



Department
of Education



About this Communique

The Department of Education (the Department) – Community Sector Organisation (CSO) Governance Group is a quarterly forum for communication, consultation, engagement and collaboration between the Department and the community sector. Meetings are co-chaired by the Department and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and reflect topics of mutual interest to the Department and the community and education sector. You can read more about the partnership agreement that underpins this work on the [VCOSS](#) and [Department](#) websites.

This Communique has been prepared by VCOSS to increase the visibility of this forum.

What was discussed in the November 2023 meeting?

The focus of this meeting was education engagement.

The Post-Pandemic Child

Professor Kim Cornish (Sir John Monash Distinguished Professor, Turner Institute for Brain and Mental Health, Monash University) delivered a presentation drawing on her research examining the short-term and potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on children and young people. Professor Cornish highlighted the need to act now and give children, young people, and their families the support they need to respond to the impacts on their family.

According to Professor Cornish, our response must be a collective one, and it must address children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Professor Cornish highlighted the need to focus on and support children who are 8 and 9 years old. This cohort had a highly disrupted start to school, missed early learning, literacy and numeracy foundations and are currently over-represented among school refusers. The magnitude of the issue of children and young people not attending school is under-recorded.

The Turner Institute's Partners in Parenting - Education (PiP-Ed) is a validated tool that has been designed to increase parental self-efficacy to prevent and respond to adolescent school refusal and internalising disorders. It has been co-designed with the lived experience of parents, education sector staff and young people. It provides a potential solution to addressing school refusal, but to be effective it needs to be integrated with mental health and wellbeing programs in schools, and with the health and mental health system and supports delivered by the community sector.

There is also a need to invest in the mental health workforce, as there is currently an undersupply of accredited child psychologists. The UK addresses this issue through the creation of assistant psychologist roles.

Discussion points:

- Consider the impact of settings on student mental health and wellbeing; for example, the 9:00am–3:30pm structure of the current school day.

- Explore the overlay and intersection with school refusal and disability in specialist and mainstream schools.
- We have moved on too quickly from COVID-19 pandemic.
- Consider the impacts that poverty and the rising cost of living have on families and school engagement.
- Social connection is an issue for children and young people, social prescribing (currently employed by some Neighbourhood Houses) could be a solution to connect families with appropriate programs and supports.
- We have a strong universal service system, but we need to consider how the universal system can be tailored to meet individual needs.

Tutor Learning Initiative (TLI)

Maggie Garrard, Director, Priority Programs Branch, Department of Education

The Tutor Learning Initiative (TLI) funds government and low-fee non-government schools to provide small-group tutoring to students needing additional support in literacy and numeracy. The TLI was introduced in 2021 to support students whose learning had been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024 schools must only use their TLI funding to employ tutors to provide targeted small group instruction to students assessed through 2023 NAPLAN as Needs Additional Support (NAS) in literacy and numeracy and Exempt students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The funding model uses this data to extrapolate out and estimate the number of students needing literacy and/or numeracy support in the year levels with no new 2023 NAPLAN data. Schools are required to use other assessments, to identify students who are in the year levels that did not complete NAPLAN in 2023. Tutors work with groups of up to five students at a time, and tutoring can be delivered in or out of the classroom.

Navigator Program

Laura Brennan, Director Engaging Students at Risk, Department of Education

The Navigator Program is having positive outcomes in a number of areas. Program capacity has expanded in 2023 following the additional Government investment and we saw an increase in referrals over the year. Like many services, Navigator is experiencing recruitment challenges in some rural areas of Victoria. Expansion to supporting 10–11-year-olds is being piloted in four areas, and we are seeing service providers needing to work more directly with families for this younger age group.

Early Childhood Education Initiatives

Rosie Pizzi, Director Participation, Early Learning Practice and Participation Division, Department of Education

The Department are focused on ensuring that priority cohorts of children are supported to access and participate in kindergarten. Both School Readiness Funding (SRF) and Kinder Inclusion Support are critical initiatives to this end and are highly taken up by kindergarten services.

SRF provides access to Allied Health support, which has been impacted by the current workforce shortages, although this seems to be turning around for the year ahead.

Discussion:

- How do we best combine data insights and community sector knowledge to make sure supports are reaching the right children, young people and families?
- How do we measure success; some suggest a need to re-define what success looks like for individual children and young people.
- We are getting better at measuring supports for children and young people with disabilities and at implementing policies that are driven by evidence?

DE ECE reform and discussion

Sabdha Charlton, Director, Consultation & Engagement, Kindergarten Expansion and Pre-Prep Reform Division talked to the outcomes of the [2023 Best Start, Best Life reform consultation](#).

This captured insights from 100 consultation sessions across the state, with feedback from more than 5,000 Victorian early childhood teachers, educators, service providers, peak bodies, unions, tertiary education providers and families.

The consultation found that Best Start, Best Life reforms depend on delivering these main elements including; meeting the needs of children, families and communities, valuing and growing the workforce, making spaces for learning and supporting the sector through change.

Update on the Disability Royal Commission – DE update

Sharon Barry, Executive Director, Inclusive Education Division, SEPS. The team are working on a response to the Commissioners' recommendations, which is due in March 2024

Next meeting

2024 meeting dates TBC.

Please contact VCOSS if there is something you would like to share with us, to guide our planning for future meetings.

Contact:

Deb Fewster, Director, Policy, and Advocacy, VCOSS

Email: Deborah.fewster@vcoss.org.au.

Joanna Hatcher, Policy Advisor (Education, Children, Young People and Families), VCOSS

Email: Joanna.Hatcher@vcoss.org.au