

## Victorian Government response to the Commission for Children and Young People's report:

### 'Let us Learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people living in out of home care'

May 2024

The Victorian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Commission for Children and Young People's 'Let Us Learn' inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in care and reaffirm the Government's resolute commitment to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care.

The Commission's report recognises significant government investment through the Education State reform agenda including disability inclusion and mental health reforms. It showed several government initiatives are having a positive effect, including the LOOKOUT Centres, which were established in 2016 and have been expanded, now supporting schools and early childhood settings statewide.

Similarly, children in care are benefitting from the progressive roll out of the Best Start Best Life reforms as they will be able to access up to 25 hours of kindergarten a week from 2026, increasing to up to 30 hours a week from 2028.

The Commission's findings reveal continuing disparities in educational outcomes for young people in care compared to their peers.

Recent investment has built on the already strong record of investment and reform in education and care services to support education outcomes for children and young people in care.

The 2024-25 Victorian State Budget included investment of **\$27.6 million** to support our critical home-based carers and child protection workforce, increase resources for LOOKOUT and progress integration of data systems – all key recommendations of the inquiry.

This builds on **\$18.7 million** announced in September 2023 to boost education support for children and young people in care, including by increasing the provision of tailored individual education support and investing in critical system enablers.

Enabled by recent investment, work has already commenced on implementing recommendations outlined in 'Let Us Learn'.

The Victorian Government thanks the Commissioners and the many people who shared their experiences and insights, including children and young people, carers, educators and child protection practitioners, and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> Strengthening data collection</p> <p>That DE strengthen data collection for pre-school age children in out-of-home care through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• routinely collecting kindergarten attendance data to determine the participation rates of children in care</li> <li>• developing measures to track and evaluate the connection between improved attendance at kindergarten and school readiness including successful transition to primary school</li> <li>• advocating nationally for children in care to become an identified equity group in the Australian Early Development Census to determine additional supports required to improve their school readiness.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in-principle</p> <p>Support the intent of this recommendation, noting further work required on feasible implementation approach.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The department currently collects and tracks attendance data for children supported through the Early Start Kindergarten program, which includes children in out-of-home care. Work is underway to establish an attendance system more broadly for sessional kindergarten which is scheduled to be delivered in 2025.</p> <p>Further advice is being prepared on actions to address the transition to school measures and the Australian Early Development Census recommendations (as a nationally governed assessment tool).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Use the Department of Education’s Schools’ guide to Attendance to improve school attendance.</p> <p>That DE monitors the extent to which government schools follow the Schools’ Guide to Attendance, particularly the escalation processes and student support component of the guide, to inform whether implementation of the guide should be made mandatory.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will strengthen monitoring mechanisms to better capture how schools are using the Schools Guide to Attendance. The strengthened monitoring process will be used to update the Guide and consider whether there would be a benefit in making elements of the guide mandatory.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> Measure and report on school engagement</p> <p>That DE routinely collect a set of specific student wellbeing measures, to be used alongside students' academic results and attendance data, to identify and report on engagement levels for children and young people in out-of-home care. This should be reported under the Out-of-Home Education Commitment.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will consider measures for wellbeing such as those that have been agreed as metrics for FISO 2.0 and look at how these, together with academic results and attendance data, can be used to measure school engagement.</p> <p>Reporting mechanisms will be considered as part of the review of the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment (Partnering Agreement) in order to incorporate school engagement reporting in the revised Agreement.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> Consider and address barriers to recruitment and retention of Child Protection practitioners</p> <p>That when reviewing the Child Protection Operating Model, DFFH consider barriers to the recruitment and retention of Child Protection practitioners, including sustainable and equitable workloads, and practitioner engagement and job satisfaction.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>Action plans for this recommendation already exist outside of this inquiry.</p> <p>The Department is examining the roles, responsibilities, and operating model for child protection in Victoria. This work will include further consideration of opportunities to address barriers to recruitment and retention of child protection practitioners, including sustainable workloads and practitioner wellbeing.</p> <p>The Child Protection Strategic Workforce Plan 2023 - 2026 specifically addresses barriers to CPP recruitment and retention. The plan will be evaluated on an annual basis to ensure that progress is made towards desired outcomes.</p> <p>Additional investment is required to support any significant reforms or new initiatives proposed as part of the examination of child protection roles and responsibilities.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> Enhance tools and strengthen guidance to assist Child Protection practitioners to support educational engagement for children and young people in out-of-home care</p> <p>That DFFH enhance Child Protection’s prioritisation of education for children and young people in out-of-home care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing the current tools and resources available to Child Protection practitioners to ensure they adequately support educational engagement of children and young people in care through placement decisions, case planning and case management</li> <li>• strengthening guidance on Child Protection visits to education settings, including limiting these visits and visitations with parents during school and kindergarten hours to exceptional circumstances, and requiring Child Protection practitioners to seek and give weight to children’s views about visits at school</li> <li>• providing ongoing professional development opportunities for Child Protection practitioners to strengthen their application of the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care and the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment and relationships with education settings</li> <li>• ensuring dedicated opportunities for reflective practice on education-related issues between Child Protection practitioners and LOOKOUT Centre staff.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of the recommendations regarding Child Protection visits to education settings and will examine opportunities to improve practice and compliance with existing guidance but notes that a level of operational flexibility is required and there will continue to be circumstances where visits are required in the child’s best interest and to acquit on legal obligations.</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The Department’s Child Protection Induction Program, currently under re-development, will include key messages relating to the educational needs of children in care; including the application of the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care and the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment and limiting visits to children in educational settings.</p> <p>There are monthly Practice Discussion Series as part of the ongoing professional development of Child Protection practitioners. The topic of meeting the educational needs of children in care, will feature within one of the monthly sessions in 2024.</p> <p>Opportunities for reflective practice between child protection practitioners and LOOKOUT Centre staff (Area specific and led, through Area based Practice and Operational Leadership roles in Child Protection with DE) will also be considered.</p> <p>Additional investment is required to develop a targeted eLearn to support these recommendations.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b> Improve the implementation and quality of cultural plans</p> <p>That DFFH improve funding for and the quality of cultural plans, including greater funding for kinship finding services and directly funding ACCOs to implement activities within cultural plans.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The Department will work through the Aboriginal Children's Forum to identify required policy and practice changes to better support cultural plan compliance rates for new and review reports, their quality and implementation. This work commenced through a statewide forum of ACCO Cultural Planning Advisors which occurred on 22 to 23 February 2024.</p> <p>In addition, the department has agreed, through its response to recommendations in the Kinship Care VAGO Audit, to utilise the Aboriginal Family Finding Kinship Services working group to develop a process to monitor and report on service provider outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship finding activities and systems architecture to enable accountability, data recording, monitoring, benchmarking and reporting to improve timeliness, which will also support achievement of better cultural plan compliance rates and quality.</p> <p>Additional resourcing would be required.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> Increase carer payments</p> <p>That the Victorian Government increase the care allowance payments for kinship and foster carers.</p>	<p>Further Consider</p> <p>To be further considered subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The Victorian Government recognises the critical role that kinship and foster carers play in providing a safe and supportive environment for children who cannot remain safely at home. The Victorian Government provides a range of financial and other important supports, including the care allowance, to assist home-based carers to support children in their care.</p> <p>As this recommendation would require additional investment to implement, the Government will consider this recommendation as part of future State budget processes and in the context of competing investment priorities and broader economic conditions.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> Ensure equitable financial support for kinship and foster carers</p> <p>That DFFH strengthen the care allowance assessment and payment process to ensure assessments are conducted thoroughly and in a timely way, and that equitable financial support is provided to kinship and foster carers</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>Care allowances, across five different levels, are available to both kinship and foster carers. The needs of the child or young person are considered when determining the care allowance levels and can be re-assessed as needs change.</p> <p>The Department will examine the Care Allowance Policy and Procedures guidance to consider areas for strengthening in relation to timeliness and equity.</p> <p>Additional investment would be required to meet the additional costs associated with a greater proportion of carers and children receiving higher levels of care allowance.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> Remove voluntary contributions and other education expenses for carers</p> <p>That DE ensure that carers of students in out-of-home care are not requested to pay voluntary financial contributions and education-related expenses, including camps and excursions.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The department's Parent Payments policy sets out that schools must provide students with free instruction and ensure students have free access to all items, activities, and services that are used by the school to fulfill the requirements of the Curriculum.</p> <p>The policy will be updated to clarify that carers of students in out-of-home care are not to receive requests for voluntary contributions. No additional funding is required for this.</p> <p>Access to the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and State Schools Relief program will be reviewed to ensure no barriers to uptake for students in OOHC.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10:</b> Provide carers with information and assistance to access flexible education-related funding.</p> <p>That DFFH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure all carers and the children and young people in their care, particularly those in kinship care and in residential care settings, are provided with information about flexible funding available to cover education and extra-curricular activities</li> <li>further streamline the process for seeking this funding.</li> </ul>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The department will establish processes to provide information on education-related flexible funding to carers and residential care staff (including considering the use of the Care Support Help Desk and the provision of fact sheets).</p> <p>The department will also consider any improvements for the processes for accessing the funding.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11:</b> Provide all students in out-of-home care with a free Victorian Student Travel Pass</p> <p>That the Victorian Government provide all student-aged children and young people in out-of-home care with a Victorian Student Travel Pass free of charge.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Transport</p> <p>Department of Transport and Planning</p>	<p>Implementation is subject to consideration of further investment and appropriate implementation mechanism, including intersections in the short term with existing Students in Crisis Travel Pass program (funded until 2025).</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 12:</b> Strengthen residential care providers' support for educational engagement</p> <p>That DFFH strengthen residential care workers' support for educational engagement of children and young people living in residential care settings by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working with residential care providers to incorporate education-related information into their induction training for new residential care workers</li> <li>working with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to support an education-related course to be made available to residential care workers as part of the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy.</li> </ul>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Children</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The department will update current program expectations to include education-related information in the induction programs provided by CSOs and work with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to support development and inclusion of an education resource into training available to residential care workers through the existing investment in the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13:</b> Advocate for trauma-informed teaching practices to be incorporated into teacher training</p> <p>That the Victorian Government advocate for the inclusion of effective trauma-informed and responsive teaching practices in initial teacher education programs as part of national reforms to improve teacher training. Trauma-informed practices should also be incorporated into early childhood educator training.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The department will leverage existing regular forums with Victorian initial teacher education providers to recommend that providers consider including trauma-informed teaching practices within their initial teacher education programs for both early childhood and school teaching qualifications.</p> <p>In designing and delivering pre-service placement support programs, the department will consider opportunities for the inclusion of trauma-informed practice training for participants.</p> <p>The department will also leverage any opportunities through intergovernmental forums to advocate for this at the national level as part of broader national reforms.</p>



Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 14:</b> Adopt a ‘whole school’ approach to trauma</p> <p>That DE work to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>government schools adopt a ‘whole school’ approach to trauma and embed trauma-informed practices throughout their school environments as part of the implementation of FISO 2.0 in schools</li> <li>trauma-informed training is offered as an option under School Readiness Funding for early years educators and other staff, and that early childhood education settings are encouraged to embed these practices into their operations.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of this recommendation, noting further work required on feasible implementation approach in relation to government schools. School Readiness Funding component accepted in full.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The department will consider opportunities to strengthen policy and guidance regarding whole school approaches to trauma-informed practice in the context of FISO 2.0.</p> <p>Trauma-informed training is available to schools through the Mental Health Fund and Menu which includes Programs and interventions designed to raise awareness, provide management tools or tailored support for students who have experienced trauma or adverse life experiences.</p> <p>Trauma-informed training is offered through several School Readiness Funding menu items, including programs and services offered by the Australian Childhood Foundation and the Alannah &amp; Madeline Foundation.</p> <p>Improvements to the School Readiness Funding (SRF) program currently underway will support services to embed practices, particularly through the introduction of a two-year planning cycle.</p> <p>SRF reforms will be introduced from 2025 and will strengthen guidance to services about the alignment of evidence informed programs and supports available through the SRF Menu with improving access and inclusion.</p> <p>Further consideration will be given to additional actions to increase access to trauma-informed items by services with a high proportion of enrolments of children known to child protection.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 15:</b> Fund programs to encourage students in out-of-home care to pursue post-secondary education</p> <p>That the Victorian Government fund programs across government schools to encourage students in out-of-home care to pursue post-secondary education and training and to improve access to such opportunities. Funded programs should include the elements provided in Raising Expectations, the Game Changers Transitions Peer Mentoring, and the Level Up Peer Mentoring Program.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education/Skills and TAFE</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Jobs Skills Industry and Regions</p>	<p>DJSIR will evaluate current programs and use these findings to consider opportunities for further support for students in care through post-secondary pathways.</p> <p>DE will establish the Work-based Learning for Priority Cohorts initiative, which includes a focus on connecting students in care to work-based learning opportunities and work readiness skills.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 16:</b> Training for school leadership teams to increase understanding of out-of-home care</p> <p>That DE require school leadership teams to participate in training on the out-of-home care system and the experiences of children and young people in care. This requirement should be triggered upon enrolment of a child or young person in out-of-home care in a government school.</p>	<p>Accept in part</p> <p>The Victorian Government accepts the commitment to providing school leadership teams with appropriate training, but requirements on mandatory school take-up require further consideration.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE to develop professional learning modules for school leadership teams to build an understanding of the care system and experiences of students in care.</p> <p>DE to test modules to inform the determination of appropriate implementation approach.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 17:</b> Strengthen school and carer relationships and support carers as advocates for children and young people in out-of-home care</p> <p>That DE and DFFH strengthen the focus on carers in the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care and the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support carers to navigate school and early childhood education systems and enhance their capacity to advocate for children and young people in their care</li> <li>• build better connections between education settings and carers.</li> </ul>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	Partnering Agreements (Early Childhood and Education) will be reviewed, and this will be considered as part of the review.
<p><b>Recommendation 18:</b> Strengthen school staff understanding of Child Protection, The Orange Door and community services</p> <p>That DE build the capacity and expertise of relevant school staff to support vulnerable students through a strengthened understanding of Child Protection, The Orange Door, and community services.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	DE to work with DFFH to update guidance to schools on referral and response pathways to better direct children and their families to the most suitable support, including pathways into The Orange Door and linkages with earlier intervention services working with families.

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 19:</b> Support Aboriginal children and young people to report racism and respond appropriately when they do</p> <p>That DE develop a clear and distinct policy that explicitly addresses racism in Victorian Government education settings. Youth friendly resources specifically for Aboriginal children and young people should also be developed to explain the policy and raise awareness of how to raise concerns about racism. The creation and design of these resources should be done in consultation with Aboriginal children and young people.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will develop an anti-racism policy to be implemented in all Victorian government schools; and will explore opportunities to develop supporting resources specifically for Aboriginal children and young people, developed in consultation with Aboriginal children and young people.</p> <p>Work is also underway in developing Victoria's first Anti-Racism Strategy, which will provide a roadmap for preventing and responding to racism and discrimination against First Peoples, multicultural and multifaith Victorians.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 20:</b> Audit the effectiveness of the Report Racism Hotline</p> <p>That DE conduct and publish an audit of the Report Racism Hotline to examine the types of complaints it receives and from whom, in addition to the effectiveness of processes for addressing complaints of racism</p>	<p>Accept in part</p> <p>Analysis of issues raised through the Report Racism Hotline will inform broader work on strengthening the response to incidents of racism.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will analyse the issues reported through the Report Racism Hotline and other mechanisms and identify ways to strengthen the response to incidents of racism.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 21:</b> Implement recommendations from the Community Understanding and Safety Training evaluation</p> <p>That DE implement the recommendations made in the EY Sweeney evaluation report of Community Understanding and Safety Training as a priority.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will review the Community Understanding and Safety Training to ensure it remains fit for purpose and provides an opportunity for schools to deepen their understanding.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 22:</b> Develop youth relevant cultural safety resources</p> <p>That DE develop youth relevant cultural understanding and safety content to further support progress towards culturally safe schools.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	DE will work with communities and schools to facilitate local community input into school culture and develop locally led resources for strengthening cultural safety in schools.
<p><b>Recommendation 23:</b> Require schools to report on actions taken to address racism</p> <p>That DE require government schools to report on measures they are implementing to improve cultural safety and address racism as part of their FISO 2.0 Annual Implementation Plans and Annual Report to the School Community.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	DE will support government schools to plan for and report on measures they are implementing to improve cultural safety and address racism as part of their requirement to comply with the Child Safe Standards.
<p><b>Recommendation 24:</b> Strengthen educational supports to Aboriginal students in out-of-home care</p> <p>That DE strengthen the educational support it provides in schools to Aboriginal students in out-of-home care.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	DE will continue to identify opportunities to strengthen the support provided to schools through LOOKOUT Centres, as part of the implementation of Recommendations 39 and 40.

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 25:</b> Develop clear guidance and monitoring in relation to the use of modified timetables</p> <p>That, as part of the development of DE’s modified timetable policy, it provide clear instructions to government schools regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the appropriate use of modified timetables that are in the best interests of the child and upholds children and young people’s right to education</li> <li>development of plans to return students to full-time schooling, including a specified date and review process</li> <li>accurate attendance recording to ensure students on modified timetables are not reflected in the data as attending full-time.</li> </ul> <p>The policy should also require, in circumstances where modified timetables are implemented for students in out-of-home care, that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consideration of the modified timetable is included in Student Support Group meetings and discussed with carers</li> <li>the use of a modified timetable triggers consideration of targeted supports to facilitate a return to full-time school</li> <li>approval is obtained from a senior departmental officer in consultation with the relevant LOOKOUT Centre.</li> </ul> <p>That DE also monitor schools’ implementation of the modified timetable policy</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of this recommendation. Further work will consider the feasibility of implementation of all elements.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will establish policy regarding the appropriate use of modified timetable arrangements and specific attendance reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>DE will monitor initial policy implementation to determine if further oversight mechanisms are required.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 26:</b> Review suspensions policy</p> <p>That DE update its suspensions policy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implement an appropriate process to ensure that suspensions in primary schools only occur in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort</li> <li>• ensure the suspension triggers an urgent assessment of appropriate supports required to address student behaviour</li> <li>• require suspensions of children and young people in out-of-home care to be reported immediately to a senior departmental officer and the relevant LOOKOUT Centre to prompt consultation about alternative interventions and supports to address student behaviour</li> <li>• monitor and review schools' implementation of post-suspension Student Support Group meetings to determine whether they occur and how effectively these support the re-engagement of students.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of this recommendation. Further work will consider the feasibility of implementation of all elements.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The Department will review the current suspension policy and guidance materials against the intent of the recommendations, amending where required to strengthen departmental practice in supporting students in out of home care to address behaviours and prevent suspensions.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 27:</b> Improve understanding of and responses to the use of informal suspensions by schools</p> <p>That DE review schools' reasons for sending students home early to understand the regularity of schools using informal suspensions, the implications for students and their caregivers, and to inform what other supports are required in schools to reduce this practice.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of this recommendation. Further work will consider the feasibility of implementation of all elements.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will extract data on the use of early leaving absence codes and analyse a sample of students marked as leaving school early to assess if policy and practice changes are required.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 28:</b> Include consideration of the impact on children of pandemic orders</p> <p>That the Minister for Health implement a process to ensure consideration of the impact on children’s rights, safety, and wellbeing before making (or varying, extending, or revoking) pandemic orders and to include these considerations when publishing their Statement of Reasons for the making of pandemic orders.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Health</p> <p>Department of Health</p>	<p>The template for the Statement of Reasons will be updated to reflect the consideration that has been given to any impact on the rights, safety, and well-being of noted priority populations when making, varying, extending, or revoking pandemic orders.</p> <p>Children and young people will be noted as one of a number of priority populations whose rights, safety and wellbeing will be considered as part of this amendment, and such consideration will be acknowledged in any published Statement of Reasons.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 29:</b> Ensure the ability to measure and report on student disengagement in state emergencies</p> <p>That DE develop guidelines to ensure it can measure and report on the number of students who disengage during or immediately after periods of major disruption to education services.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will review current guidelines and practices and develop new guidelines and a student disengagement monitoring tool for use during or immediately after periods of disruption.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 30:</b> Ensure strengths-based student involvement in Student Support Group meetings</p> <p>That DE strengthen in-school supports for children and young people in out-of-home care by reviewing the Student Support Group process to ensure that student voice is a key component of goal setting and review, and that it is strengths-based. This review should be conducted in collaboration with children and young people in care and the LOOKOUT Centres.</p>	Accept	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will consider current Student Support Group processes and update guidelines for the inclusion of student voice as required.</p>



Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 31:</b> Require that cultural plans inform Individual Education Plans</p> <p>That DE, DFFH and partners of the Wungurilwil Gaggapduir working group strengthen the requirements in the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment for relevant information from Aboriginal students' cultural plans to be shared by care teams and case managers with education settings to inform their Individual Education Plan and cultural connections in schools and early childhood education centres.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Support the intent of the recommendation, noting implementation approach is subject to consultation and codesign with Aboriginal community and partners.</p>	<p>Portfolios: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The departments will work with the Wungurilwil Gaggapduir Working Group (or alternative governance, as consistent with the principles of self-determination) to consider this recommendation as part of the review of the partnering agreements (see rec 38).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 32:</b> Review Educational Needs Analysis model</p> <p>That as part of the review of the Educational Needs Analysis (ENA) model, DE and DFFH review the ENA assessment process and resourcing for primary, secondary and specialist school students to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children and young people undergo an assessment soon after and no later than 90 days from when they enter out-of-home care to determine their educational needs and whether they require additional one-on-one support</li> <li>• schools receive financial support to implement ENA recommendations for any enrolled children and young people in care</li> <li>• additional funding is provided for appropriate behaviour assessments as required.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolios: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The departments will undertake a review of current ENA requirements and processes. Further funding has been provided to procure more ENAs in 2025.</p> <p>Implementation of this investment will be evaluated to determine how schools are utilising existing school funding to support implementation of ENA review recommendations and if further investment is required.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 33:</b> Review and strengthen the Designated Teacher role</p> <p>That DE, in collaboration with the LOOKOUT Centres, conduct a review of the Designated Teacher role to strengthen capacity to effectively fulfil the role’s functions under the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment (Partnering Agreement). The review should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which positions in schools should be assigned the Designated Teacher role and what time allowance should be provided to undertake the role’s functions</li> <li>• improving awareness of the role and its purpose among children and young people in out-of-home care to enhance their understanding of the Partnering Agreement and the supports available to them in schools</li> <li>• any necessary improvements to the Designated Teacher training</li> <li>• options to build a network of Designated Teachers and communities of practice.</li> </ul>	Accept	Portfolio: Education  Department of Education	DE to review Designated Teacher role as part of review of the Partnering Agreements and update policy and guidance as required.
<p><b>Recommendation 34:</b> Review school enrolment process for children and young people in out-of-home care</p> <p>That DE and DFFH, through LOOKOUT Centres, review current enrolment processes and develop a best practice tool for use across Victoria to ensure that children and young people in out-of-home care receive the appropriate supports when starting at a new school.</p>	Accept	Portfolios: Education/ Children  Department of Education  Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	DE will work with DFFH to consider existing processes and tools used to support current enrolment processes and opportunities to improve state-wide consistency (including best practice guides/support documents).

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 35:</b> Consider integrating digital information systems about children and young people in out-of-home care</p> <p>That DE and DFFH assess the feasibility of integrating Student Insight and the Client Relationship Information System to ensure government schools receive real time information about the care arrangements for children and young people in out-of-home care.</p>	Accept	Portfolios: Education/ Children  Department of Education  Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	DE and DFFH will improve data sharing and assess feasibility of improved data integration across DE-DFFH systems (including Student Insight and CRIS).
<p><b>Recommendation 36:</b> Expedite the roll-out of Student Insight</p> <p>That DE resource and expedite the roll-out of Student Insight and ensure that the system stores all information relevant to student learning and appropriate oversight of record keeping and information sharing.</p>	Accept in principle  Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.	Portfolio: Education  Department of Education	To be considered as part of future state government processes.
<p><b>Recommendation 37:</b> Track educational engagement through the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment</p> <p>That when reviewing reporting requirements under the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment, DE consider measures to track educational engagement and improved education and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.</p>	Accept	Portfolio: Education  Department of Education	DE will work with DFFH to revise reporting requirements as part of the review of the Partnering Agreements, drawing on existing wellbeing and learning data captured by DE.  DE will further consider options to improve monitoring of educational outcomes in kindergarten services.

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 38:</b> Review and strengthen the Agreements</p> <p>That DE and DFFH conduct a comprehensive review of the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care and the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment (Partnering Agreement) to clarify their purpose and strengthen collaboration between key partners, including by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>streamlining and elevating the current governance structure (ideally to be jointly chaired by the Secretaries to DE and DFFH)</li> <li>reviewing and clarifying the roles and accountabilities of signatories to the Agreements</li> <li>where necessary, expanding reporting requirements to reflect signatories' obligations under the Agreements and to measure performance, for example, information sharing responsibilities of case managers</li> <li>ensuring reporting requirements of the Partnering Agreement are met and moving to public reporting on compliance and student outcome data</li> <li>considering the scope, including whether the Partnering Agreement should include a focus on children and young people in out-of-home care who are disengaged from education, those in care transitioning from Secure Care and Youth Justice settings, and those who have recently been reunified with their parents.</li> </ul>	Accept	<p>Portfolios: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The Departments will conduct a review of the partnering agreements, which will commence in 2024, to develop an updated Agreement that reflects the recommendation.</p> <p>The review will take in consideration the aspects outlined by the Inquiry, including an examining the purpose and scope of the agreements, roles and responsibilities, governance structures, as well as reporting and monitoring.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 39:</b> Assess additional resource requirements for LOOKOUT Centres as a result of the review</p> <p>That, as part of the review of the Early Childhood Agreement for Children in Out-of-Home Care and the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment, DE identify resource requirements for the LOOKOUT Centres to enable an effective combination of school capacity building and accountability.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>Conduct a review of the Partnering Agreements, commencing in 2024 to develop an updated Agreement. This will include consideration of the role of LOOKOUT and resourcing implications.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 40:</b> Allocate necessary resources to LOOKOUT Centres based on the review</p> <p>That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to the LOOKOUT Centres based on the review of resource requirements referred to in Recommendation 39.</p>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>The Victorian Government has invested \$8.4 million over four years to improve data integration and expand the LOOKOUT workforce in response to demand.</p> <p>Further consideration is required, following the review of both the EC and Education Partnering Agreements.</p> <p>This will be considered as part of future State budget processes.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 41:</b> Track and monitor student movement between mainstream schools and Flexible Learning Options</p> <p>That the movement of students in out-of-home care between mainstream settings and FLOs be tracked with the intention of benchmarking and improving, over time, how students are meeting their agreed Individual Education Plans, including progressing to desired pathways of education.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will implement improved data reporting and monitoring of the movement of students between schools and flexible learning options.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 42:</b> Use the review of alternative education settings to improve practice</p> <p>That in its review of alternative education settings, DE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensure that good practice is captured, shared, and replicated</li> <li>uplift the quality of support and education provided where needed, including through the provision of adequate resourcing</li> <li>track student outcomes, including movement between FLOs and mainstream schools</li> <li>review the policy settings to ensure decisions on the provision of alternative education (including FLOs, re-engagement programs and attendance at non-school senior secondary and foundation secondary providers) are in the best interests of a child or young person in out-of-home care.</li> </ul>	<p>Accept in principle</p> <p>Actions will be subject to future funding decisions.</p>	<p>Portfolio: Education</p> <p>Department of Education</p>	<p>DE will complete its review of complementary education settings.</p> <p>Outcomes of the review will be subject to Government consideration.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 43:</b> Monitor transitions from Secure Care and Youth Justice into other education settings</p> <p>That DE and DFFH monitor the transitions of children and young people from Secure Care and Youth Justice settings to education settings as part of the Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment to ensure they comply with departmental guidelines and ensure that appropriate supports for re-engagement with education are provided.</p>	<p>Accept</p>	<p>Portfolios: Education/ Children</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</p>	<p>The Departments will assess current processes for monitoring transitions as part of the review of the Partnering Agreement.</p>

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 44:</b> Share best practice approaches to flexible learning</p> <p>That DE create opportunities for schools and FLOs, including those in alternative settings provided by independent and Catholic schools, to share best practice approaches to flexible learning.</p>	Accept	Portfolio: Education  Department of Education	DE will identify opportunities to support the sharing of best practices through the current review of Complementary Education Settings.
<p><b>Recommendation 45:</b> Review resourcing requirements for one-to-one education supports</p> <p>That the Victorian Government review resourcing for and access to one-to-one education supports provided to children and young people in out-of-home care to enable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manageable caseloads for one-to-one teaching support</li> <li>needs-based access for all children and young people in care across the state.</li> </ul>	Accept in principle  Actions will be subject to future funding decisions. Note teacher workforce constraints may impact on timing of and approach to implementation.	Portfolios: Education/ Children  Department of Education  Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	In 2023 the Victorian Government provided \$10.7 million to provide 500 children and young people with one-to-one education support. The Departments are currently implementing this budget outcome and the model will consider the elements outlined in recommendations 45, 46, and 47.  The model will be evaluated to inform future investment decisions on continuation and expansion on individual learning support for children in care.
<p><b>Recommendation 46:</b> Ensure the model of one-to-one teaching support is effective</p> <p>That one-to-one teaching support for children and young people in out-of-home care that is funded by the Victorian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be provided by qualified teachers</li> <li>include a focus on literacy and numeracy</li> <li>include advocacy for a child or young person in relevant meetings, including in Student Support Group and care team meetings</li> <li>involve liaison with other workers and carers to encourage educational engagement</li> <li>be provided flexibly across placement changes by the same teacher.</li> </ul>			

Recommendation	Victorian Government response	Portfolio and lead department	Implementation Plan
<p><b>Recommendation 47:</b> Ensure appropriate collaboration between DE and DFFH to ensure that referrals to appropriate supports are made in a timely way</p> <p>That DE and DFFH collaborate so that all relevant information about children and young people in out-of-home care, including chronic absences, Individual Education Plan progress, Student Support Group meetings and Educational Needs Analysis recommendations are used to ensure that referrals to one-to-one education supports are made in a timely and appropriate way, rather than after a child or young person has already disengaged.</p>			