

# ***Education Transitions***

Tabled 18 March 2015

The Auditor-General provides assurance to Parliament on the accountability and performance of the Victorian Public Sector. The Auditor-General conducts financial audits and performance audits, and reports on the results of these audits to Parliament.

On 18 March 2015, the Auditor-General tabled his performance audit report, *Education Transitions*.

## Overview

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- Early childhood services and schools face significant challenges transitioning students.
- This audit looked at how transitioning children are supported. It found that:
  - early-years progress is not replicated in middle years
  - school autonomy has resulted in some innovative practices
  - greater support is needed.
- The Department of Education and Training (DET) needs to focus on tackling the areas where no gains have been made.

When children are successful in transitioning from early childhood education and care to school, or from primary into secondary school, there are long lasting benefits to their later performance at school. However, transitions pose significant challenges to both the students and their schools.

The objective of the audit was to examine the effectiveness of the Department of Education and Training (the department), early childhood services and schools in supporting children to make successful transitions.

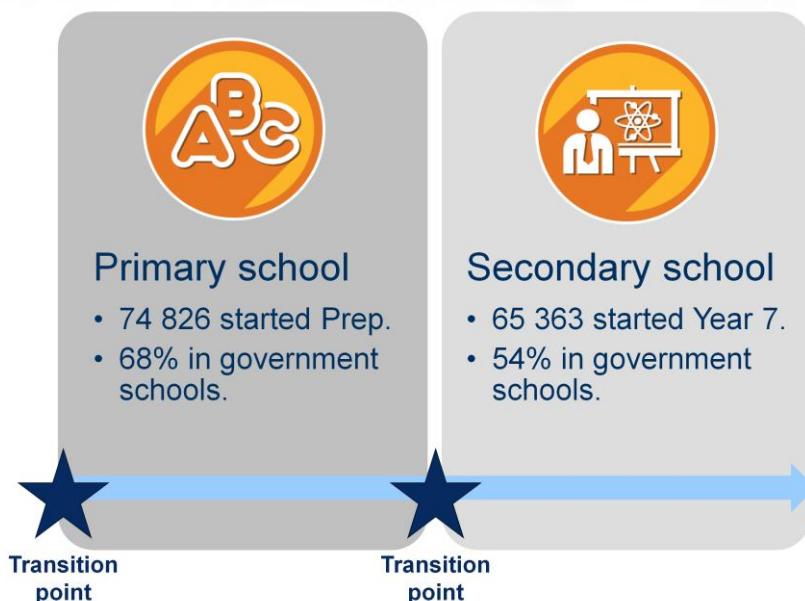
The audit found that:

- The department has developed a comprehensive, well-researched framework to support early-years transitions. These actions have contributed to improved outcomes.
- In contrast, the department does not have a strategy or framework for managing middle-years transitions. Engagement and academic outcomes for middle years students continue to decline as children move into secondary school.
- The push to increase school autonomy has resulted in some innovative approaches from schools to tackle transition challenges. However, greater support is needed from the department, particularly for middle-years transitions.

The department now needs to focus on tackling the areas where no gains have been made.

## Background

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In order to make a successful transition, children need support not only from their families, but also from the services that share their care.

They need to be prepared for the level and style of work expected of them and their schools need to understand and respond to their individual needs.

Schools and early childhood services deal with large volumes of children transitioning to a new environment every year. These include the two key transitions that all children undergo—when they begin their Prep year at primary school, and when they begin year 7 at secondary school.

In 2014:

- Almost 75 000 children started Prep, and
- 65 000 started Year 7.

The majority were in government schools.

This volume of transitioning requires significant resources from schools to effectively transition their students.

## Students transition from a wide range of schools 4

### Selection of 10 schools

School	Number of transitioning children entering the school	Number of early childhood services or schools children come from
Primary School 1	116	16
Primary School 2	106	16
Primary School 3	84	21
Primary School 4	52	26
Primary School 5	50	13
Secondary School 1	271	48
Secondary School 2	203	35
Secondary School 3	187	43
Secondary School 4	165	20
Secondary School 5	64	16

This figure, from page 40 of the report, shows the number of children who transitioned into a selection of 10 audited schools.

It also shows the number of services or schools that they transitioned from.

Students come from a wide range of services providers or schools—regularly in excess of 20. In one case a secondary school received 271 new Year 7 students from 48 separate primary schools.

In this context it is a challenge for schools to develop and maintain strong relationships with such a broad network of schools.

Where individual conversations are not possible, receiving schools place greater emphasis on the information that is transferred to them, making it critical that this information is available in a consistent, useful and timely form.

## Focus of this audit

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### Key areas examined

- DET guidance and support.
- DET's use of data to monitor outcomes.
- Practices of schools and early childhood services.

### Audit scope

- Site visits to 30 schools and services.
- Transitions into primary school and secondary school.

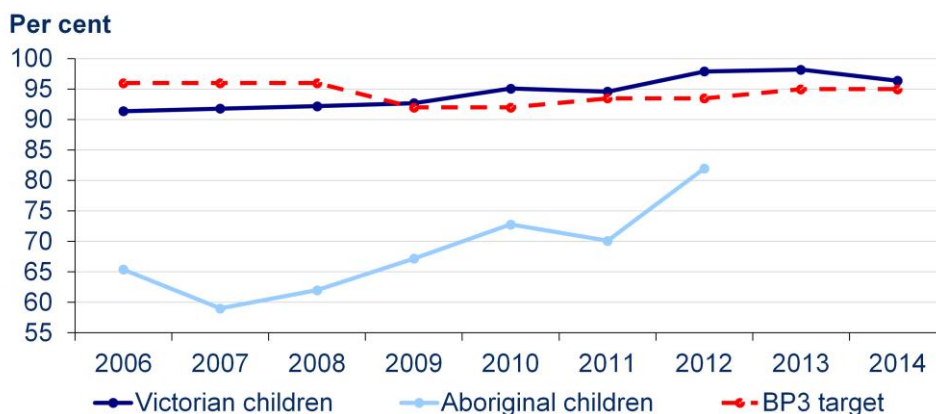
To examine the effectiveness of services to support children to make successful transitions, the audit examined:

- the department's guidance and support to schools and services
- its use of data to monitor outcomes and improve its practices
- the practices of schools and early childhood services to support students.

The audit involved site visits to 30 schools and early childhood services.

## Early-years outcomes improving

- Most children are well prepared to start primary school.
- Kindergarten participation is critical and improving.



Note: There is no separately reported data available for Aboriginal children since 2012.

Early-years outcomes are improving.

Most children are well prepared to start primary school.

Prep teachers' assessments show that children's developmental and academic preparedness have both improved.

Kindergarten programs play a critical role in preparing children to transition to school. While participation in kindergarten is not compulsory in Victoria, rates are high.

This chart shows the improvements that have been made in the reported kindergarten participation rate over the past nine years, including significant improvements for Aboriginal children.

## Early-years outcomes improving

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- DET's approach is robust and comprehensive.
- However, DET does not adequately monitor the impact of transitions.



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bikeriderlondon/Shutterstock.com.

**More could be done to monitor the quality and effectiveness of programs and initiatives.**

The department has implemented a comprehensive approach to supporting early-years transitions.

However, one in five children still begin school with a developmental vulnerability.

Particular cohorts of children—including those from Aboriginal backgrounds, areas with lower socio-economic status and boys—fare much worse.

The improvements in early-years outcomes have occurred concurrently with the department developing and implementing a comprehensive framework for early-years transitions. The framework includes:

- high-quality guidance and resources
- standardised transition statements for each child, and
- specifically-funded programs.

However, more could be done to better monitor the quality and effectiveness of the programs and initiatives in place to encourage a positive transition to school.



## Mixed middle-years outcomes

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- Middle-years outcomes are mixed.
- Some encouraging trends but further improvement needed.



*Photo courtesy of hxdbzxy/Shutterstock.com.*

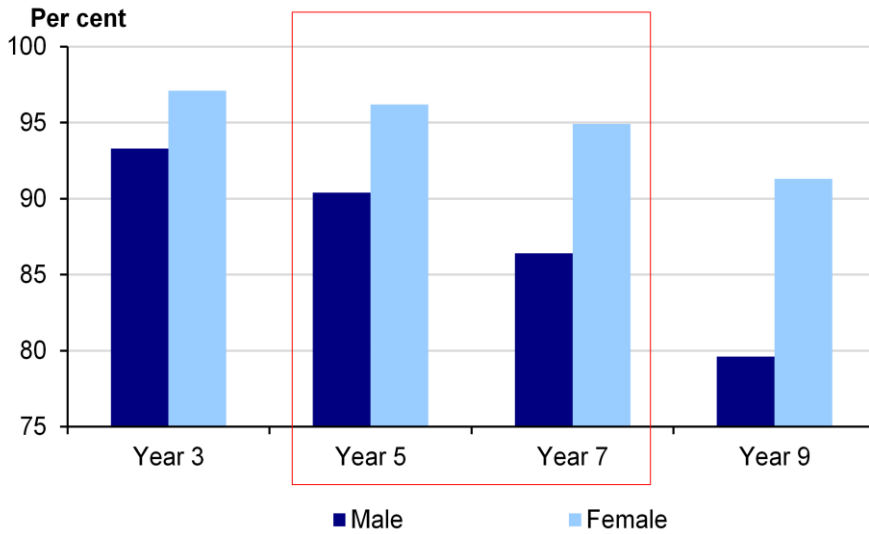
There have been modest improvements in some middle-years transition outcomes over the past seven years.

However, there are well established gender-based differences in both academic and engagement outcomes during the middle years that the department has not successfully addressed.



## Victorian students achieving national minimum standard for writing, 2014

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This chart shows how boys' writing performance declines at a far faster rate than their female peers as they progress through school.

This is particularly notable following the transition to secondary school (as shown within the red box on this chart).

This trend has persisted over the past five years.

## Mixed middle-years outcomes – *continued*

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- Despite discrepancies between boys and girls, DET has no gender-specific guidance for schools.
- DET does not provide enough support to schools.

**DET needs to better manage inconsistencies across the system and properly support schools to transition students effectively.**

The department has not done enough to fully examine middle-years outcome trends and to relate these back to the strategies being used by schools to transition students.

Unlike for early-years transitions, the department does not have a clear strategy or framework for middle years.

As a result, schools are tackling middle-years transitions in varying ways. While this has resulted in some innovative practices, it has also lead to inefficiencies across the school system.

There are simple steps that the department could take to better support schools to improve middle-years transitions. These include:

- evaluating the available data more thoroughly, and
- drawing on the successful approaches already in place for early years.

## More needs to be done to support transitions

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- Poor and inconsistent practices for transferring student information.
- Inadequate monitoring of vulnerable cohorts.
- DET's current approach is not helping to break down some of the more entrenched transition outcomes.

**DET needs to understand and monitor the barriers to successful transitions, the actions taken to address these barriers and associated outcomes for students.**

More needs to be done to support transitions, particularly in the middle years.

The timely transfer of information is hampered by:

- a lack of understanding about the use and disclosure of information among schools
- the capacity of schools to develop and maintain good relationships with the large numbers of feeder kindergartens and schools that their students transition from, and
- the lack of dedicated staff resources to transfer academic, engagement and personal information on each child.

The department provides resources, guidance and advice to schools on transferring vulnerable students, and support for these groups has improved over time.

However, without more detailed, accurate and timely outcomes information, it is not possible to know what impact this support is having for vulnerable students.

Similarly, the department does not routinely examine outcomes for transitioning students and has no reliable information about the outcomes of particular approaches, strategies or methods used by schools.

The department needs to understand and monitor the barriers to successful transitions, the actions taken to address these barriers and associated outcomes for students.

While it is taking steps to address these issues, further work is needed.

## Recommendations

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		Accept
That the Department of Education and Training:		
1.	reviews all child-level and service-level data collected by it from maternal and child health services, and early childhood education and care providers	✓
2.	reviews the use of early-years transition statements	✓
3&4.	develops and monitors transition-related outcomes for both the early years and the middle years including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transition	✓
5.	develops a more comprehensive suite of guidance and resources to support schools to transition middle-years students.	✓

The audit report made seven recommendations to the department that focused on:

- reviewing the data collected from early childhood services and schools and making best use of it
- further developing the guidance materials, support and funding provided to early childhood services and schools, and
- an increased focus on improving middle-years outcomes and support for the most vulnerable students.

All seven recommendations are detailed in the report.

## Recommendations – *continued*

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		Accept
That the Department of Education and Training:		
6.	reviews and improve its systems to allow more timely access to child-level data for schools	✓
7.	examines the appropriateness of the timing of the Year 6 review for children who receive funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities, and its impact on transition outcomes.	✓

The department accepted all recommendations and has provided a detailed outline of how it intends to address each recommendation, including deadlines for all recommendations. This is contained in the report.

The Auditor-General will monitor this progress over time.

## Key messages

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**More could be done to monitor the quality and effectiveness of transition programs and initiatives.**

**DET needs to better manage inconsistencies across the system and properly support schools to transition students effectively.**

**DET needs to understand and monitor the barriers to successful transitions, the actions taken to address these barriers and associated outcomes for students.**

In summary the audit found that

- more could be done to monitor the quality and effectiveness of transitions programs and initiatives
- the department needs to better manage inconsistencies across the system and properly support schools to transition students effectively, and
- more needs to be done to understand transition outcomes.



## **Key messages – *continued***

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**A new approach is needed.  
Having improved some areas, DET now needs  
to focus on tackling the areas where no gains  
have been made.**

A new approach is needed.

Having improved some areas, DET now needs to focus on tackling the areas where no gains have been made.

## Relevant audits

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- *Access to Education for Rural Students (2013–14)*
- *Student Completion Rates (2012–13)*
- *Science and Mathematics Participation Rates and Initiatives (2011–12)*
- *Indigenous Education Strategies for Government Schools (2010–11)*
- *Programs for Students with Special Learning Needs (2012–13)*

Previous related audits are listed on this slide.

## Contact details

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