



Education Transitions



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Auditor-General

Education Transitions

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The Hon. Bruce Atkinson MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Melbourne

The Hon. Telmo Languiller MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my report on the audit *Education Transitions*.

This audit assessed whether the Department of Education and Training (DET), government schools and early childhood education and care providers are effectively supporting children to transition into Prep and from primary to secondary school.

The audit found that DET has improved access to high-quality kindergarten programs and has developed a comprehensive, well-researched framework to support early-years transitions. These actions have contributed to improved outcomes for children transitioning into Prep. However, DET does not have a similar strategy or framework for managing middle-years transitions and despite some pockets of improvement, engagement and academic outcomes continue to decline as children move into secondary school.

System-wide change is required if consistent long-term gains are to be made, and if issues such as the uneven impact of transitions on male and female students are to be resolved. My report recommends a range of simple, cost-effective steps that DET could take to better support schools to improve middle-years transitions, and highlights some of the examples of better practice found in audited schools.

Yours faithfully



John Doyle
Auditor-General

18 March 2015

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Auditor-General's comments



John Doyle
Auditor-General

Successful transitions into and between schools can make or break a young person's educational experience. The transitions into Prep and from primary to secondary school mark key stages in young peoples' development and in their engagement with the education system. Poor transitions can lead students to disengage and result in poorer educational outcomes. Some children—such as Aboriginal children, children with disabilities, boys and children from low socio-economic backgrounds—are at greater risk of suffering from a poor transition.

To transition well, a child needs to understand what the next stage in their education looks like and they need to be prepared for the level and style of work expected of them at the next stage.

The challenge for early childhood education and care providers and for schools is to prepare students for the move, to make sure that their information is transferred as efficiently and effectively as possible, and to support them to settle into their new school environment.

My audit examined how well early childhood education and care providers and schools support children to make successful transitions. It also looked at how effective the Department of Education and Training (DET) has been in supporting, guiding and monitoring early childhood education and care providers and schools.

It was pleasing to find many examples of good practice including innovative curriculum and teaching approaches, joint professional development forums with school and early childhood teachers, and schools that set and monitored academic achievement targets for transitioning students. However, I also found great variation in the approaches adopted by schools, highlighting both the risks and the benefits of school autonomy.

In an environment where schools have high levels of autonomy, DET needs to provide strong leadership, including sound guidance, appropriate support and effective monitoring of schools. It does not consistently do so.

I found that DET has developed a comprehensive and well-researched framework to support early-years transitions. This has led to a greater uniformity of approach and contributed to improved early-years transition outcomes. However, it does not provide the same levels of support and guidance to schools to transition students from primary to secondary school. While there have been modest improvements in some middle-years transition outcomes over the past seven years, these are not consistent. Given the lack of attention from DET these can only be attributed to the schools themselves tailoring their delivery of education to their students.

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System-wide change is required if consistent long-term gains are to be made, and if issues such as the uneven impact of transitions on male and female students are to be resolved. There are simple and cost-effective steps that DET could take to better support schools to improve middle-years transitions.

My report makes seven recommendations, including that DET provide better advice to schools on middle-years transitions and develop better systems for monitoring children's outcomes as they progress through school. I am encouraged to see that DET has already started to address some recommendations and has provided a detailed plan of action including deadlines for all recommendations. I look forward to the opportunity to review the outcomes of these actions in the future.

I would like to thank the schools and early childhood education and care providers that were visited by my audit team and the DET staff who provided the evidence required for this audit.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Doyle', written in a cursive style.

John Doyle
Auditor-General

March 2015

Audit summary

Background

There are a number of key transitions during young peoples' education that shape their learning, development, wellbeing and engagement with school. The two key transitions occur when children move into the Prep year of primary school and when they move from primary into Year 7 of secondary school. Other transitions that can affect a child's school experience include when they transition from grade to grade within a school and when they move between schools.

While a transition is generally considered to be a single event or year of schooling, the process of transitioning usually occurs over a more extended period of time. It involves preparing the child to move, transferring them and their information, and a period after the move during which they settle into their new year level or school. The transitioning process can be both challenging and transformative for the child. The effect on the child's academic outcomes and engagement with school can be monitored to provide an indication of how successfully the transition was made.

The transition into Prep marks the start of a child's formal full-time education and the move away from play-based learning into a more structured learning environment. The move from primary to secondary school usually occurs around the onset of puberty, a time of significant developmental change in the middle years—Year 5 to Year 8. This increases the likelihood of difficulties in adjusting, and can ultimately impact on learning outcomes.

The success of a transition is likely to be influenced by a broad range of factors—including prior learning and achievement, socio-economic and cultural background, disability and learning difficulties, and gender.

The objective of the audit was to examine how effectively early childhood education and care providers, schools and the Department of Education and Training (DET) are supporting the transitions of children in the education system. The audit examined whether DET has developed and implemented an effective and well-researched approach to support schools and early childhood education and care providers, and whether they in turn efficiently and effectively support children and their families during transitions.

Conclusions

DET has developed a comprehensive, well-researched framework to support early-years transitions. It has improved access to high-quality kindergarten programs and has provided funded programs and resources to support schools. These actions have contributed to improved outcomes for children transitioning into Prep, including their developmental status and academic readiness for school.

In contrast, DET does not have a strategy or framework for managing middle-years transitions. Despite the overall pattern of a decline in engagement and academic outcomes as children move into secondary school, there are some encouraging outcomes associated with middle-years transitions. These include improvements in childrens' engagement with school and parents' opinions on how well the schools transitioned their child.

DET's *Strategic Plan 2013–17* emphasises the importance of middle-years transitions and its school funding model encourages schools to focus on improving middle-years outcomes. However, it provides little general guidance to schools on how to effectively transition middle-years children. The guidance that it does provide is limited to focusing on supporting transitions for vulnerable cohorts of children, such as those with additional learning needs.

Schools face significant challenges in dealing with student transitions including efficiently transferring and accessing student information, establishing and maintaining effective communications with other schools and early childhood education and care providers, and monitoring student outcomes. The extent to which schools have been effective in dealing with these challenges varies significantly and is highly dependent on the capabilities of the school staff and leadership team. Without a mechanism for better practice being identified and shared, the opportunities for schools and DET to engage in continuous improvement are limited. However, the better support provided by DET for early-years transitions is associated with improved performance in this area.

While the push to increase school autonomy has resulted in some innovative approaches from schools to tackle transition challenges, greater support is needed from DET, particularly for middle-years transitions.

Findings

Transition outcomes

Early-years outcomes have improved

Prep teachers are increasingly assessing new Prep children as being ahead of the expected levels in English and mathematics. In 2013–14 almost all children in Victoria were assessed by their Prep teachers as being at, or six months above, the expected level in English (99 per cent) and mathematics (97 per cent). This standard has been maintained over the past five years.

Since the first assessment in 2009, Victoria has reduced the proportion of Prep children who are considered developmentally vulnerable on one or more of the Australian Early Development Census domains—previously known as the Australian Early Development Index. In 2012, Victoria had the lowest proportion of any state (19.5 per cent), however, this still equates to one in five children entering school with at least one assessed developmental vulnerability. Vulnerable cohorts are particularly at risk of falling further behind during transitions.

Kindergarten participation is strongly associated with improved performance in both developmental and academic readiness for schools. Over the past five years, kindergarten program participation levels have risen from 93 per cent to 96 per cent. DET has exceeded its Budget Paper target each year since 2009, although there are weaknesses in the current measure. More could be done to monitor how well children and their families engage with kindergarten throughout the year, and to assess the quality and effectiveness of particular kindergarten programs. This information would better inform DET's actions to improve early-years transitions.

Mixed outcomes for middle-years students

For middle-years transitions, a range of academic and wellbeing outcome data is available, including academic performance, engagement with school and parents' assessment of children's transitions.

The two key measures of academic achievement are:

- teacher assessments of performance against the Australian Curriculum/Victorian Essential Learning Standards
- the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results.

Performance across these two measures is mixed. While teacher assessments show a drop in performance immediately following the middle-years transition, NAPLAN results show improvements in literacy and numeracy over the same period. However, the NAPLAN writing results appear to be significantly impacted by the transition—with boys most heavily affected.

There has been a steady overall increase in student engagement with school since 2007. However, there is a notable drop in engagement across the middle-years transition period that has not changed over time. Engagement is strongly correlated with academic achievement.

Despite the widely reported discrepancies in performance between boys and girls around the middle-years transition, DET has not prepared gender-specific guidance for schools. Notably, only one of the eight audited secondary schools monitored gender-based student outcomes. It is difficult to see how DET can expect schools to address this known gap unless it provides clear guidance and improved support to schools to monitor and address the issue.

More needs to be done to address transition challenges

Poor and inconsistent practices for transferring student information

The timely and accurate transfer of academic, engagement and personal information student performance information is critical to the success of a transition. In early-years transitions, DET has taken a significant step towards facilitating this by introducing a standardised *Transition Learning and Development Statement* (transition statement) for all children. However, it has not produced a comparable document for middle years, meaning that primary schools prepare material in multiple formats and with varying levels of detail to suit the differing needs of secondary schools.

The timely transfer of information is further hampered by various factors:

- Schools lack understanding about the use and disclosure of information—including compliance with privacy legislation—and there is a corresponding lack of consistency in practice. DET has not provided clear guidance and schools are unsure about what information they can transfer and what permissions they need to do so. As a result, student information is not being transferred as efficiently, effectively or completely as it could be.
- Schools have varying capacities to develop and maintain good relationships with the large numbers of early childhood education and care providers and schools their students transition from. This increases their reliance on written information including, for early years, information in transition statements.
- Schools lack dedicated staff resources to transfer academic, engagement and personal information on each child. Only one of the audited schools had resources dedicated to managing or supporting transitions.

To address these barriers DET needs to:

- provide clearer guidance about information disclosure and privacy legislation
- work closely with schools to understand the information needs and challenges associated with middle-years transitions
- standardise the transition of middle-years student information.

Better support needed for vulnerable cohorts

DET provides guidance, funding and support to assist specific groups of vulnerable students to transition effectively into and between schools. These groups include:

- children with additional or complex needs
- gifted and talented children
- children with a language background other than English
- children from Aboriginal backgrounds—in this report the term Aboriginal refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Support for these groups has improved over time, but without more detailed, accurate and timely outcomes information, it is not possible to know what impact this support is having.

DET funds a range of early childhood programs designed to assist students to prepare for the transition to school. While it does not fund specific middle-years transition programs, in 2008 it revised its school funding model to weight it more towards the middle years. It is not clear how schools have applied this weighted funding to support transitioning middle-years students.

DET's most significant funded program is the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD). This \$640 million program supports 22 000 government school students with disabilities. However, each child with PSD funding has this reviewed in Year 6. This means that about half of all PSD students have their funding and support modified or cancelled in the period leading into a major transition. Holding the review in Year 7—once the student has transferred into secondary school—would allow a more accurate assessment of their needs in their new school environment.

More needs to be done to understand transition outcomes

It is important that DET has a good understanding of transition-related outcomes so that it can design policies, programs and approaches to address issues that arise. However, it 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. As such, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the outcomes reported in this audit are a direct result of specific actions designed to improve transitions.

While the Victorian Student Number now allows DET to collect and report more reliable student-level data, it does not extend back into early childhood education and care providers. Therefore, it is not currently possible to link participation in early childhood services to early school performance. DET has advised that it plans to improve child-level monitoring, which will allow this linkage to occur.

Similarly, early childhood education and care providers and schools need access to timely, relevant data to understand whether their actions are effective. In April 2013, DET launched a new School Information Portal to replace the Performance Assessment Report it previously provided to schools. This new system provides schools with improved access to a wider range of performance information.

While this is a significant step forward in allowing schools to better monitor their performance, none of the audited schools had evaluated their approach to transitioning students using this information.

It is clear that early childhood education and care providers and schools are managing transitions well overall. However, DET's current approach to supporting, guiding and monitoring early childhood education and care providers and schools is not helping to break down some of the more entrenched transition outcomes. A new approach is needed to address these issues. Having achieved sustained improvement in some areas, DET now needs to start focusing on tackling the areas where no gains have been made, including where there are differences in outcomes based on gender, geographic location, culture and language.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
That the Department of Education and Training:		
1.	<p>reviews all child-level and service-level data collected by it from maternal and child health services, and early childhood education and care providers in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the collected information is sufficient and appropriate for the Department of Education and Training to monitor the impact of these services on children's long-term educational outcomes develop reporting requirements to collect and record this information in a way that allows the Department of Education and Training to link child-level data collected prior to school with data collected after school enrolment 	22
2.	<p>reviews the use of early-years transition statements with a particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequacy of the information captured relationships between early childhood and school-based educators training and development for educators in early childhood and school-based settings to develop a shared understanding of the role of both sectors. 	22

Recommendations – continued

Number	Recommendation	Page
That the Department of Education and Training:		
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 transitions	22 & 42
5.	develops a more comprehensive suite of guidance and resources to support schools to transition middle-years students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear advice to schools on the use and disclosure of children's information and data • a standardised minimum set of data for transitioning students • developing transition networks with geographically similar schools and sharing best practice approaches across the school system 	42
6.	reviews and improves its systems to allow more timely access to child-level data for schools	42
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.	42

Submissions and comments received

In addition to progressive engagement during the course of the audit, in accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994*, we provided a copy of this report to the Department of Education and Training with a request for submissions or comments.

We have considered those views in reaching our audit conclusions and have represented them to the extent relevant and warranted. The Department of Education and Training's full section 16(3) submissions and comments are included in Appendix C.

1 Background

1.1 The importance of successful transitions for children

The importance of children making successful transitions into and between schools is widely acknowledged and the success of a transition is influenced by a broad range of factors, including prior learning and achievement, socio-economic and cultural background, disability and learning difficulties, and gender.

There are a number of educational transitions that shape a young person's learning, development, wellbeing and engagement with school. The two key transitions occur when children move into the Prep year of primary school, and when children move from primary to Year 7 of secondary school. Other transitions that can affect a child's school experience include when they transition from grade to grade within a school and when they move between schools.

The two key transitions occur at times of significant developmental change. The transition into Prep marks the start of a child's formal full-time education and the move away from play-based learning into a more structured learning environment. Meanwhile, the move from primary to secondary school often occurs around the onset of puberty.

1.2 Understanding transition

While a transition is generally considered to be a single event—where a child moves between sectors (early childhood education and care to school) or schools (primary to secondary)—the process of transitioning covers a longer period of time, and can be both challenging and transformative. For example, the skills a child learns in kindergarten can influence how quickly and effectively they transition into school.

The actions of the school to support a child in the months and years following their transition can also have a significant impact. It is therefore important not to consider a transition simply as a process of transferring a child from one setting to another, but as a series of interconnected processes taking place over an extended period of time.

Broadly speaking, the same principles apply to making any transition successful:

- **Preparation**—preparing the child to move. Making sure they have the relevant social, emotional and developmental skills needed to progress to the next stage of their education. Providing guidance and advice on the transition experience and making effective introductions to their new educational environment.

- **Transfer**—transferring the child from one setting to another. Making sure that the child, their families and the receiving school have all of the information they need to ensure an effective transfer.
- **Induction**—settling the child into their new learning environment, and identifying and providing any additional support needed.
- **Consolidation**—continuing to monitor the child's learning and developmental outcomes and engagement, and providing any additional support needed.

1.3 Early-years transition

One of the key initiatives implemented across all Australian jurisdictions to drive improved transition outcomes for Prep students has been to increase the levels of participation in kindergarten programs. In 2014, around 96 per cent of four-year-old children in Victoria were enrolled in a kindergarten program.

Kindergarten programs play a critical role in a child's learning and development including their social and emotional skills, self-awareness, language, literacy and numeracy skills—all of which are critical to helping children settle quickly and effectively into a school environment. Attending high quality kindergarten programs has been shown to have a positive impact on a child's later school-based outcomes.

In 2014, 74 826 Victorian children moved from early childhood education and care or home-based settings into primary school, with 51 222 of those (68 per cent) starting Prep in a government school.

1.4 Middle-years transition

There has been growing awareness of the importance of 'the middle years'—defined as spanning Year 5 to Year 8—on a child's learning experiences.

The transition from primary school to secondary school occurs during these middle years and involves significant change for a child and their family. While the majority of children make this transition without disruption to their wellbeing or learning, many experience a drop in achievement and engagement with school in the years following this transition.

International research suggests that this negative impact may be cumulative—existing gaps are likely to be widened—and may signal the beginning of later disengagement from secondary school. Australian research also shows that as a child progresses through the middle years of school they report a decrease in psychological health. A quarter of Western Australian children surveyed by Edith Cowen University in a study published in 2014 found the transition from primary to secondary school difficult.

Our examination of middle-years transitions focuses on the activities of primary schools preparing children for transitioning to secondary school and the activities of the secondary schools receiving those children.

In 2014, 65 924 Victorian children started Year 7 at a secondary school. Of those, 35 675, or 54 per cent, did so at a government school.



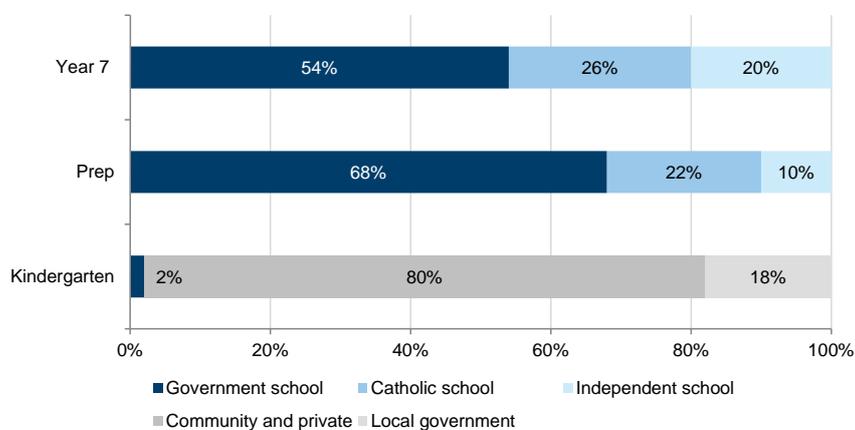
Photograph courtesy of hxdbzxy/Shutterstock.com.

1.4.1 Providers involved in transitions

The non-government sector is responsible for providing the vast majority of kindergarten programs for children. Local government services cover 18 per cent of enrolments, while government schools providing a kindergarten program represent only 2 per cent of total enrolments.

Government schools are the main providers of primary schooling for children in Victoria. However there is a far more even distribution of children across government and non-government schools in the secondary sector. Figure 1A shows the involvement of government and non-government providers at each stage of a child's education.

Figure 1A
Enrolments by provider



Note: 'Community and private' providers of kindergarten services include both Catholic and independent schools.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office's analysis of 2013 kindergarten and 2014 school enrolment data.

1.4.2 Other significant transitions

In addition to these two key transitions, a large number of school-aged children also experience transitions when they move:

- **from one school to another**—approximately 10 per cent of children from each year level move each year—55 468 children in 2013
- **into and out of specialist schools**—2 269 children started, and 1 795 exited a specialist school in 2013
- **into and out of English language schools**—3 263 children started, and 2 831 exited an English language school in 2013—children usually attend for two terms before transitioning to a mainstream school.

1.5 Legislation

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* sets the overarching legislative framework for education and training in Victoria. A key principle of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* is that all Victorians should have access to a high-quality education. The legislation does not prescribe a process for transitions.

All Victorian preschools are bound by the conditions set out in the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* or the *Children's Services Act 1996* as well as the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* or *Children's Services Regulations 2009*. The Department of Education and Training (DET) licences early childhood education and care services including preschool, long day care, family day care, occasional care and outside school hours care services. Services must meet the *National Quality Standard (Schedule 1 of the Regulations)*, as well as all regulations and conditions of applications for licences covered under the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* or the *Children's Services Regulations*.

In order to receive Victorian State Government funding, preschools must be licensed to operate a preschool program that meets the criteria for funding eligibility.

1.6 Roles and responsibilities

1.6.1 Department of Education and Training

DET is the key agency responsible for the delivery of educational outcomes in Victoria, including for early childhood and school education. It provides funding to government schools to cover the cost of providing free instruction in the core curriculum—including infrastructure, staffing and school resources—and separately funds specific programs designed to meet the individual learning needs of children, both prior to and within the school system.

In addition DET's role is to:

- license and regulate education and care services as required by relevant acts and regulations
- develop and deliver policy, guidance and support that enables schools and early childhood education and care providers to support children
- monitor and oversee the performance of schools and early childhood education and care providers and determine whether the educational outcomes of children are being maximised.

The Compact: Roles and responsibilities in Victorian government school education, (the Compact) sets out the key responsibilities of both DET and schools. It requires schools to:

- establish networks and partnerships with families as well as early childhood education and care providers and other schools to strengthen student engagement and support transitions
- demonstrate sustained improvement in student engagement and wellbeing
- collect and report on engagement and other data that support monitoring, reporting and student transitions.

1.6.2 Government schools

Under the Compact, government schools have broad responsibilities related to transitions—including demonstrating sustained improvement in student engagement and wellbeing, and tracking children's data, including any movement to a different setting. In Victoria there are:

- 1 127 government primary schools
- 239 government secondary schools
- 77 government primary-secondary schools
- 79 government specialist schools
- eight government English language schools or centres.

1.7 Funding and support

1.7.1 Early years

Australian and international research suggests that learning experiences in the years prior to starting school—and in the early years of school—are critical to a child's long-term success at school. As a consequence, Australian governments have increased the investment in early childhood education and care significantly over the past decade. Across all state and territory governments, \$1.4 billion is spent annually on early childhood education and care. DET reported that its expenditure for the 2013–14 financial year for early childhood education was \$367.5 million. This figure includes per capita grants, kindergarten fee subsidies and specialist program funding.

1.7.2 Middle years and students with disabilities

DET provides the delivery of education to children in Victoria by giving funding directly to schools. DET funds government schools through the Student Resource Package. In 2014, the Student Resource Package allocated over \$5 billion to schools, comprising student-based funding, school-based funding, and targeted initiatives. The standard funding component for each child in a school is weighted to recognise the different costs associated with different year levels. The level of funding provided for students in Years 7 and 8 who have just transitioned to secondary school was increased to the same level as students in Years 9 to 12, to encourage schools to invest in early intervention.

DET also administers \$640 million in funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities for children from Prep through to Year 12. This cohort of children is considered to be at a higher risk of making a poor transition.

Further information about DET's school funding arrangements are available in VAGO's *Victorian school funding explained* information piece, published in February 2015 as an appendix to the performance audit report *Additional School Costs for Families*.

1.8 Audit objective and scope

This audit examined how transitions into and between early childhood education and care and school, and between schools are managed. It examined DET, as the agency responsible for policy and initiatives that guide student's transitions, along with a sample of early childhood education and care providers and schools.

The audit focused on the most significant transitions that all children make—into primary school for the first time and into secondary school. It also examined activities undertaken by English language schools and specialist schools. The transitions that children make annually as they progress to the next year level were not considered as part of this audit.

The objective of the audit was to examine how effectively early childhood education and care providers, primary and secondary schools and DET are supporting the transitions of children in the education system. To evaluate this objective, the audit assessed whether:

- DET has developed and implemented effective and well-researched policies, strategies and approaches to support schools and early childhood education and care providers to manage transitions efficiently and effectively
- education providers efficiently and effectively support students and their families to transition into and between schools.

1.9 Audit method and cost

The audit involved research, document and file review, and interviews with DET staff and stakeholders. The audit also selected a range of schools, taking into account factors such as their region, proximity to other government and non-government schools, socio-economic status, receipt of transition-related funding and performance against transition-related indicators. In total, the audit examined the practices of 30 schools and early childhood education and care providers, as shown in Figure 1B.

Figure 1B
Providers or schools visited during the audit

Type of provider	Number
Government secondary school	6
Government primary school	10
Government Prep to Year 12 or Kindergarten to Year 9 school	2
Government English language school	2
Government specialist school	2
Kindergarten program provider ^(a)	6
Independent Prep to Year 12 or Kindergarten to Year 12 school ^(a)	2
Total	30

(a) Providers not associated with DET.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The total cost of this audit was \$495 000.

1.10 Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows:

- Part 2 examines activities and outcomes associated with early-years transitions
- Part 3 examines activities and outcomes associated with middle-years transitions
- Appendix A outlines transition activities in the early years
- Appendix B outlines transition activities for Years 6–7.

2 Early-years transition

At a glance

Background

A well-researched, system-wide approach to transitioning children is needed to support schools in minimising the negative impact of transitions and making sure that vulnerable children are not disadvantaged.

Conclusion

The Department of Education and Training (DET) has implemented a robust and comprehensive approach to supporting early-years transitions. While outcomes are improving, DET does not adequately monitor the impact of transitions. This means it cannot easily identify and support vulnerable cohorts of children or drive system-wide improvement.

Findings

- DET has a well conceptualised approach to early-years transitions that facilitates transferring information with the child, through a transition statement.
- Despite improvements in kindergarten participation, one in five Victorian children start their first year of school with a developmental vulnerability.
- Children who are Aboriginal, from a language background other than English, or who live in low socio-economic areas are more commonly assessed as having a developmental vulnerability.
- DET does not collect sufficient service-level or child-level data to enable it to understand the relationship between its approach and later outcomes.

Recommendations

That the Department of Education and Training:

- reviews all child-level and service-level data collected by it in order to:
 - ensure that it can monitor their impact on children's long-term outcomes
 - link data collected prior to school with data collected after school enrolment
- reviews the use of early-years transition statements with a particular focus on:
 - adequacy of the information captured
 - relationships between early childhood and school-based educators
 - training to develop a shared understanding of the role of both sectors
- develops and monitors transition-related outcomes for the early years.

2.1 Introduction

Children who enter school for the first time require a set of life and learning skills in order to make a successful transition to primary school. Research has established that children who commence school without these basic skills are at risk of poorer academic and social outcomes.

Promoting successful transitions in the early years is not just about the readiness of the child. It requires the involvement of parents and families, communities, early childhood education and care providers, as well as schools.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) oversees and regulates the early childhood education and care sector, and is the major provider of education to children through government schools.

Early childhood education and care service providers and schools have the autonomy to adopt practices to best support the children in their care. DET's role is to provide advice and guidance on current best practice approaches to support children's successful transitions and to monitor children's outcomes so that improvements to strategies, planning and service delivery can be made.

2.2 Conclusion

Most Victorian children are well prepared for their transition to primary school. Prep teachers' assessments of children's developmental vulnerability and academic preparedness have both improved. However, one in five children still begin school with a developmental vulnerability, and particular cohorts of children—including those from Aboriginal backgrounds, areas with lower socio-economic status, and boys—fare much worse.

The improvements have occurred concurrently with DET's development and implementation of a comprehensive framework for early-years transitions that includes:

- high-quality guidance and resources for schools, early childhood education and care services and families
- the requirement for schools to complete and issue transition statements for each child
- specifically-funded programs.

However, more could be done to better monitor the quality and effectiveness of kindergarten programs as well as the initiatives DET has in place to encourage a positive transition to school. DET needs to increase its focus on transitions into school for boys, Aboriginal children, students learning English as an additional language, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

2.3 Transition outcomes

There are two key measures of transition outcomes for children moving into primary school. These are:

- **developmental status**—measured by the three-yearly census of Australian children in their first year of school, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)—known as the Australian Early Development Index until 1 July 2014
- **academic readiness**—measured by Prep-teacher judgements against the statewide learning standards.

Kindergarten participation is a key input strongly associated with improved performance in both areas. In Victoria, the proportion of children attending a kindergarten program has increased each year between 2006 and 2013. Over the 2009 to 2012 period, the rate of children defined by the AEDC as having an area of developmental vulnerability in their first year of schooling has declined. Victoria's performance exceeds that of any other Australian jurisdiction. The next AEDC survey is due to be conducted in 2015.

Victorian Prep teachers assessed the literacy and numeracy standards of the majority of their students as being at the expected level, and believe that approximately three-quarters of Victorian children are adapting well to their first year of school.

However, there is still a sizable minority of children who start their transition to school with a developmental vulnerability that is likely to impact on their later success at school.

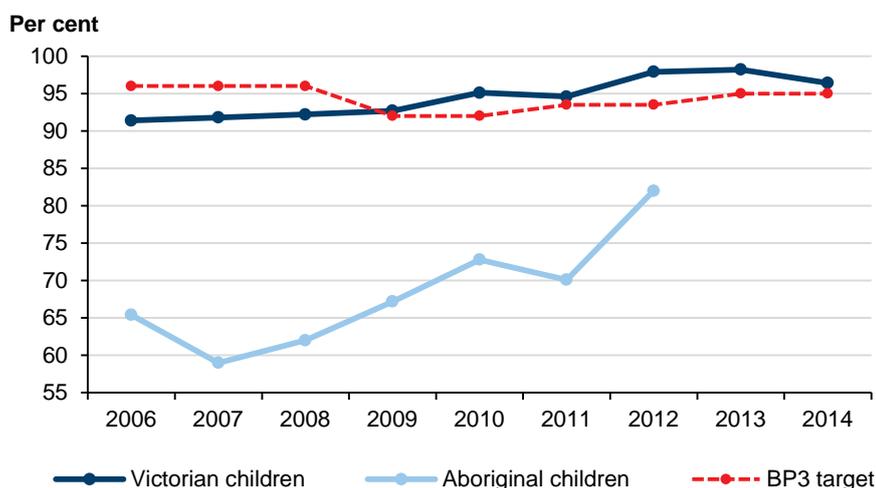
2.3.1 Kindergarten participation

Kindergarten programs play a critical role in preparing children to transition into school. They are designed to engage children, to develop their skills in communication, thinking and building positive relationships, and to build their sense of identity and wellbeing.

Attendance at kindergarten is not compulsory in Victoria. However, for several years Victoria has been moving towards the nationally agreed target of providing all children with access to a kindergarten program for 15 hours a week in the year before they start school. Consistent with the national agreement, Victoria has set its target for kindergarten participation—as distinct from universal access—at 95 per cent.

Figure 2A shows the improvements that have been made in the reported kindergarten participation rate over the last nine years, including significant improvements for Aboriginal children.

Figure 2A
Kindergarten participation rates over time against
Budget Paper No.3 service target



Note: Budget Paper No.3 (BP3) target figures are from <http://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/State-Budget/Previous-budgets>. As BP3 figures are reported by financial year, and participation rate figures are reported by calendar year, we have selected the first year of the BP3 data due to the August kindergarten census being in the first half of the financial year, i.e. the 2006 figure here represents the figure reported in the 2006–07 BP3.

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

Source: Victorian Auditor-General’s Office based on data provided by DET, and the DET Annual Report 2013–14 and BP3s (2006–07 to 2014–15).

2.3.2 Assessment of children's development in their first year of school

Developmental status

The Commonwealth Government undertakes a national three-yearly census of all children in their first year of school—the AEDC. This census is completed by Prep teachers and measures children’s development in five areas or domains, including:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills
- communication skills and general knowledge.

The AEDC was implemented nationally for the first time in 2009 and repeated in 2012. The next data collection will occur in 2015.

Being competent in all five of these domains is considered important to making a successful transition to school. Figure 2B shows that the number of Victorian children in their first year of school who were considered by their Prep teacher to be developmentally ‘on track’ increased from 55.9 per cent in 2009 to 57.1 per cent in 2012.

Figure 2B
Per cent of Victorian Prep children considered 'on track' by gender over time

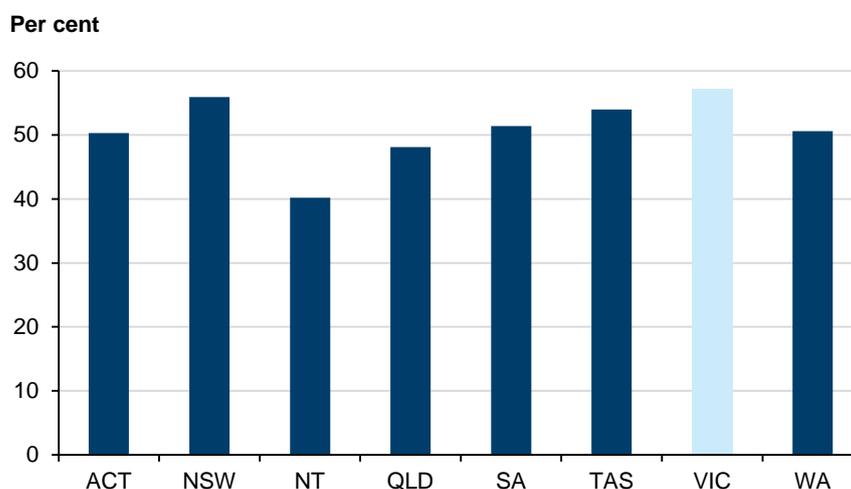
Year	'On track' on five domains		'On track' on five domains
	Boys	Girls	All
2009	47.3	64.4	55.9
2012	48.7	65.7	57.1

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AEDC data provided by DET.

Figure 2B also shows that boys are far less likely than girls to be developmentally 'on track' when they begin school. In fact, less than half of boys were considered to be developmentally 'on track'. This pattern persists throughout schooling in most indicators.

As shown in Figure 2C, Victoria has the highest proportion of children 'on track' on all five developmental domains of any state or territory, closely followed by New South Wales.

Figure 2C
State-by-state comparison of the proportion of children considered developmentally 'on track' in their first year of school, 2012



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AEDC data reported in *The state of Victoria's children 2012: early childhood*.

AEDC results also provide measures of the proportion of children vulnerable in one or more developmental domains. Figure 2D shows that the proportion of Victorian children rated by their Prep teachers as vulnerable against the AEDC domains had reduced between 2009 and 2012, and is lower than in any other state or territory.

Figure 2D
Per cent of Prep children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains by state and territory in 2009 and 2012

	2009	2012
State/territory		
Victoria	20.3	19.5
New South Wales	21.3	19.9
Tasmania	21.8	21.5
Australian Capital Territory	22.2	22.0
Western Australia	24.7	23.0
South Australia	22.8	23.7
Queensland	29.6	26.2
Northern Territory	38.7	35.5

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on the Australian Government 2013. *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia 2012 – AEDI National Report Re-issue November 2013*, Australian Government, Canberra.

Despite this improving trend overall, results for boys, Aboriginal children, children from language backgrounds other than English and students from low socio-economic backgrounds were consistently lower, albeit also showing improvement between 2009 and 2012, as shown in Figure 2E.

Figure 2E
Per cent of Victorian Prep children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains by population cohort

	2009	2012	Significance of comparative result
Boys	26.4	25.2	Significant decrease
Girls	14.1	13.8	No significant change
Aboriginal	42.4	39.6	Significant decrease
Non-Aboriginal	20.1	19.2	Significant decrease
Language background other than English	30.4	28.0	Significant decrease
English speaking only	17.8	17.3	No significant change
Low socio-economic status	32.0	31.5	No significant change
High socio-economic status	14.1	12.5	Significant decrease
Total	20.3	19.5	Significant decrease

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AEDC data. Significance testing by DET.

The AEDC also compiles information from Prep teachers on the success of students' transitions into school. Figure 2F shows that more than three-quarters of Victorian children were considered by their Prep teachers to have made a good transition to school.

Figure 2F
Victorian Prep teachers ratings of children's transitions to school in 2012

School transition indicators	Often or very true (per cent)	Sometimes or somewhat true (per cent)	Never or not true (per cent)	Don't know (per cent)
Child is making good progress in adapting to the structure and learning environment of the school	78.9	18.3	2.4	0.5
Child has parent(s)/caregiver(s) who are actively engaged with the school in supporting their child's learning	77.5	16.5	5.2	0.7
Child is regularly read to/encouraged in their reading at home	79.4	14.5	4.8	1.2

Note: Totals subject to rounding errors.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AEDC data provided by DET.

Academic readiness

The Australian Curriculum Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS) outline common statewide standards for children between Prep and Year 10 that schools use to plan learning programs, assess progress, and report to parents. Introduced in 2013, AusVELS replaced the previously used curriculum standards, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). Each semester, school teachers at each year level assess each of their students against AusVELS.

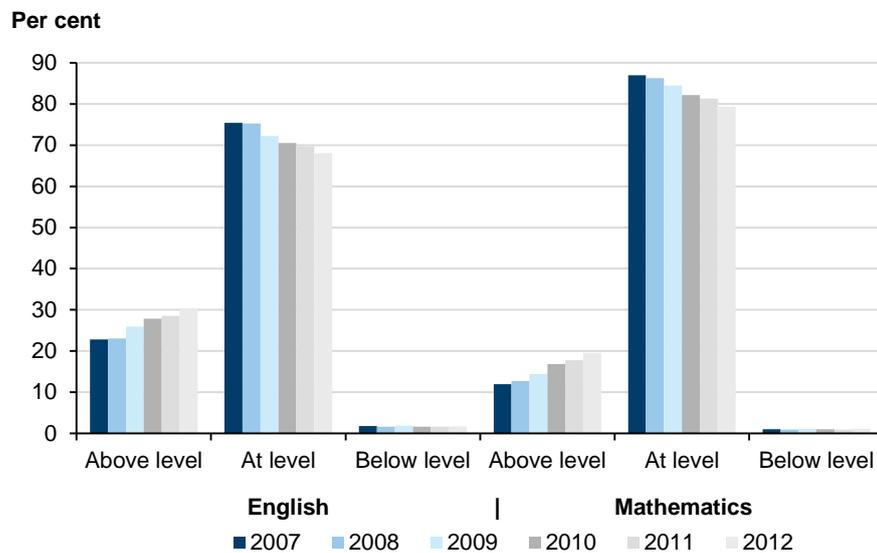
In 2013 end of year data, only a very small percentage of children in Prep were rated as six months or more behind in English and mathematics—3 and 1 per cent respectively. Between 25 per cent, for English, and 20 per cent, for mathematics, of Prep children were at least six months above the level expected.



Photograph courtesy of bikeriderlondon/Shutterstock.com.

Since 2007, the proportion of children who were rated by their Prep teacher as above the expected level in both mathematics and English has risen, as seen in Figure 2G. Correspondingly, the proportion of children at the expected level has declined over the same period. There has been negligible change in the proportion of students below the expected level.

Figure 2G
Prep children, rated by teacher judgements, compared to their expected level for English and mathematics from 2007 to 2012



Note: This figure reports end-of-year data recorded in Semester 2.

Note: From 2013, teacher assessment data was collected against a revised standard, which is not comparable to past results.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office analysis of Victorian Essential Learning Standards data.

These outcomes suggest that the majority of children who transition to school are well prepared academically. They also highlight that there is a sizeable and growing minority—approximately 30 per cent in English and 20 per cent in mathematics—of children who start school considerably above the expected level.

2.4 Strengths in the current approach

There are a number of strengths in DET's current approach to early-years transitions. It has developed a well-researched, robust framework with clear guidance and resources for schools and early childhood education and care providers. In addition to targeted programs for vulnerable children, DET introduced transition statements that convey information from early childhood educators and families to Prep teachers. DET has also increased kindergarten participation rates to very high levels.

2.4.1 Attendance at high-quality kindergarten services

There is increasing international and Australian evidence that participation in a quality kindergarten program has a positive impact on children's developmental vulnerability as they enter school and on their later school outcomes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Education at a Glance* report in 2013 concluded that this impact was present even when accounting for the socio-economic background of the child. Using the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children* the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research concluded that attendance at kindergarten added 10 to 15 points to a child's Year 3 National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy results, which is equivalent to 15 to 20 weeks of schooling.

Figure 2H shows the link between kindergarten attendance and the development of language and cognitive skills for children in their first year at school in Victoria.

Figure 2H
Association of attendance at kindergarten with language and cognitive development

Percentage of Prep children developmentally 'on track' in AEDC language and cognitive skills domain, 2012	
Had attended kindergarten	85.7
Had not attended kindergarten	68.6

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AEDC data provided by DET.

This difference may reflect either the population likely to attend a kindergarten program or the benefits of the program itself. The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research noted that children who do not attend kindergarten may be more disadvantaged and have parents who place less value on education, making it difficult to isolate the impact of kindergarten participation on later outcomes. After controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, the research concluded that children who did not attend kindergarten would have gained more from attending kindergarten than those who actually attended.

2.4.2 Sound and well-supported early-years framework

Sharing information—common framework

One of the ways to support successful transitions is to ensure that information gathered by one educator is shared with the next. In Victoria, all early childhood education and care professionals working with children from birth until the age of eight—which includes teachers working in schools—were brought under the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (VEYLDF) in 2009.

VEYLDF provided educators with a common language and set of outcomes, regardless of whether they worked in early childhood education and care setting such as kindergartens, or within schools with children in years Prep to Year 2. The framework brought together the Australian Early Years Learning Framework and the school-based VELs.

DET's *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative is an important element of VEYLDF. It aims to improve children's experience of starting school by enhancing the development and delivery of transition programs.

A key part of this initiative was the introduction of a standardised *Transition Learning and Development Statement* (transition statement) that early childhood educators and families complete to share information with the school about the child's learning and development. It also allows the early childhood educators to indicate to the school if they would like to speak with the child's Prep teacher about specific issues. This remains a good example of DET seeking to address a major transition issue.

The initiative is accompanied by a comprehensive resource kit for schools and early childhood education and care services that provides detailed information about effective programs and approaches to transition planning. It also includes advice about additional support for specific groups of children and families.

In 2009, DET changed the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedure and funding criteria to make completion of transition statements a requirement of funding. In 2013, providers of kindergarten programs reported completing a transition statement for 95.2 per cent of enrolled children. It is likely that linking the funding to the completion of the statements by kindergarten services has contributed to this high compliance rate. However, in 2013, only 80 per cent of children at government schools arrived with a completed transition statement. Of the 20 per cent of children who did not have a transition statement, half were then completed by the Prep teacher with the family. Multiple factors influenced this result, including parents not giving consent to transfer information and not advising where the child is transitioning to.

Comprehensive approach

DET has adopted a comprehensive three-tiered approach to supporting successful transitions in the early years:

- **Universal**—all children are expected to arrive at school with a transition statement containing information from early childhood educators and family that will assist in supporting a successful transition to school.
- **Targeted**—initiatives to support children who are part of a cohort known to be vulnerable to poor transition to school, such as Aboriginal children.
- **Individual**—initiatives to support children identified as being vulnerable to poor transition because of a disability.

Funded programs and resources for students with extra needs

DET allocated \$367.5 million in 2013–14 to support students to prepare for and transition into school through support for regular kindergarten places and a range of special initiatives in the early years including:

- Early Childhood Intervention Services
- Kindergarten Inclusion Support Packages
- Early Start kindergarten.

Further, children who require additional support at school due to having disabilities and moderate to severe needs can be supported under the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) once they commence school. Currently government schools receive PSD funding to provide targeted support for 22 281 students (4 per cent). Two-thirds of applications for Prep students are made prior to or shortly after the start of the school year, by mid-February. This means that the majority of these students are identified as potentially needing assistance before they commence school.

2.5 Weaknesses in the current approach

Despite the strengths, there are some weaknesses in DET's approach to supporting early-years transitions. In particular:

- further work is required to target support towards the students identified as vulnerable in Figure 2E
- DET could make better use of available data
- there are persistent challenges for schools and early childhood services in how they communicate and understand continuity of learning between kindergarten and school.

2.5.1 Better targeting of vulnerable cohorts is needed

The current National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, agreed to by DET, has an explicit focus on improving participation in kindergarten programs for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The agreement defines these as including, but not being limited to, children:

- from Aboriginal backgrounds
- with a disability
- being in, or at risk of being placed in, the child protection system
- in communities identified, through AEDC, as having significant vulnerabilities
- in low socio-economic communities
- who are refugees or children of refugees at risk
- from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Despite this and the fact that DET has met its overall kindergarten participation performance measure for the past four years, DET does not set or report on targets for increasing kindergarten participation in these high priority groups.

2.5.2 Inadequate collection and use of data

While DET has taken steps to improve data collection and the use of that data in relation to early-years transitions, there are a number of unresolved issues.

Lack of child-level outcomes and indicators

Currently in Victoria, once a child enters a government or non-government school they are given a unique student identifier called a Victorian Student Number (VSN). The VSN was introduced in 2011, and follows a child from Prep until they are aged 25 if they are enrolled in school or vocational education and training—but not in higher education. While currently linked to basic identification and enrolment information, it has the potential to allow for better tracking, and the linking of children's outcomes with a range of other data. This unique identifier does not exist in early childhood education.

As part of its *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative, DET commissioned research to develop and trial an evaluation tool to measure the outcomes and indicators of a successful transition to school for children, families and their educators. DET has not completed this work.

While DET has sought to use its mid-year supplementary school census to establish the value and use of the transition statements for Prep teachers, the data is of low quality and there is no evidence that the data collected is used to inform ongoing policy development in this area.

Through its Abilities Based Learning and Education Support curriculum resource, DET has made some progress on measuring outcomes for school students with disabilities. However, it remains unclear if this will enable DET to examine whether the funding allocated to support these students is being effectively used, or if the extensive policy and program work aimed at supporting these students during transitions has been effective.

Issues with kindergarten reporting and measures of quality

Care must be used when looking at kindergarten participation rates, as data on participation in kindergarten is fraught with difficulties. This situation is not just particular to Victoria.

Consistent with national data collection measures, the definition of attendance or participation in kindergarten used in reporting is that the child was enrolled and had attended the program for at least one hour during the reference period—the census week in August.

Audited early childhood education and care services and schools provided examples of children not attending kindergarten for periods of up to three months while visiting relatives from their home country, or having attendance impacted by a lack of transport, for example. Despite DET's reported local and statewide averages being much higher, one audited school reported that less than 50 per cent of students that enrolled in 2014 had attended a kindergarten. None of the publicly reported data on participation captures these variations.

Until 2014, DET calculated local kindergarten participation rates based on the postcode of the service, rather than the child's address. This contributed to inaccuracies in locally reported rates, including the situation that in 2013, 34 of 79 local government areas had participation rates of more than 100 per cent. DET has recently started to use the postcode of the child's address rather than the provider's address. It hopes this will produce more accurate data for planning and service delivery. In addition, DET has begun scoping for an Early Childhood Management Solution which aims to improve the identification and tracking of children in early childhood services. The scoping phase is due to be completed in late 2015.

2.5.3 Issues with information transfer

As mentioned earlier, transition statements are intended to help Prep teachers get a better understanding of the children coming into their classes. Most early childhood education and care providers comply with the requirement to supply these statements to government and non-government schools because their completion is linked to funding.

However, early childhood service providers visited for this audit reported that the transition statement took over an hour to complete for each child, not including the time needed to explain and receive feedback from parents. Many early childhood service providers also felt unsure about whether the transition statements, or indeed their own professional knowledge of the child, was valued by schools. This is not necessarily a reflection about the usefulness of the statements to transfer information, but is more about the communication and respect that exists between early childhood teachers and primary school teachers.

Most Prep teachers in audited schools stated that the transition statements were of limited use, as they did not provide a balanced picture of the skills of a child. In line with the research literature that informed the *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative, and the fact that parents must give permission for the transition statements to be sent to schools, kindergarten educators are instructed to write the statements based on the child's strengths, rather than deficits. This focus on 'strength-based' assessment was cited as a difficulty. Understandably, Prep teachers placed more value on being able to observe the child in an early childhood setting or during Prep orientation days. However, this does not mean that the statements are without value, particularly where observation of the child was not possible.

Despite the common framework developed under VEYLDF, staff in audited schools perceived a lack of consistency and congruity in what is taught in early childhood education and care services with what would set the foundation for a successful transition to school.

According to DET, the principal role of a kindergarten program is to engage each child in effective learning, thereby promoting communication, learning and thinking, and to develop in each child the capacity for positive relationships and a sense of identity. Notably, the majority of early childhood educators stated that they did not see their role as preparing children for school—rather they saw their role as helping children develop social and self-care skills.

Few educators in either early childhood or school-based settings had professional experience in the alternate settings. Educators who had this experience felt that they had a special insight that would ultimately help them provide a positive transition experience for children. This suggests that more training and professional development is required to bring educators in early childhood and school-based settings to a shared understanding of the roles of the two sectors.

Recommendations

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 in order to:
 - ensure that the collected information is sufficient and appropriate for the Department of Education and Training to monitor the impact of these services on children's long-term educational outcomes
 - develop reporting requirements to collect and record this information in a way that allows the Department of Education and Training to link child-level data collected prior to school with data collected after school enrolment
 2. reviews the use of early-years transition statements with a particular focus on:
 - adequacy of the information captured
 - relationships between early childhood and school-based educators
 - training and development for educators in early childhood and school-based settings to develop a shared understanding of the role of both sectors
 3. develops and monitors transition-related outcomes for the early years including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transitions.
-

3 Middle-years transition

At a glance

Background

To transition successfully to secondary school, children need to be supported before, during and after the transition. Children who have difficulty with this transition are likely to become more disengaged and have poorer academic outcomes in the future.

Conclusion

Middle-years outcomes are mixed, with some encouraging trends in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy results and parents' views on transitions. However, the Department of Education and Training (DET) does not provide enough support to schools to properly support students or improve their own practices. DET should monitor children's post-transition outcomes more effectively.

Findings

- In some measures, children's academic outcomes and engagement with school decline after transitioning to secondary school. Boys' performance declines faster than girls.
- Parents' ratings of school support for children, as they transition, have improved.
- Schools undertake a variety of informed practices to support transitioning children.
- DET has a role to manage inconsistencies across the system and to properly support schools to transition students effectively. It does not do either well.
- DET does not undertake system-level monitoring to track transition outcomes.

Recommendations

The Department of Education and Training:

- develops and monitors transition-related outcomes for the middle years, including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transitions
- develops a more comprehensive suite of guidance and resources to support schools to transition middle-years students
- improves its systems to allow more timely access to child-level data for schools
- examines the appropriateness of the timing of the Year 6 review for children who receive funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities.

3.1 Introduction

The transition into secondary school is a significant one for children and it occurs as children are undergoing the developmental changes associated with the onset of puberty. In moving to secondary school, children enter a new social world and move to a more independent learning environment. The shift often involves a change in the type of curriculum and pedagogy (teaching methods) from that experienced in primary school. There is wide recognition of a drop in children's achievement and engagement with school after they make this transition.

The challenge for schools is to sustain children's progress and motivation as they make this transition during Years 5 through 8. Making a successful transition from primary school to secondary school has an impact on both children's engagement with school and their later academic outcomes. International research suggests that children who fall behind at this point will find it increasingly difficult to make up the lost ground.

3.2 Conclusion

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 of Education and Training (DET) has not addressed.

The static nature of middle-years outcomes over time suggests that there is room to improve the approach to managing this transition. However, DET has not done enough to fully examine the trends in the data and relate this back to the strategies and approaches being employed by schools to transition students.

Unlike the early-years transition, DET does not have a clear strategy or framework guiding the middle-years transition. It does not require a transition statement to be prepared and shared with secondary schools. As a result, schools are tackling middle-years transitions in varying ways and while this has resulted in some innovative practices, it has also lead to inefficiencies across the school system.

Given the lack of guidance and support from DET, the modest improvements in middle-years transition performance can only be attributed to the schools themselves tailoring their delivery of education to their students.

System-wide change is required if consistent long-term gains are to be made, and if issues such as the uneven impact of transitions on male and female students are to be resolved. There are simple steps that DET could take to better support schools to improve middle-years transitions, including evaluating the available data more thoroughly to inform targeted strategies and initiatives to support vulnerable students, and drawing on the successful approaches already in place for early-years transitions.

3.3 Middle-years outcomes

For children transitioning between primary and secondary school, a range of academic and wellbeing-related data is available. This section examines:

- academic performance
- children's engagement with school
- parents' assessment of children's transitions.

3.3.1 Academic performance

There are a number of ways in which the academic performance of school students is measured and monitored:

- **The Australian Curriculum/Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS)** outline statewide standards for students between Prep and Year 10 that schools use to plan learning programs, assess progress and report to parents. Every semester teachers assess each of their students against the relevant AusVELS standard. These replaced the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), which were in place until 2012.
- **The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)** is used to assess the performance of Australian children against a national minimum standard for numeracy and reading and writing. Children are tested at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The Year 5 and 7 assessments fall either side of the middle-years transition and provide a good measure of their transition outcomes.

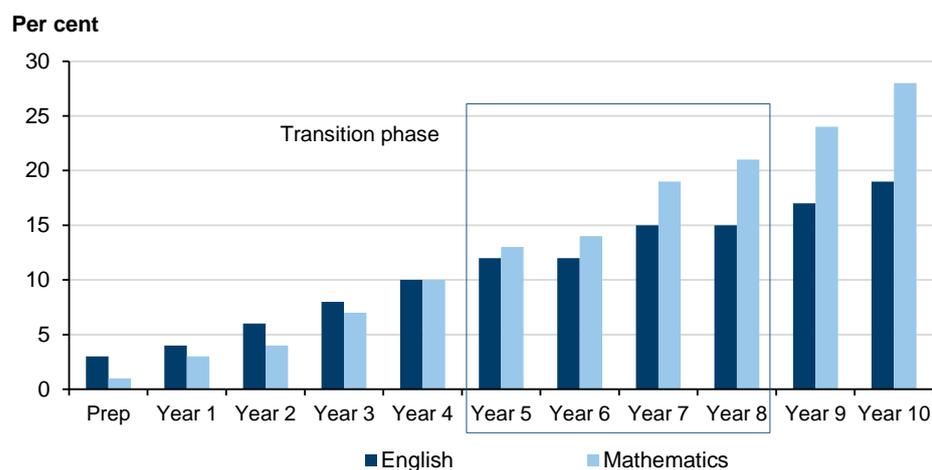
Teacher assessments of student performance against AusVELS

Teacher assessments against AusVELS show that the percentage of children whose performance is below the expected level increases as each child progresses through school, as shown in Figure 3A. Despite this fairly linear change, there are some notable variations:

- **Year 6 results** immediately prior to transition show a lull in the trend, particularly for English, with less of an increase in the number of children who are below the expected level.
- **Year 7 results** immediately following the transition reverse the Year 6 gain, and is then followed by a pattern of declining performance from Year 8 to Year 10.

Improving the middle-years transition process could assist in achieving significant improvements to student outcomes in Year 7 and beyond.

Figure 3A
Percentage of children in 2013 assessed as being six months or more below the expected levels in English and mathematics



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on AusVELS 2013 data, provided by DET.

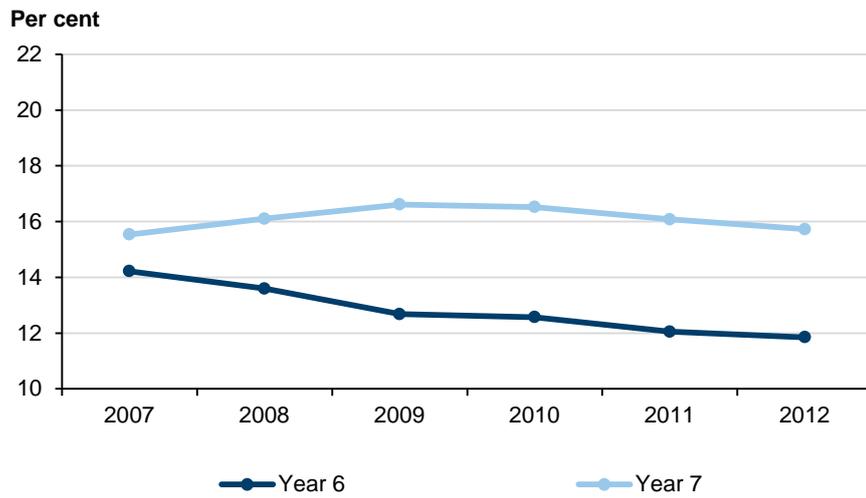
Figures 3B and 3C show the gap in outcomes between Year 6 and Year 7, from 2007 to 2012, in both English and mathematics. In both charts, a downward trend indicates a positive outcome.

In both English and mathematics, the gap between Year 6 and Year 7 performance has increased.

In English, teachers of Year 6 students were more positive about the capabilities of their students, while teachers of Year 7 students maintained their position.

In mathematics, teachers of Year 6 students have held a consistent view of student performance over time. However, the proportion of Year 7 students assessed as below the expected standard rose significantly from 15.3 per cent to 21.1 per cent over the five years.

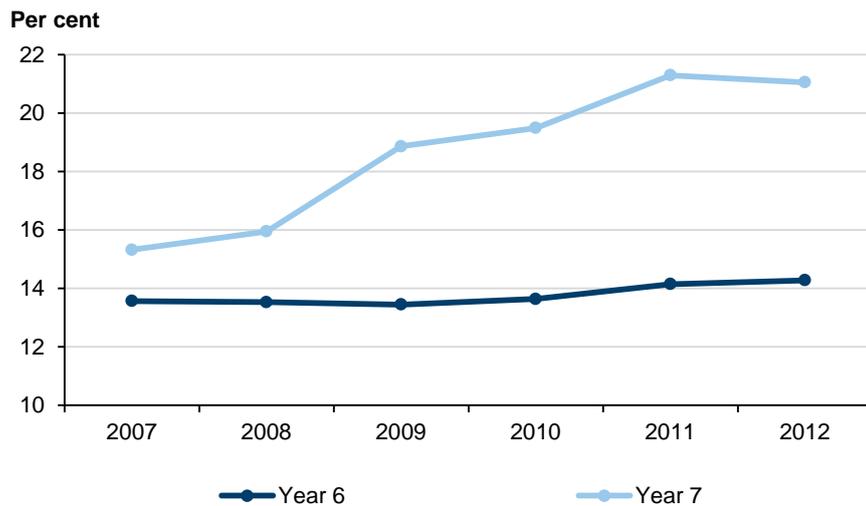
Figure 3B
Students assessed as being six months or more below the expected level in English



Note: From 2013, teacher assessment data was collected against a revised standard, which is not comparable to past results.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on VELS data, provided by DET.

Figure 3C
Students assessed as being six months or more below the expected level in mathematics



Note: From 2013, teacher assessment data was collected against a revised standard, which is not comparable to past results.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on VELS data, provided by DET.

Student performance in NAPLAN

NAPLAN results tell a slightly different story to the teacher assessments of student performance. As Figure 3D shows, the percentage of students assessed as being 'at or above' the minimum standard in reading and numeracy tests has improved for students transitioning from primary to secondary school. However, performance in writing assessments has dropped in each year as students transition from primary to secondary school. The gaps in performance between Year 5 and Year 7 have changed little over the last five years.

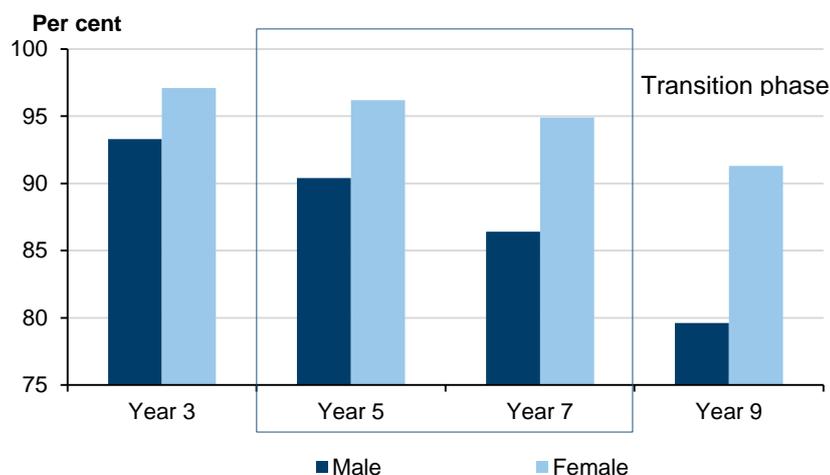
Figure 3D
Percentage of students meeting the national minimum NAPLAN standards

	Reading		Numeracy		Writing	
	Year 5	Year 7	Year 5	Year 7	Year 5	Year 7
2010	91	93	94	94	92	89
2011	91	94	93	94	91	87
2012	90	92	93	93	92	89
2013	95	92	93	94	92	87
2014	92	92	92	93	90	87

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on NAPLAN results for students at government schools, provided by DET.

Figure 3E 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.

Figure 3E
Victorian students meeting the national minimum NAPLAN standard for writing, 2014



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on NAPLAN results provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

3.3.2 Engagement

Engagement refers to the active participation of children in their learning and development, and is a strong predictor of student retention in later years, and a child's academic outcomes. In school settings, engagement has three components:

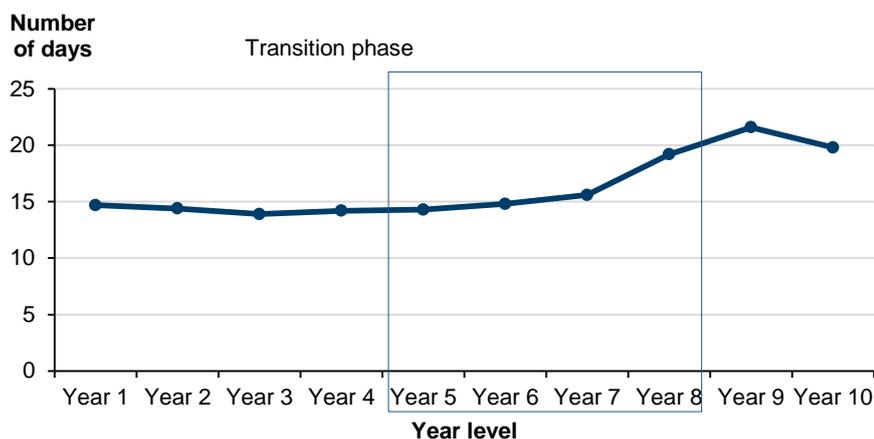
- **behavioural**—including attendance and participation in school activities
- **emotional**—including a child's sense of belonging and feeling valued at school
- **cognitive**—including beliefs about the importance of school for the child.

While it is not possible to directly link these outcomes to particular transition activities or approaches, it is clear that performance in these key areas drops off following the transition to secondary school. While there have been small improvements for Year 7 children, the drop in engagement after children transition to secondary school remains, suggesting that a different approach is needed to tackle these issues.

Attendance

On average, Victorian children are absent from school for around 16 days per year. Absenteeism rates remain relatively stable through primary school and into Year 7. However, as shown in Figure 3F, once children transition into secondary school absenteeism rates start to rise rapidly—with a dramatic increase in Years 8 and 9. This pattern of absenteeism has not changed over the past five years.

Figure 3F
Average days absence per full-time equivalent student in 2014

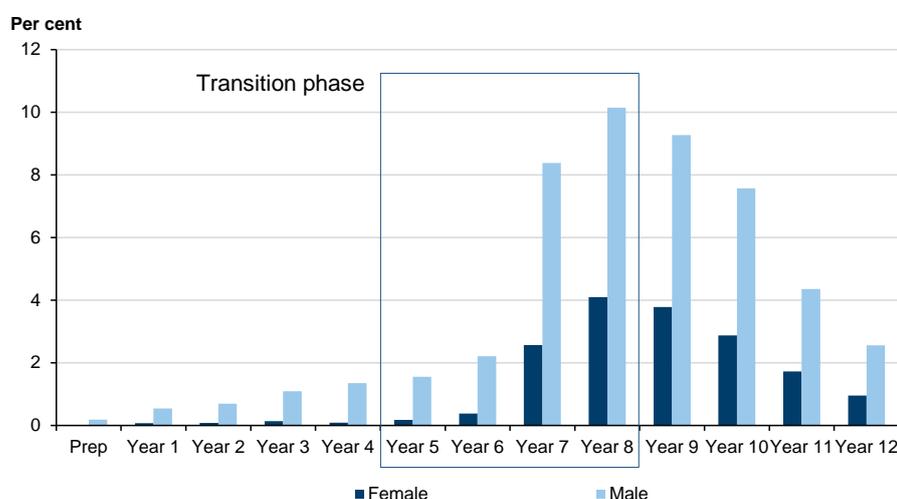


Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on DET data.

Suspensions from school

As Figure 3G shows, very few children are suspended from school during their primary years. However, immediately following the transition to secondary school the number of suspensions increases dramatically. Notably, the vast majority of secondary school suspensions are boys, again reinforcing the need for more gender-specific strategies. The current pattern of suspensions has remained consistent in recent years.

Figure 3G
Student suspensions in 2014



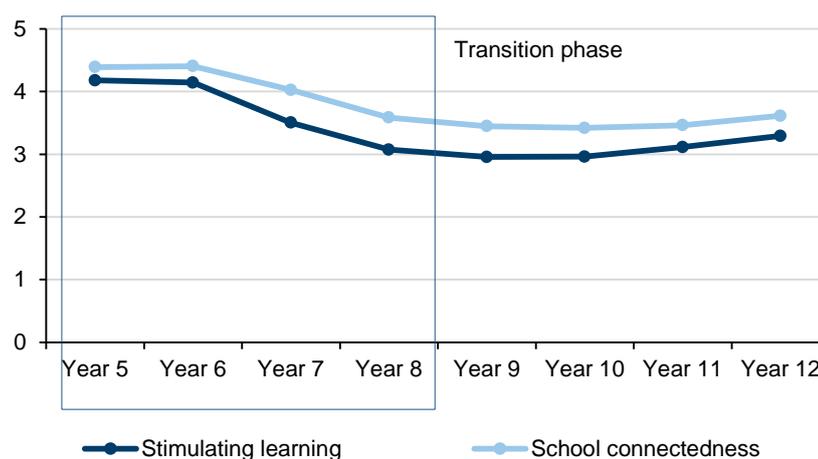
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on DET's August 2014 census of schools.

Connectedness and stimulating learning environments

DET's Attitude to School Survey asks children in Years 5 to 12 a number of questions about their experiences at school. The Attitude to School Survey includes assessments of how stimulated students feel by their learning environment and how connected they feel to the school. Both of these indicators decline significantly following the transition into Year 7, only recovering marginally as they progress through the latter years of secondary school.

Figure 3H displays results from the 2013 student ratings for these two measures on a scale of one to five, with five being most positive.

Figure 3H
Student ratings of stimulating learning and school connectedness



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office based on an analysis of DET data from the 2013 Attitude to School Survey.

Over the past five years, both measures have improved incrementally. However, the overall pattern of performance remains unchanged showing that more specific, targeted action is required.

Year 7 girls were significantly more positive than Year 7 boys on their:

- connectedness to peers
- school connectedness
- student motivation
- student morale.

3.3.3 Parental feedback

DET's Parent Opinion Survey collects parent views about their children's experience of school, including parents' views of how schools are handling children's transitions. This data shows that:

- parents of primary school children are more positive about how schools handle transitions than parents of secondary school children
- parent ratings of how well primary and secondary schools have supported children during transitions have consistently improved over the last seven years.

While these questions indicate parents are more positive about schools' support for children who are transitioning, DET has no information that links this data to what schools are actually doing, which limits the usefulness of this data to drive system improvement.

3.4 Strengths in the current approach

There are a number of strengths in DET's current approach to supporting middle-years transitions.

3.4.1 Renewed focus on middle-years transitions

DET has long acknowledged that the middle years of schooling—covering Year 5 to Year 8—are a critical time in students' learning and development. Over the six years preceding 2003, DET had a range of initiatives in place to improve teaching practices and student learning outcomes in the middle years. These initiatives aimed to address declining student performance and engagement during the transition to secondary school. DET provided no explanation as to why these initiatives stopped. DET's *Strategic Plan 2013–17* and its 2012 document *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* both placed renewed emphasis on middle years. However, to date, DET has not developed a more detailed plan or framework to support middle-years students.

Unlike in earlier years, DET does not currently fund specific middle-years programs. However, its school funding model is designed to target disadvantage and is weighted to encourage schools to invest in Years 7, 8 and 9.

In 2013–14, DET administered \$5 484 million to government schools, with the majority of this delivered through its school budget—the Student Resource Package. The majority of this funding, \$4 165 million, was provided as core student funding. Core student funding includes a standard funding component for each student in the school, supplemented by a series of loadings designed to recognise the costs associated with different year levels, different types and sizes of schools, and the additional costs imposed by rurality and isolation. In 2014, the core funding for each student was:

- **Prep to Year 1**—\$6 684
- **Year 2**—\$6 206
- **Year 3 to Year 6**—\$5 688
- **Year 7 to Year 12**—\$7 554.

In 2008, DET increased the funding level allocated for the year levels immediately following the start of secondary school—Years 7 and 8—to match the allocation to Years 9 to 12. DET has maintained this single weighting to encourage schools to invest in early intervention.

Further information about DET's school funding arrangements are available in VAGO's *Victorian school funding explained* information piece, published in February 2015 as an appendix to the performance audit report *Additional School Costs for Families*.

3.4.2 Support for children with additional needs

There are a range of children who may require additional support when transitioning to secondary school. DET offers better support to schools to transition students with additional needs than it does mainstream students. Much of the high-quality guidance and material prepared for these purposes could easily be adapted to apply to the general school population.

Students with disabilities

In addition to administering \$640 million funding under the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) DET's *Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School* resource provides extensive advice to families and educators on how to support students with additional or complex needs that arise from disabilities, when moving from primary to secondary school.

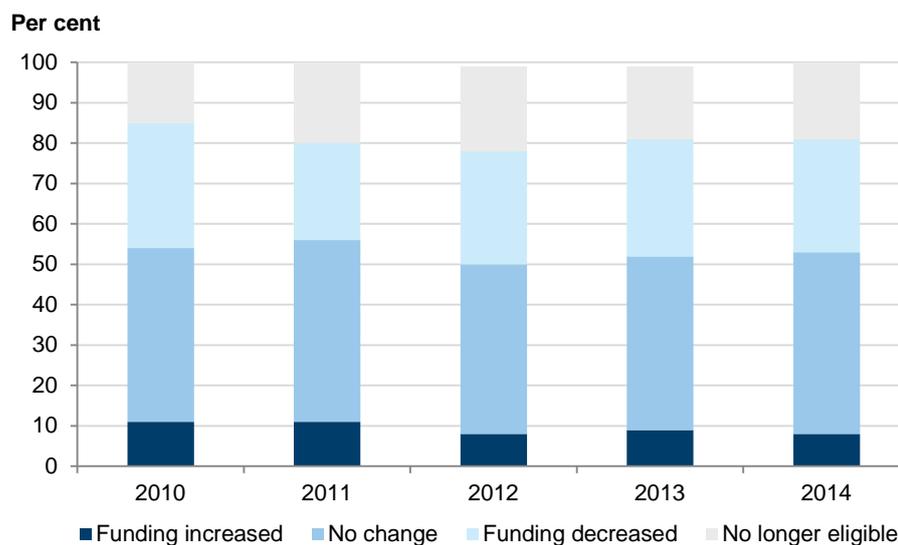
Many of the principles embedded within this approach apply more broadly to the general school population. There would be considerable value in DET reviewing this document with a view to establishing it as the starting point for a broader middle-years transition framework.

There is currently only one mandated review point to determine the appropriateness of supplementary funding provided to schools under PSD. This occurs at Year 6. DET advised that it should inform students' secondary school placement options.

However, audited schools consistently expressed concern with the timing of the review of PSD funding for students, which occurs just before they transition to secondary school. Audited school staff suggested that a review after the child is at secondary school would likely provide a better understanding of the need for additional ongoing support in their new school environment. It would also mean that they continue to receive additional support during their transition into secondary school.

In 2014, one in five Year 6 students were assessed as no longer being eligible for additional support through the PSD. A similar number had their funding levels reduced following this review. This means that almost half of the Year 6 PSD-supported students received less support immediately following their transition into secondary school—see Figure 3I. It is reasonable to assume that the need for extra support will decline for some students as they progress through school. However, the current approach is at odds with the fact that DET has built a framework specifically to assist students with additional needs to transition effectively into secondary school.

Figure 3I
Outcomes for Year 6 students undergoing review of PSD funding prior to transitioning to secondary school, 2010–14



Note: 2014 data excludes 50 reviews—out of 2 085 in total—that were still underway at December 2014. Data for 2012 and 2013 do not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General’s Office based on information provided by DET.

These concerns were raised by the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission in its 2012 report *Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools*. It found that funding reviews before entering secondary school may prompt a step down in support, even though the secondary school environment and curriculum may be more challenging. It recommended that DET investigate any systemic patterns of reductions in funding occurring during middle-years transitions.

DET did not address this recommendation with a specific review and has not comprehensively evaluated the impact of the Year 6 funding review timing on the successful transition of these students into secondary school. DET advised that rather than conduct a one-off review, it relies upon what it believes are high levels of quality assurance applied to all PSD applications. This audit did not examine these processes in detail. Even with DET’s approach, there may remain some value in a more comprehensive evaluation of the impact of this review on the transition outcomes of students.

From August 2014, Victoria has participated in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability. This joint initiative with the Commonwealth Government was endorsed by all education ministers in Australia, and will allow an annual count of the number of students with disabilities receiving adjustments at school—including children who receive PSD funding and those who do not.

DET states that the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability will allow it to better target programs and make resourcing decisions that contribute to more effective outcomes for students with disabilities. However, it is too early to assess whether this aim will be realised.

Students learning English as an additional language

DET has developed and implemented a strategy to support students transitioning from English language schools or centres into a mainstream setting. The New Arrivals Program is designed to prepare eligible students to fully participate in mainstream schooling. The support provided for the transition is part of the program, not its purpose. It provides intensive instruction in English for a period of 6 to 12 months. Despite English language schools or centres being in existence since the late 1980's, DET has never undertaken a review that examines the outcomes for children who transition from them to mainstream schools. In 2013, 2 831 students exited from English language schools or centres to enrol in a mainstream school.

This audit visited two English language schools, both of which had:

- **transition reports**—standardised reports for each child outlining their stage of English development and future learning needs
- **transition officers**—dedicated staff who provide intensive support for children transitioning into mainstream schooling. This support includes preparing for the new school—beginning in the term prior to exiting—and ongoing support once students are at the new school.

These English language schools undertook these activities as a matter of good practice, rather than under any DET direction or insight into what constitutes better practice. Both were considered by mainstream schools to be helpful practices to support any child making a transition.

3.4.3 Local decision-making

Under the current devolved accountability model, government schools are largely autonomous. School principals are free to develop specific approaches to managing transitions that meet the needs of their student population.

Audited schools had adopted a range of practices to support students to transition effectively into secondary school—these are outlined in Appendix B. Most of the activities undertaken by schools were targeted towards preparing students to transition, and the actual transfer from one school to another. Consistent with international research, the majority of transition activities targeted the administrative, social and personal aspects of transitions.

Audited schools had far fewer transition activities that targeted curriculum or pedagogy, despite a number of schools stating that they were aware of the benefits of these activities.

There are risks associated with increased school autonomy, mainly relating to inconsistent practices. As described later in this report, inconsistent practices between schools can lead to inefficiencies and duplication of effort. It can also impact the quality and smoothness of the transition experience for students and their families.

DET has a role to manage these types of inconsistencies across the system and to properly support schools to transition students effectively. It needs to provide clear guidance on transitions and help schools to gather and share information about good transition practices. It does not do either well. Audited schools identified the support from DET's regional offices as critical, but recent reforms have limited DET's regional offices' capacity to directly support schools.

Figure 3J exemplifies both the positive and negative sides of school autonomy.

Figure 3J
Case study: School relationships under school autonomy

School A is a large secondary college in a metropolitan area of Victoria. Schools B and C are two primary schools that each send the majority of their exiting Year 6 students to school A. Both primary schools described very different relationships with school A when it comes to transitioning children.

Primary school B describes their relationship with secondary school A as good:

- Our transitions coordinator has a good relationship with their equivalent at school A.
- We work collaboratively with school A to successfully transition our Year 6 children.
- Our teachers spend time at school A to see and understand their approach.
- We have shaped our pedagogy to match school A in order to smooth the transition for children.
- Teachers from school A visit our schools to give presentations to our children.
- We have developed this relationship ourselves, not as part of the organised local network of schools.

Primary school C describes its relationship with secondary school A as poor:

- Our attempts at collaborating with school A have not been successful.
- We suggested and put in place a written agreement for transitioning students, but it was not followed by school A.
- Our teachers have very little contact with staff at school A—visits rarely occur.
- Our children have contact with school A only when they go on school tours.
- The important information and understanding we have about our Year 6 children—such as individual learning plans for students with disabilities—is often ignored by school A.
- Our request for access to NAPLAN data on our exited students to reflect on how well we prepared them for their transition was initially refused due to 'privacy reasons'.
- We feel school A is focused on teaching subject content and not meeting individual children's learning needs.
- We participate in a network of schools which share ideas on best practice, including around transitions, but school A is not part of that network.
- As our main destination school, we would like, but have not been asked to, provide feedback for peer reviews on school A.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

DET currently takes no role in assisting schools to develop positive relationships with other schools when they share the transitioning of children, nor does it hold schools to account for the quality of those relationships. It is clear from this case study that some level of oversight and intervention are required to ensure that schools are not isolated or disassociated from their nearby schools.

3.4.4 Improved school-level monitoring

Under the *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* schools policy, one of DET's identified roles is to provide a range of high-quality data about schools and their students to support schools to make informed decisions.

In April 2013, DET launched a new School Information Portal (SIP) to replace the School Level Report previously provided to schools. The SIP provides a central access point for school data and is intended to support school-level planning and self-evaluation.

The SIP provides schools with a much greater capacity to analyse and use school-based information as soon as it becomes available. This data allows schools to benchmark and track their performance across a range of data, such as student achievement, parent and student attitudes, enrolment, retention and participation. DET has proven responsive to feedback from schools on adapting and tailoring the reports available on SIP, and plans to add further capacities and functions over time.

The development and implementation of SIP is a significant step towards allowing principals to effectively monitor the performance of their students and their school. This system has the potential to provide principals with the type of meaningful, timely and comprehensive information about transitioning students they need to make informed decisions.

3.5 Weaknesses in the current approach

DET's current approach to middle-years transitions has a number of weaknesses, including that it has no overarching framework, makes limited use of available data to track transition outcomes, and has problems associated with transferring information between schools.

3.5.1 Problems with transferring and accessing student information

In order for children to make successful transitions, it is vital that the academic and other information needed to assist their learning is available to the staff supporting them. However, DET's guidance is unclear and schools are interpreting their privacy obligations in inconsistent and incorrect ways. As a result, the processes used by schools to collect, use and disclose academic and other information are ad hoc and inefficient. This adversely affects schools' ability to transition students efficiently and effectively.

Use and disclosure of information

Schools collect and use a large amount of personal and health information on their students. In Victoria, the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* outline obligations in relation to the collection, use and disclosure of personal and health information.

Audited schools were not clear about what information they could share and what process they should follow for sharing information between government schools. They were also uncertain about whether parental permission was required to pass on the information contained in children's school files.

Student files contain important information about children's welfare and educational needs. DET advised that new schools require this information to discharge their duty of care and meet their obligations under disability discrimination laws and that by the time of transition, schools will have the consent of parents or guardians to collect and store information. Therefore, the transfer of information between government schools should occur as an administrative matter. While DET was able to provide this advice to VAGO on request, it has not provided clear, definitive and widely available advice to schools on this matter.

Access to student data and other information

Secondary schools cannot easily and efficiently access the full range of academic data—particularly NAPLAN results—on their new students. While this information is collected and stored centrally, it is not immediately or comprehensively available to schools. Quick and easy access to this information would assist schools to tailor the teaching of new students, and fully track and understand their progress as they transition. In most cases, audited primary schools provided whatever information the secondary school asked for on each child. However, a number of schools commented on the inefficiency of this process.

In a similar manner, primary schools cannot access any information about the progress of the students that they transition to other schools—even in a de-identified format. This information would provide them with useful insight into the success or otherwise of their approaches to transitioning students. It is hard to see how primary schools could improve their approach without meaningful, objective evidence on student outcomes.

Approaches to collecting, monitoring and using student information

All schools demonstrated significant efforts to collect, monitor and use data that would inform them about their students' education, engagement and wellbeing. Strategies to do this involved:

- using a spreadsheet based on the DET Student Mapping Tool
- developing school-specific spreadsheets to monitor student outcomes
- purchasing—sometimes multiple—commercially available software packages to monitor student outcomes
- designing surveys for parents and students to get feedback on transitions.

These approaches rely heavily on staff expertise and schools having the resources to allocate staff time to conduct the work. Much of the data collected and used by schools was collected in different systems, and on occasions was re-entered manually by schools to suit their purpose.

Audited schools based their knowledge of available programs on informal professional networks or on information provided by commercial providers. Despite many schools purchasing the same commercial programs, each school visited did so within their own school budgets. As such, there wasn't an opportunity to negotiate for discounts across multiple schools.

There is scope for DET to take a larger role in developing tools that can be used by schools to more efficiently monitor school outcomes.

Information transfer practices and school networks

DET has developed standardised transition statements for students transitioning into primary school and for students with additional needs. However, it has not developed a standard tool for students moving between schools.

DET provides no guidance for schools that outlines the basic information that should be transferred from one school to another when a student transitions. The consequence of this is that primary schools that need to transition students to a range of secondary schools may be asked to prepare information in a range of formats, and with varying levels of detail.

Audited schools advised that they regularly have to copy information from their electronic systems onto paper for the secondary school, which is then manually re-entered into the secondary schools' incompatible system.

Figure 3K shows the large number of early childhood education and care services involved in student transitions. In this environment, schools cannot develop and maintain strong relationships with such broad networks of schools. This highlights the importance of having a standardised data set.

Figure 3K
Number of services or schools sending children to schools visited during the audit

School	Number of transitioning children entering the school	Number of early childhood services or schools children come from	Number of early childhood services or schools sending only one child
Primary School 1	116	16	–
Primary School 2	106	16	2
Primary School 3	84	21	9
Primary School 4	52	26	16
Primary School 5	50	13	7
Secondary School 1	271	48	18
Secondary School 2	203	35	12
Secondary School 3	187	43	21
Secondary School 4	165	20	10
Secondary School 5	64	16	6

Note: Data provided for either 2013 or 2014 school year.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

DET's schools policy *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* requires schools to set up networks and partnerships with early childhood education and care providers and other schools.

All the audited schools reported being in established networks. However, most schools participated in networks that were set up between like-minded schools or school principals, rather than with nearby schools which shared transitioning students. In these cases, the networks were valued for the range of professional learning opportunities and support they offered. However, valuable opportunities to develop collaborative approaches to transitioning students were lost by the dispersed geographical nature of some of these networks.

A number of schools commented that they were able to access much more support from DET's regional offices prior to the department's restructure.

Among the audited schools, there were two well-established and well-functioning networks that included all local schools. These networks had developed and implemented innovative and practical solutions to efficiently and effectively manage transitions, including principals jointly agreeing to:

- a single day when all Year 5 and 6 teachers could meet with a secondary school representative
- primary schools providing specified data to secondary schools using a modified version of the DET Student Mapping Tool
- coordinate the management of mid-year school transfers to prevent 'school hopping'—where parents move their children between schools during the year to find the best fit
- decide on which school should take children who have been expelled
- hire specialist resources—including Autism coaches and Koorie education officers.

3.5.2 Limited monitoring of transition outcomes

DET provides schools with student and parent surveys, which are administered by the school. DET then collates the surveys on behalf of schools, and provides school-level data back to schools via the SIP. DET does not however, systematically or routinely analyse this data to inform transition-related policy and guidance.

DET's *2013–2017 Strategic Plan* identified its intent to shift the balance of its efforts from focusing on inputs to outcomes. To facilitate this, it is developing a new Outcomes Performance Framework designed to support evidence-based decision-making and monitoring. The current draft of the framework includes two transition-related measures of a successful transition into secondary school—student connectedness to school and student motivation, neither of which measure academic outcomes.

Through its Abilities Based Learning and Education Support Resources project DET has made some progress on measuring outcomes for students with disabilities. However, it is not clear if this will enable DET to examine whether the funding allocated to support these students is being used effectively, or if the extensive policy and program work aimed at supporting these students during transitions has been effective.

3.5.3 No comprehensive framework to support middle-years transitions

Unlike its approach to early-years transitions, children with additional needs and children at English language schools, DET does not have a comprehensive middle-years transitions framework, and provides limited guidance or direction to schools.

DET's guidance to schools focuses on providing strategies to support students or groups of students who are either known to be, or likely to be, vulnerable to poor transitions. However, it does not provide comprehensive advice on how schools should address the risks to engagement, wellbeing and academic achievement for the majority of children making this transition.

3.5.4 Lack of gender-specific guidance and support

International literature and Victorian early- and middle-years transitions data shows that there are significant, persistent gender-based differences in both engagement and academic performance. Despite this, DET does not provide schools with guidance about managing gender differences in learning and engagement, either during transitions or in other aspects of schooling. In contrast, the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities has developed a *Boys and Girls Education Strategy*, which provides its schools with a strategic framework of six objectives for addressing the education and wellbeing needs of students that takes gender into account.

Only one audited school actively monitored gender-based student outcomes, let alone gender-based transition outcomes. The persistence of gender differences in educational outcomes suggests that DET's current and historical approach is not working and change is required.

Recommendations

The Department of Education and Training:

4. develops and monitors transition-related outcomes for the middle years, including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transitions
 5. develops a more comprehensive suite of guidance and resources to support schools to transition middle-years students including:
 - clear advice to schools on the use and disclosure of children's information and data
 - a standardised minimum set of data for transitioning students
 - developing transition networks with geographically similar schools and sharing best practice approaches across the school system
 6. reviews and improves 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.
-

Appendix A.

Transition activities in the early years

'Promising practices' is the term used in the Department of Education and Training's guidance materials for strategies, programs and approaches designed to support positive transitions for children.

Figure A1
Observed transition activities in the early years—Promising practices by phase of transition

Practice idea	Preparation phase	Transfer phase	Induction phase	Consolidation phase
Reciprocal visits— for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School tours by parents and children. Regular site visits throughout the year by kindergarten teacher and children to local primary school(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prep transition sessions at the school—varying from two to eight sessions in terms three and/or four. Extra Prep transition sessions for children with additional needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prep orientation day. 	
Reciprocal visits— for educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site visits by Prep teacher to kindergartens. Site visits by kindergarten teachers to schools. 			
Transition statements and meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of <i>Transition Learning and Development Statements</i> by kindergarten teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transfer, with parent consent, of transition statement to primary schools. Site visits by Prep teachers to main feeder kindergartens to discuss children. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone call by Prep teacher to kindergarten teacher to discuss areas of concern for individual children.
Joint professional development		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local council facilitated forum for kindergarten and Prep teachers for networking and information sharing. 		
Local transition networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual child health assessments undertaken by a range of specialists, with results reported to families and the kindergarten. Transition networks of primary and kindergarten teachers focused on improving information sharing. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular clinic run at the school by local paediatric specialist.

Practice idea	Preparation phase	Transfer phase	Induction phase	Consolidation phase
Buddy programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection and preparation of older school children as 'buddies' for new Prep students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of each prospective Prep student to their buddy during the Prep transition session. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prep/Year 5 buddy program commences with shared weekly activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buddy program continues.
Family involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent input into, and consent for providing, transition statement to primary schools. Kindergarten information nights and informal discussions with parents on their child's readiness for school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent information sessions and social activities during Prep transition days. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent social activities during Prep orientation day. Prep interviews for parents and children. Family Liaison Officer supporting parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent-teacher interviews. Parents trained as helpers. Parent forums on relevant topics. Parent input into Student Support Groups and learning plans for children with extra needs.
Learning programs responsive to children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities run by kindergarten teachers that mimic school expectations and learning environment. Preparation of program for students with disability applications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in activities that mimic school expectations and learning environment during transition sessions. Identification of children that may have special needs—organise assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1:1 assessment of Prep students by teachers on academic and other outcomes. Learning structured within play-based learning approach. Four day week for term one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of children's needs by classroom teachers and wellbeing staff. Play-based/structured-learning program. Student support groups for children with extra needs. Classes for advanced students.
Social story-boards		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children given photos of their Prep teacher, a school DVD and a postcard from their buddy to familiarise them with the new setting. 		
Community-level transition timetable		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network-wide transition day. 		

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

Appendix B.

Transition activities for Years 6–7

Figure B1
Observed transition activities for Years 6–7—Identified practices and further good practice

Area	Preparation phase	Transfer phase	Induction phase	Consolidation phase
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offered school tours for parents and children. Assisted completion of student enrolment into secondary school form. Responded to requests for information for multiple secondary school transition reports. Established clear roles and responsibilities within primary and secondary schools for transitions. Identified transitions as a key responsibility in position description. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a 'transition champion' within the school—an individual with responsibility for monitoring and supporting effective transitions. Developing a transition policy, agreed on in partnership with local primary schools that covers the process for collecting and transferring information and sets out expectations for active collaboration between feeder and receiver schools. It would outline the role of staff, parents and children in the transition process and be regularly reviewed and amended accordingly. All staff, parents and children would be aware of the policy. Setting and monitoring of academic achievement targets, and other targets on engagement for the years following transition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary schools made efforts to identify students who had relevant information in primary-school-held student welfare files. Sought consent and liaised with parents to obtain information from primary schools. Requested files and information from primary schools—written and verbal. Undertook site visits to feeder primary schools. Provided information sessions and resource packs to parents. Held information sharing evenings for children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held Year 7 management team and teachers' meetings to discuss and plan for individual students and incoming cohorts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collated Year 7 student information to be transferred to Year 8 level coordinator. <p>Further good practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing effective monitoring of academic and engagement outcomes for individual students, and groups known to be at risk of poor transition—for example, due to gender, culture, language or disability. Providing feedback to primary schools on the effectiveness of transition arrangements and the early progress of children. Involving staff, parents and children—including exited children—in evaluating transition arrangements to ensure continuous improvement.

Area	Preparation phase	Transfer phase	Induction phase	Consolidation phase
Social and personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved current secondary students in programs to assist primary schools, e.g. band, athletics carnivals. Identified children who might need extra transition sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated contact with older student 'buddy' through a welcome to high school letter. Provided extra transition sessions for identified students. Used observational information to assist in creating class groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held a Year 7 orientation day Robust anti-bullying policy was made explicit to children and parents and implemented effectively. Began Year 7–10 peer support/buddy program. Held Year 7 camps early in the school year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed a sub-school structure across year levels, to increase engagement and mimic the 'smaller school' feel of primary schools. Developed a 'house' system for non-classroom activities, e.g. school concerts, athletics. Surveyed children and parents on how they found the transition experience.
Management of learning— ensuring that children are seen as active participants in the transition process and in their own learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduced a whole-school approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of children at each stage of schooling, through fortnightly classes on social and emotional learning. Topics include positive relationships, mindfulness, stress and self-management, study skills, cyber safety and developing resilience. Assisted students to develop learning portfolios, which describe them as learners and give samples of their achievements. This is shared with the secondary school when the child transitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified specific student needs to inform planning and provision of support for students, and to inform class compositions, e.g. Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) funding pooled to provide an aide who might assist PSD funded and non-PSD funded students. Held transition evenings for parents and children to meet with school principals and Year 7 coordinators. Organised classroom cohorts to optimise availability and use of educational supports. Provided information to parents about how they can support their children to become professional learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed individual learning plans and behaviour plans for specific children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sought feedback through parent-teacher interviews. Organised fortnightly sessions for students on managing their wellbeing, including topics on stress and self-management, and study skills. Reviewed individual student's Year 5 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy data when it became available (after Year 7 testing). <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering children to actively contribute to the transition process, in which they are viewed as active participants, e.g. to suggest improvements and identify barriers to successful transition. Helping children understand their preferred style of learning so they can talk confidently about this to their new teachers.

Figure B1
Transition activities for Years 6-7—Identified practices and further good practice – continued

Practice Idea	Preparation Phase	Transfer Phase	Induction Phase	Consolidation Phase
<p>Pedagogy— improving the continuity in teaching and classroom practice between years 6 and 7. It seeks to counter stereotypes held by teachers in each setting and to encourage cross-setting professional support and dialogue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed a whole-school approach to pedagogy. Used assessment strategies that support staff to better monitor the progress of individual students and sub-groups of students. Undertook staff training in the use of positive psychology in the classroom. Provided information to parents about teaching and classroom practice. Amended later primary school pedagogy to match secondary school approach. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a mutual understanding of primary and secondary school approaches to teaching and learning. Focusing on preparing children to meet ‘new ways of working’, e.g. specific group work at primary school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held team meetings of teachers with contact with a specific class to discuss individual students and teaching strategies for that specific class grouping. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing lesson observations—especially where there are children with specific difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct baseline assessment and testing of Year 7 students, e.g. On Demand Literacy testing, Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics, etc. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team teaching between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers. Teacher exchange and secondment between primary and secondary schools. Both primary and secondary schools evaluating and adapting their joint approach to transition—taking into account the views of parents and children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing monitoring of students’ progress by classroom teachers. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team teaching between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers. Teacher exchange and secondment between primary and secondary schools. Both primary and secondary schools evaluating and adapting their joint approach to transition—taking into account the views of parents and children.

Practice Idea	Preparation Phase	Transfer Phase	Induction Phase	Consolidation Phase
<p>Curriculum— improving curriculum continuity between Years 6 and 7, thereby ensuring that secondary school teachers build on the curriculum covered to date and seek to teach to children's strengths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted a program for advanced Years 5 and 6 primary school students to participate in science and mathematics classes at secondary school. Provided information to parents and children about the curriculum. <p>Further good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-way dialogue and discussion between primary and secondary schools on adapting the Years 6 and 7 curriculum specifically to match the needs of vulnerable children. Making summer schools available for different groups of children, e.g. gifted and talented. Establishing a common understanding of progress expected of children during transition years, and monitoring outcomes against these. Sharing understanding on the quality of work expected from Years 6 and 7 children across at least the core subjects. Having joint master classes for specific groups—for example, gifted and talented children or children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed programs to meet learning needs of incoming students—for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> high achievers low literacy Koorie support English as an additional language. Identified children who may benefit from special programs. 		

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, based on the five 'areas' identified in an analysis of transition activities by Galton, M., Gray, J. & Ruddock, J. (1999) *Transitions and transfers: A review of the impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment*, Research report no., 131, Homerton College, and adopted by the NSW Department of Education and Communities and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria.

Appendix C.

Audit Act 1994 section 16— submissions and comments

Introduction

In accordance with section 16A and 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to the Department of Education and Training with a request for submissions or comments.

The submissions and comments provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Education and Training



Department of Education and Training

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Mr John Doyle
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
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Dear Mr Doyle

Proposed Report: Education Transitions

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2015 providing the final opportunity to comment on the proposed report and recommendations of the Education Transitions Audit.

The Department has reviewed the report and accepts the recommendations. Enclosed with this letter is the Department's response to the recommendations of the proposed report and a plan outlining the actions the Department commits to taking to address the report's recommendations.

The Department has already commenced implementing a number of the identified actions, including identifying key data and information to be included in middle years' transition statements, documenting best practice and providing a suite of user-friendly policies, guidelines and resources.

Should you wish to discuss the Department's response, please contact Sri Indra, Acting Director, Audit and Risk, Department of Education and Training, on 9947 1863 or by email: indra.sri.s@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Gill Callister
Secretary

6/3/2015

Encls



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RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Education and Training – continued

Education Transitions – Response to recommendations in the proposed report and action plan		Timeframe
1	Accept	July 2015
	<p>Review all child-level and service-level data collected by it from maternal and child health services, and early childhood education and care providers in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that the collected information is sufficient and appropriate for the Department of Education and Training to monitor the impact of these services on children's long-term educational outcomes develop reporting requirements to collect and record this information in a way that allows the Department of Education and Training to link child-level data collected prior to school with data collected after school enrolment. 	<p>1.1 Develop a revised set of data indicators and a data collection system for Maternal Child Health that will, once agreed with local government, provide a more comprehensive reporting framework on service activity and outcomes at child level.</p> <p>1.2 Undertake work to examine how to improve information sharing across service providers. Consider policy options for system-level tracking to improve the Department's ability to monitor long-term educational outcomes.</p> <p>1.3 Finalise the scoping of a system to establish a tracking and disengagement alert function across key early childhood services. This project will include consideration of the sufficiency and appropriateness of information currently collected by DET, how the information might be used to monitor the impact of MCH and early childhood education and care services on children's long-term educational outcomes and the potential cost/benefit of linking child-level data collected prior to school with data collected after school enrolment.</p>
	<p>2.1 Commission a report based on a series of statewide consultations with early childhood and school professionals and families. The consultation will obtain qualitative feedback on the Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative and address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the Transition Statements are used and the adequacy of the information captured how the supporting resources are used and could be improved to promote positive transitions for children what successful strategies are being implemented to facilitate positive transitions for children and families how transition strategies are currently being evaluated, to inform the further development of the Outcomes and Indicators tool. <p>This report will inform the forward work plan for the Transition Initiative and an update to the Transition Statements and supporting resources.</p>	<p>August 2015</p>
2	Accept	August 2016
	<p>Review the use of early years transition statements with a particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequacy of the information captured relationships between early childhood and school-based educators. training and development for educators in early childhood and school based settings to develop shared understanding of the role of both sectors 	

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Education and Training – continued

<p>December 2015 December 2016 June 2015 June 2017</p>	<p>2.2 Develop and implement initiatives that strengthen relationships and communication between educators in early childhood and school settings, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two cohorts for the <i>Leading Continuity of Early Learning</i> course through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership 10 to 20 multi-disciplinary networks to participate in the <i>Assessment for Learning</i> professional development and training opportunity four pilot locations to participate in the Supporting Reciprocal Visits project, incorporating local professional learning involving early childhood and school professionals eight funded demonstration sites to participate in the <i>Linking Learning Birth to 12 Years Project</i> involving early childhood services and primary schools in local networks.
<p>September 2015 September 2015 July 2015 November 2015</p>	<p>2.3 Continue to develop evidence-based professional learning resources - based on the <i>Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework</i> - that recognise the importance of continuity of learning. These resources, to assist early childhood and school educators in supporting positive transitions, will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> four video vignettes reflecting reciprocal visits between educators in early childhood and school settings as a vehicle for enhancing children's learning and transition experiences, available to all early childhood and school educators on DET's website four video vignettes demonstrating the connections that are made between families, early childhood education and care professionals and teachers to support effective planning for children's transition to school for whom English is an Additional Language a video vignette demonstrating strong and effective local partnerships that showcases how professionals in early childhood and school settings and families collaborate <i>Early Abilities Based Learning and Education Support</i> assessment tools and resources to assist early childhood and school educators to ensure a more effective transition to school and advance the learning and development for children with a disability or developmental delay.
<p>August 2016 December 2017</p>	<p>2.4 Informed by the consultation on the <i>Transition: A Positive Start to School</i> initiative, develop and implement additional evidence-based professional learning resources to support implementation of the <i>Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework</i>. These resources will aim to strengthen relationships between early childhood and school professionals and their understanding of their respective roles in children's transitions.</p> <p>The criteria these resources will be evaluated against will include the extent to which they have strengthened the relationships between early childhood and school professionals, and developed a shared understanding of the role of both sectors.</p>
<p>September 2015</p>	<p>2.5 Work with up to six clusters of schools focussing on the nature and scope of professional barriers between primary and secondary teachers/leaders, and successful strategies to overcome them, for inclusion in the suite of resources to support transition.</p>

**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Education and Training –
continued**

3	Develop and monitor transition-related outcomes for the early years including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transitions.	Accept	<p>3.1 Develop and implement a suite of transition outcome measures for the early years (for example, measures for standardised transition statements) in order to be able to better identify those children who are developmentally vulnerable so that a targeted response can be developed.</p> <p>3.2 Informed by the consultation on the Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative, develop and implement an enhanced approach to monitoring transition activities in the early years.</p> <p>3.3 Build on current support for vulnerable cohorts to prepare for and transition into school through kindergarten participation and engagement. This will be achieved through systematic program improvement, targeted stakeholder engagement and greater use and sharing of local and cohort-specific participation data.</p>	August 2016
4	Develop and monitor transition-related outcomes for the middle years including for children identified as most vulnerable during school transitions.	Accept	<p>4.1 Drawing on the Outcomes Framework and supporting Evidence Guide, review existing measures of student engagement and develop new measures of achievement to better monitor and understand transition outcomes for all students, particularly those moving from Year 6 to 7. The analysis of this data will include trends over time and a focus on cohorts at risk of poor transitions and disengagement such as boys and highly mobile students. Use data linkage methods to identify and learn from best-practice schools, to inform targeted strategies and initiatives.</p>	March 2016
5	Develop a more comprehensive suite of guidance and resources to support schools to transition middle years' students including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear advice to schools on the use and disclosure of children's information and data • a standardised minimum set of data for transitioning students • developing transition networks with geographically similar schools and sharing best practice approaches across the school system. 	Accept	<p>5.1 Undertake work on a new Transfer policy and guidelines for all student transfers, including transitions between Year 6 and Year 7.</p> <p>The new policy will be consistent with Victorian privacy legislation and ensure that when students transfer between Victorian government schools, the transferring school provides information required to fulfil the Department's legal obligations (including duty of care, anti-discrimination and occupational health and safety obligations).</p> <p>5.2 Develop a framework, including a definition of successful transition, to guide the identification and publication of resources including evidence-based best practice that will address the transition needs of all students, including targeted groups.</p> <p>5.3 Use the framework to audit and update existing guidance and key support materials and, in collaboration with regions, identify a range of successful strategies for inclusion in a suite of published materials.</p> <p>5.4 Commission the re-development of the School Transition and Resilience Training Program (START) to support school communities and networks implement best-practice approaches to transition from primary to secondary school. This will include enhancing the evidence-base identifying why resilience is vital during transition periods, recent research on the importance of the middle years and transitioning into secondary schooling, and teaching and learning resources that focus on resilience-building activities for the primary-secondary transitions.</p> <p>5.5 Work with the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) to gather students' views on barriers, impacts and strategies that work in relation to transitions and document for inclusion in published resources</p> <p>5.6 Conduct a survey and follow-up interviews, to identify the type and level of data that is most useful to educators and how data is currently being used to support transition from Year 6 to 7. Build on the findings to identify key data sets to include in the transition template.</p>	September 2015

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Education and Training – continued

			<p>5.7 Develop a school transition template that includes personal, medical and achievement information and incorporates advice on data that (with parental consent) can and should be transferred when students transfer between government schools.</p>	September 2015
			<p>5.8 Work with RSG and regional offices to identify and implement an approach that will support statewide coverage of geographically based clusters/networks focussing on transition.</p>	December 2015
6	Review and improve its systems to allow more timely access to child-level data for schools.	Accept	<p>6.1 Scope the capacity for mechanism(s) such as CASES21, Insight Platform, and the VCAA database to facilitate electronic transfer of identified minimum sets of data (personal, medical and achievement as per the transition template).</p>	June 2016
7	Examine 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.	Accept	<p>7.1 Review the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), focusing on the transition from primary to secondary school and the specific needs of autism and dyslexia as one of nine initiatives within The Government's Special Needs Plan for Victorian Schools. This review will also examine the timing of the Year 6 review for children who receive funding under the PSD.</p>	Jan 2016

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