
Measures:

- Designated Teacher appointments
- SSG established in each school and meets at least four times per year
- IEPs completed for all students in out-of-home care and reviewed at least four times per year
- all students in care more than three months have an ENA completed
- Learning Mentors are appointed by the school for all students on the LOOKOUT Centre roll introduce information management system
- professional development provided to all schools, carers, and Case Managers attendance by education sector staff at care team meetings
- improvement in data and information sharing between the Department and DHHS increased attendance at SSG by Case Managers

RESOURCES AND APPENDICES

10. RESOURCES

10.1 Departmental websites

Career Education Funding
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/
teachingresources/careers/Pages/mips.aspx

Diversity and Inclusion
www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/
default.aspx

Student Engagement
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/
behaviour/engagement/Pages/default.aspx

Educational Needs Analysis
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/
Pages/ena.aspx

Equal Opportunity
www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/divequity/Pages/
default_eeo.aspx

Human Rights Charter
www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/
Human_Rights.aspx

Individual Education Plans for students in out-of-
home care
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/
Pages/oohcedplans.aspx

LOOKOUT
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/
lookout.aspx

Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/
marrung.aspx

Out-of-home care education commitment:
partnering agreement
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/
Pages/oohcpartneragreement.aspx

Public Liability Insurance
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/
finance/pages/publicliability.aspx

Senior Secondary Re-engagement
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/
management/finance/Pages/srpref053.aspx

School Attendance
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/
studentmanagement/attendance/Pages/default.aspx

School Policy & Advisory Guide
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/
Pages/spag.aspx

Student Support Group
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/
Pages/oohcstusupp.aspx

Student Support Services
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/
safety/Pages/studentsupport.aspx

Vocational Education and Training delivered to
secondary school students
www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/
management/finance/Pages/srpref056.aspx

10.2 Other resources

Child Family Community Australia - children in care
resource sheet
https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/children-care

Child Protection Manual
http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/

Child, Youth and Family Act 2005 (Vic)
www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/
consol_act/cyafa2005252/

Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
www8.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/
consol_act/eatra2006273/

Program requirements for children in
residential care
providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/children-residential-care-
program-requirements-word

Program requirements for the Cultural Support
Plan Program
dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/
documents/201705/youth-justice-aboriginal-
cultural-support-plan-2008.pdf

The Best Interests framework for vulnerable
children and youth
dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/best-interests-
framework-vulnerable-children-and-youth

Victorian handbook for Foster Carers
https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-
handbook-foster-carers-word

11. APPENDIX

11.1 Legislative Framework

11.1.1 Children, Youth and Familes Act 2005

The *Children, Youth and Families Act* section 1 sets out provisions:

a. for community services to support children and families; and

b. for the protection of children; and

c. in relation to children who have been charged with, or who have been found guilty of, offences; and

d. to continue the Children's Court of Victoria as a specialist court dealing with matters relating to children.

There are specific provisions in relation to Aboriginal agencies (sections 6 and 18A–D) and Aboriginal child placement principles (sections 13–14).

Division 2, section 10 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* outlines a set of best interest principles which must underpin all decisions by those administering the Act. Those principles most relevant to the education of children and young people in state care include:

*   10(1) for the purposes of this Act the best interests of the child must always be paramount;

*   10(2) when determining whether a decision or action is in the best interests of the child, the need to protect the child from harm, to protect his or her rights and to promote his or her development (taking into account his or her age and stage of development) must always be considered;

*   10(3)(c) the need, in relation to an Aboriginal child, to protect and promote his or her Aboriginal cultural and spiritual identity and development by, wherever possible, maintaining and building their connections to their Aboriginal family and community;

*   10(3)(d) the child's views and wishes, if they can be reasonably ascertained, and they should

*   be given such weight as is appropriate in the circumstances;

*   10(3)(e) the effects of cumulative patterns of harm on a child's safety and development;

*   10(3)(f) the desirability of continuity and permanency in the child's care;

*   10(3)(n) the desirability of the child being supported to gain access to appropriate educational services, health services and accommodation and to participate in appropriate social opportunities;

*   10(3)(o) the desirability of allowing the education, training or employment of the child to continue without interruption or disturbance.

Section 11 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* outlines a set of decision-making principles that must be considered by the Secretary of DHHS or a community service when making a decision or taking an action in relation to a child. Those of most relevance to the education of children and young people under the care of the state include:

*   11(b) where a child is placed in out-of-home care, the child's care giver should be consulted as part of the decision-making process and given an opportunity to contribute to the process;

*   11(c) the decision-making process should be fair and transparent;

*   11(d) the views of all persons who are directly involved in the decision should be taken into account;

*   11(f) the child and all relevant family members (except if their participation would be detrimental to the safety or wellbeing of the child) should be encouraged and given adequate opportunity to participate fully in the decision-making process;

*   11(g) the decision-making process should be conducted in such a way that the persons involved are able to participate in and understand the process, including any meetings that are held and decisions that are made;

*   11(h) persons involved in the decision-making process should be:

    –   provided with sufficient information, in a language and by a method that they can understand, and through an interpreter if necessary, to allow them to participate fully in the process; and

    –   given a copy of any proposed case plan and sufficient notice of any meeting proposed to be held; and

    –   provided with the opportunity to involve other persons to assist them to participate fully in the process; and

    –   if the child has a particular cultural identity, a member of the appropriate cultural community who is chosen or agreed to by the child or by his or her parent should be permitted to attend meetings held as part of the decision-making process.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle holds that if it is in the best interests of an Aboriginal child to be placed in out-of-home care, in making that placement, regard must be given to the advice of the relevant Aboriginal agency, and that as a priority an Aboriginal child must be placed with the Aboriginal extended family or relatives and, where this is not possible, other extended family or relatives. Under section 13(2)(b) if, after consultation with the relevant Aboriginal agency, this placement is not feasible or possible, the child may be placed with an Aboriginal family from the local community and within close geographical proximity to the child's natural family; an Aboriginal

family from another community; as a last resort, a non-Aboriginal family living in close proximity to the child's natural family. Crucially, section 13(2)(c) states that any non- Aboriginal placement must ensure the connection of the child's culture and identity through contact with the child's community.

Under section 16(1)(e) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act,* the Secretary of DHHS has responsibility 'to work with other government agencies and community services to ensure that children in out-of-home care receive appropriate educational, health and social opportunities.

11.1.2 Education and Training Reform Act 2006

The *Education and Training Reform Act* provides for a high standard of education and training for all Victorians. Section 1.1.1(2) makes provision for or with respect to:

a. the years of compulsory schooling and the options available

b. vocational education and training, technical and further education, adult community and further education, and other post-compulsory education and training

c. the establishment and regulation of government schools and the regulation of non-government schools and home schooling

d. the establishment and regulation of post-compulsory education institutions and providers

e. the development and accreditation of courses and the issuing of qualifications

f. the recognition and regulation of the teaching profession and the maintenance of standards of professional practice for that profession

g. the employment in the teaching service of government school teachers and other persons

h. the monitoring, planning and development of the provision of education and training

i. the repeal and re-enactment of various Acts relating to education and training.

Under section 1.1.3 of the *Education and Training Reform Act*, 'parent' 'includes a guardian and every person who has a parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides'.

Section 1.2.1(2)(b) of the *Education and Training Reform Act* enacts the principle that 'all Victorians, irrespective of the education and training institution they attend, where they live or their social or economic status, should have access to a high quality education that:

i. realises their learning potential and maximises their education and training achievement;

ii. promotes enthusiasm for lifelong learning;

iii. allows parents to take an active part in their child's education and training.

Section 1.2.1(d) of the *Education and Training Reform Act* enacts the principle that 'parents have the right to choose an appropriate education for their child'.

Section 1.2.2(1) enacts the state's provision of universal access to education and training through the establishment and maintenance of a government education and training system. Section 1.2.2(2) enacts that all persons employed or engaged in the provision of government education and training by the state or in the administration of government education and training by the state must apply or have regard to the following principles (of which the most relevant are reproduced here):

a. instruction in the learning areas in schedule 1 is to be provided free of charge for all students (except overseas students) attending a government school to the completion of Year 12 if the student is under 20 years of age on 1 January in the year that the person undertakes instruction;

b. every student has the right to attend a designated neighbourhood government school with the exception of selective government schools that are determined by the minister;

c. a student has a guaranteed place at a TAFE institute or other public training provider to the completion of Year 12 of schooling or its equivalent if the student is under 20 years of age on 1 January in the year that the person undertakes study at the TAFE institute or other public training provider;

d. a student has a guaranteed vocational education and training place for a government subsidised course if:

the student is under 20 years of age on 1 January in the year the study is undertaken; or

i. the student is 20 years of age or older on 1 January in the year the study is undertaken, and the study leads to a higher vocational education and training qualification than the highest such qualification already obtained by the student in the following circumstances:

ii. the course of study is available and has been approved to receive a government subsidy; and

iii. the student meets the admission requirements for the course of study; and

iv. the student meets any citizenship or residency requirements to undertake the course of study and student is not an overseas student (Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary Documents, 2006).

11.1.3 Attendance

Section 2.1.1(a) of the *Education and Training Reform Act* determines that it is the duty of a parent of a child of not less than six nor more than 17 years of age 'to enrol the child at a registered school and to ensure the child attends the school at all times when the school is open for the child's instruction'.

Alternatively, the parent must under Section 2.1.1(b) 'register the child for home schooling in accordance with the regulations and [...] ensure that the child receives instruction in accordance with the registration'.

Under section 2.1.2(a) it is an offence for parents not to provide instruction to a student registered for home schooling.

Section 2.1.3 of the Act defines the following (abridged list) as reasonable excuses for a child not attending school or receiving instruction:

- (a)(i) illness, accident, an unforeseen event or an unavoidable cause; or (ii) a requirement to comply with another law;
- (b) there is no government school within a prescribed distance of the child's residence and the child is receiving a distance education program through a registered school;
- (d) the child has been suspended or expelled from a registered school and is undertaking other educational programs provided by the Department or another registered school;

Section 2.1.10 enacts the powers of school attendance officers. Sections 2.1.15–2.1.23 enact the school enrolment and attendance notification legislation, including notices, penalties and offences.

ENDNOTES

1   Dr Patricia NcNamara, Lisa Andrewartha, Michael Luckman, Dr Andrew Harvey, 'Out of care, into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers", *Access & Achievement Research Unit, Final Report,* La Trobe University, March 2015

    Judy Sebba, David Berridge, Nikki Luke, John Fletcher, Karen Bell, Steve Strand, Sally Thomas, Ian Sinclair, Aoife O'Higgins, *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data,* University of Oxford, University of Bristol, November 2015

    Anglicare Victoria, *Raising our Children: Guiding Young Victorians in Care into Adulthood, Socioeconomic Cost Benefit Analysis by Deloitte Access Economics,* April 2016

    Narey, Martin, Department for Education (DFE), *'Residential care in England: report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care',* July 2016

    Dr Anita Kochanoff, Jacynta Krakouer, Pre Mitchell, Jenny Trevitt, 'Early Years Transitions, Supporting children and families at risk of experiencing vulnerability', *Victorian Department of Education and Training, Early Childhood & School Education Group*, September 2016

    AIHW, *Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection* –1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015, 9 December 2016

    Victorian Government DHHS, *Out-of-Home Care outcome Tracking Survey – State-wide Report*, Cycle 1: April 2016, February 2017

2   Section 176 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act* outlines the statutory requirement for developing a cultural support plan for every Aboriginal child or young person placed in out-of-home care. The aim of a cultural support plan is to ensure Aboriginal children and young people remain connected to their:

    - family including extended family
    - Aboriginal community
    - culture
    - country

3   Taskforce 1000 is a collaborative project between DHHS and the Commission for Children and Young People which started in 2014. The project seeks to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people living in out-of-home care and inform future planning by reviewing the current circumstances of Aboriginal children and young people living in out-of-home care in Victoria. The project also seeks to identify and address the issues associated with the over representation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. The final report was released in 2016 and can be accessed here: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Publications-inquiries/always-was-always-will-be-koori-children-inquiry-report-oct16.pdf