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School Transitions for Vulnerable Young People

Re-engaging students through local initiatives

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Professor Roger Slee

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SCHOOL TRANSITIONS FOR VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

RE-ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH LOCAL
INITIATIVES

SEPTEMBER 2015

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Professor Roger Slee

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The authors acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of Australia and pay our respects to their elders, past and present.

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About

The Victoria Institute

The Victoria Institute was established in 2011 under the leadership of Professor Roger Slee. It is a research-intensive unit focused on impact and influence, particularly in the areas of educational reform and inclusive practices.

Well placed within Victoria University, The Victoria Institute has social justice as a key focus. Our researchers work collaboratively with a range of government departments, policy makers, philanthropic organisations and community groups. The Victoria Institute operates with the explicit intention of improving educational experiences and outcomes for all.

Our targeted research program aims to build better learning and greater participation and success for students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds as well as those who are disengaged or excluded.

The Victoria Institute is connected with the College of Education and works in association with The Mitchell Institute and the Centre for International Research on Education Systems.





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Abbreviations

AE	Avenues Education
BOLT	Bikes over lunchtime
BSC	Bentleigh Secondary College
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CYMHS	Child Youth Mental Health Services
DET	Department of Education and Training, Victoria
EEP	Education Engagement Partnership
ELP	Enhanced Learning Program
GEYS	Glen Eira Youth Service
LGA	Local government area
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
SFYS	School Focused Youth Services
SPS	Stonnington Primary School
SWAG	Socialisation with a goal
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VET	Vocational Education and Training
5CTF	5 C Transitions Framework

Executive Summary

This Report was commissioned by the School Focused Youth Services program covering the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira. The request was to review issues around, and examples of, primary to secondary school transition programs occurring within the three LGAs. All three Cities are actively committed to working through their own youth services and with other local community agencies to alleviate difficulties faced by young people in this day and age.

The commission arose from requests from those working in transition programs for summative and constructive information to reflect on their own work and learn from each other. Thus the task for the Report was to review national and local practice in order to provide concise guidance for reshaping local transition programs in the light of recent research, key government reports and learning from developments in our own communities. The project was conducted between April and August 2015.

Whilst the brief was to focus on vulnerable young people, many of the issues discussed and the exemplars presented in the pages that follow either concurrently apply, or are clearly applicable, to all young people transitioning between primary and secondary education, whatever the level of their preparedness.

The Report is accompanied by an 'audit and action' document that is intended to provide a tool for schools and other relevant personnel to review what they are doing currently as part of the process of planning for the next program, with additional insights gained from recent publications and exemplary work by colleagues.

Neither document is conclusive or complete. The world moves too fast to pretend that is possible. An example of how times change so quickly is to compare the following statement from 2013, to the findings of this Report only two years later. In 2013, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) observed:

We are particularly concerned that there is a distinct lack of services and responses through school and community sector organisations for vulnerable 8-12 year olds (...) As the transition between primary and secondary schools occurs at this age, middle years children can drift away from school and are at risk of disengaging from education entirely.

This Report updates those observations in a number of ways.

1. Disengagement is starting much younger than the middle years, in some cases in the first years of schooling. Local schools and agencies are aware of, and responding to, this phenomenon.
2. Two recent major reports from the Victorian Government, through the Department of Education and Training and the Office of the Auditor-General, have explored, addressed and presented ways forward for the dilemmas outlined above, some of which are already underway locally.

3. Schools and community services in the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira likewise already are working together constructively across a dynamic and innovative suite of transition programs.

This Report found:

4. The student is the centre of focus in local transition programs. The aims are for each child to be assisted to reach a sense of belonging at each stage / year of schooling, and each child be assisted to find within themselves the motivation to move on / step up, feel safe with change and cope with 'departure' and 'arrival' events in their lives.
5. Transition 'day' events are becoming common beyond the Grade 6 to Year 7 divide (starting earlier and continuing later) so that moving on throughout their school life becomes second nature to students. The skills learnt regarding handling change are an important part of coping with alterations to school organisation, family structure and physical development, as well as to changing community expectations, and to changes arising from technological advances, especially social media.
6. Most local transition programs aim to be holistic, incorporating widely based, co-ordinated processes. Individual programs are excellent on their own, but knowledge about what is being done elsewhere could be stronger. This is a point participants accept and this Report is part of the response to their request for assistance to improve local and systemic collaboration.

This Report recommends:

7. A framework for the audit and action of transitions programs based on 5 areas: child-centredness, curriculum, connectedness, continuity and collaboration. This "5C" Framework is not prescriptive but a guide to reflection and future action that will take a different shape for each specific context.
8. "Rounding" for transitions in order to enhance follow-up activities in the early years of secondary school. This strategy should improve identification of the place of knowledge and activities of each of the agencies / actors, their location and key contact effecting the transition strategies and processes, and the extent and type of practical support each offers.
9. The adoption of a "clearing-house" role for the School Focused Youth Services or similar cross-sector local agency, to improve practices that centre on the exchange and dissemination of documentation and ideas as a broadly based and consistent process. This is especially important for achieving successful school transitions for vulnerable young people.
10. The identification of sources for long-term resourcing and funding of the exemplary work currently being done in the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira, so that the intellectual capital earned so far is re-invested in new and even more productive work around school transitions.

Getting information into the hands of practitioners, in whatever vocation, has never been straightforward. Getting practitioners the information they actually want has never been easy. It is hoped that the products of this project assist with both of these tasks, at least as a springboard for reflection, professional development and sharing the excellence each staff member, school or community organisation displays individually and collectively. School Focused Youth Services (ph: 8290 7029) welcomes feedback, as do the authors.

Introduction

Project outline

School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) is a State Funded project (2013-15) designed to improve the health, well-being and educational outcomes of 10-18 year olds. SFYS Inner South covers schools within the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira. The project is governed by a cross sector and cross council committee and seeks to establish and sustain partnerships between schools and community services.

SFYS Inner South works closely with the Education Engagement Partnership, a local council and community service initiative across Port Phillip and Stonnington which seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from education (EEP, 2013).

As well as reviewing and analysing state and national data, EEP agencies collect local data that is uploaded to a central database then reported using de-identified cumulative snapshots of local issues to inform local practice. The SFYS screening document reports factors that were identified by local agencies as leading to disengagement to enable identification by teachers of students who could benefit from increased support during transition.

For the 2013 Statement, analyses of EEP data included a sample of 900 young people connecting to local agencies. This data was summarised into themes that determined two key factors impacting on children and youth: Systems (such as, but not limited to, schools) and Families.

While there is nothing surprising about the two key factors - schools and family - the data itself was very revealing, with 39% of 10-14 year olds seeking support in the high risk category, and a further 26% disengaged from schooling for 1-6 months. 'High risk' is defined by the EEP as attending less than 50% of school / classes, experiencing multiple barriers to education and under individual case management.

In the 2014 EEP Annual Report, it noted that, from a sample of 164 young people (with 30% of this group aged 10-14 years) 44% had experienced family breakdowns, 40% had concerns about living arrangements, and 40% were not attending school. The shape and make-up of families, homes and communities in Australia is changing rapidly, with government and community services struggling to re-direct services to ever younger age groups impacted by these changes.

Data from the Cities of Port Phillip and Stonnington identified a high number of young people both at risk of and currently disengaged from local education opportunities through low participation and poor achievement, or, increasingly, non-attendance. In one local primary school, close to 50% of Grade 5 & 6 students met one of these classifications.

Reasons for disengagement, as identified through the SFYS Transition Screening *pro forma*, include: weak literacy / numeracy skills, low attendance, high anxiety around transitions, missing out on first preference for secondary school, seeking alternative education, poor mental health, disrupted housing, family breakdown, guardian legal issues, and other financial, health and carer based issues.

Anecdotally, teachers report that there are students aged 7 years old with very low attendance at school. Teachers now feel the need to introduce transition-type strategies well before Grades 5 and 6 just to have these students still in schooling when the transition to secondary education occurs. Otherwise transition is never an issue for these students, with many not returning to education until their late teens or as adults.

While this phenomenon has been identified for some time in discrete groups or communities in Australia, with specific race, learning, socio-economic, language or ethnic factors at play, and highlighted at a national conference in July (Vonow, 2015), the apparent spreading across a broad spectrum of students is a new challenge that has to be faced squarely and without delay.

The transition from primary school to high school is an important life event and corresponds with a number of other physical, psychological and social developmental changes.

This transition, one of the many each person will face over their lifetime, is an important cusp point for early intervention against education disengagement and the promotion of health and well-being. What happens varies for every instance, but there is a general sense that, while there are multiple exemplars of preparatory transition strategies, these are not well known across the system or broader participants and, more concerning, tend to fizzle out once the student's physical move to secondary school occurs.

On the fair assumption that the experience of transition extends well into Year 7 and even Year 8, both in practical terms as well as personal maturation and psychologically, the role of the destination school as part of an on-going effort is crucial as a significant factor in reducing student drop-out rates.

Then there is the need to manage the transition from junior to senior high school, involving complex subject selections that shape career and post-secondary options that are hard to undo. Positive transitions improve student academic and personal outcomes (levels of confidence and a sense of their future) so that young people stay on in schooling and improve their options for careers and employment in productive adult lives.

In order to address these starting points and destination issues, some questions being asked and acted on include: how to intervene in a way that triggers positive outcomes, and who to involve in those interventions beyond the student(s)? To what extent do schools (government, catholic, independent) need to connect with other community services and groups with the skills, knowledge and resources to assist? If so, how can these groups intervene in school systems to which they do not belong, and under what authority; and what are the resulting implications for industrial relations? At the core of all this is the question about how we connect 'well-being' and student mental health initiatives that complement rather than compete with transition programs.

Project Background Questions

Are Grade 5 and Grade 6 primary students in SFYS Inner South region engaged with, and achieving in a way that assists retention in schooling during the period of transition to Years 7? What are the key barriers?

What opportunities and supports can schools and community agencies provide to prepare and support students for a successful transition to secondary schooling, and assist them to gain confidence, improve attendance and achieve academic success, leading to a recognised qualification / credential in education and/or training?

How do the outcomes of local case studies that engage Grade 5 and Grade 6 Primary level students reflect possibilities for other student cohorts in the Inner South SFYS areas, including reference to Indigenous, ethnic, cultural, gender and other community contexts?

What outcomes related to attendance, attainment and 'hoped for' transition to secondary school are able to be supported in local schools through local third party and other community / service agencies?

What is the likely shape and core elements of a framework of "best practice" for transition from Grades 5 and 6 to Years 7 and 8, especially for vulnerable young people?

Project Approach

The report is based on an extensive literature review, acknowledging that the specific topic is an under-researched area, with most of the literature focusing on transition between lower and upper secondary school, and between senior secondary and higher education and/or Vocational Education and Training (VET). The literature review was enhanced by reference to case studies, including a sample of local exemplars. Relevant policy and strategy documents from Victorian Department of Education and other relevant government departments were included in the review.

Project Outcomes

The key product is this final report to SFYS that provides evidence about the expectations and outcomes around transitioning from Grades 5 and 6 into secondary school, with a focus on vulnerable young people. The evidence was used to shape a framework for within-school strategies, as well as for relevant and appropriate community collaboration with education systems and programs in relation to all primary school students. This information has been condensed into a foldout summary sheet that schools and community services can use as an audit and action tool to assess and bolster their transition support activities as well as their collaborations.

It is hoped that both the report and the audit and action guide will be key documents for the Education Engagement Partnership steering group and participants, SFYS and the schools, education systems and the non-government agencies contributing services, talent and skills to young people in the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira.

It is expected that the 'audit and action' guide for teachers will be strongly taken up in schools as this project began on the clear and open request from teachers for a 'user-friendly' and 'concrete' handout that summarises what is being done and what they could think about to replace or include when reviewing transition strategies for the next round of program delivery.

1 RESEARCH ON TRANSITIONS

Transitioning between levels of education has always been hard for young people. As public education grew, evolved and expanded in Australia in the 19th and 20th centuries – responding to industrial and political revolutions - students, teachers and families grappled with ever increasing demands for more highly skilled workers. In the 1970s, credential creep meant that staying on in school past the compulsory attendance age (14 yrs and 9 months) became the new norm rather than the exception, especially for young women.

Retrospectively, there is a sense that the pace of change then seemed gentler than in contemporary debates, the calls for teachers and schools to do more less raucous, and adequate resourcing - whilst always tenuous and in flux - was accepted as a necessary part of achieving the public good in our democratic society. In 2015, pressures on schools, families and communities are mounting to a point where it is difficult to establish a level of continuity and common purpose before things move on yet again.

Educational research has thus long been interested in issues around transitions within and between the stages of schooling, whether between age groups, curriculum stages or levels of schooling based on systemic organisational structures. Research has been undertaken by academics, teacher action researchers, government authorities and non-government organisations.

There is a lot to draw on from this wealth of knowledge, but the focus for this report, and the accompanying teacher audit and action guide, is not to provide a full historical account but rather a summary of themes, issues and – most important – a framework to be used as practical guide to reflecting on what is being done, and what else can be done to improve the educational outcomes of all young people, but especially those at risk of disengagement.

In looking forward rather than back, this report also acknowledges that fresh data, analyses, insights and exemplars are needed to catch up with changing circumstances arising from new socio-economic and cultural dislocations in our communities. For example, technology is fast re-shaping (mostly for the good) what teachers do, how students respond to schooling, and how schools interact (more deeply) with their communities, including for transitions. But technology is expensive, resource-intensive and imperfect.

Less encouraging is anecdotal and small study data indicating students drop out of school even in the early years of primary education, with teachers spotting signs this is likely to happen even earlier for many. In one of the schools under the umbrella of the work being done by the various agencies contributing to the Education Engagement Partnership for the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira, 50% of Year 5 and Year 6 Primary school students presented as disengaged or at risk of disengagement.

In Year 7 and Year 8 (early secondary school), too many students have stopped coming to school, missing out on crucial formative years of education before some of them are re-engaged through the efforts of partners in the EEP. There are other areas of specific research interest for addressing transition issues for students with disability, Indigenous students, gender-based dispositions towards disengagement and other factors including poverty, refugee communities, established ethnic localities and gender identity.

1.1 What We Know

The following section will outline some basic tenets of what we know about school transitions, generally and more specifically for vulnerable young people in primary education, especially in Victoria, Australia.

The starting point is the recent (March 2015) and very comprehensive “Education Transitions” Report by the Office of the Victorian Auditor-General (VAGO), and the thoughtful 2014 report by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) “Transitioning from Primary to Secondary School”, that focused on ways to support students with additional needs arising from disability when moving from primary to secondary school, or moving between schools within either primary or secondary levels.

Both these reports do the task of not only providing a practical and professional account of the issues (negative and positive) around transitions, but also providing the basis for a review of the research literature that can be ‘taken as read’ for the purposes of this document, though some additional studies will be presented to inform the hands-on ‘audit and action’ attachment. At the end of this chapter, brief outlines will be drawn of a number of strategies being followed by school and non-school personnel and agencies in the Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira.

1.1.1 Definitions

The focus of this report is on improving stages of school transitions for vulnerable young people, especially the transition from primary to secondary education. Vulnerable young people in this context, are those seen as already disengaged, or at risk of disengaging, from their schooling, due to a wide range of single or inter-related factors.

There are dangers in labelling, stereotyping and/or attributing a deficit to individuals and cohorts of school students. The justification in this case is that the intent is to use the identification to better understand what is happening so as to make more meaningful interventions that might turn around factors generating that vulnerability. For the local context, 30% of students self-referred to EEP agencies, but many young people either do not see themselves as ‘disadvantaged’, resent being told they are, and are proud of where they live. The definition adopted by the EEP program and SFYS, opposite, wisely focuses on conditions that lead to vulnerability, most of which are outside any student’s direct control, rather than on blame.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

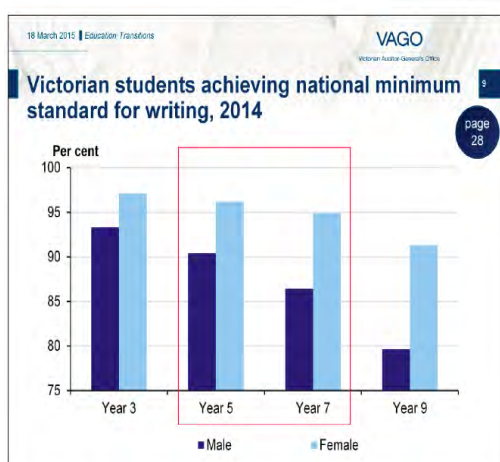
Some children and young people face obstacles to engagement and achievement in education. This may be due to a number of factors including family breakdown or dysfunction, personal or parental health conditions such as a chronic disease or mental illness, sexual abuse, school culture, lack of access to appropriate and timely supports, bullying, difficulties in literacy and/or numeracy, drug and alcohol problems, homelessness, transport and poverty. These young people and their families need support to address these barriers and to find an education program that best suits them.

1.1.2 Recent Reports on School Transitions

As noted above, this section will briefly outline key themes and findings from the VAGO Report (2015) and the DET Report (2014). Both focus on issues impeding successful transitions and offer explicit guidelines to systems, schools and teachers about more effective systemic and local policies, processes, and practices.

The Report of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office is an assessment of whether Department of Education and Training schools are effectively supporting children to transition from primary to secondary school.

In summary, the VAGO Report found that, while DET had improved access to higher quality kindergarten years, and developed a comprehensive and well-researched framework to support early-years transitions, DET did not have a similar quality framework for middle-years transitions. VAGO also reported 'inadequate monitoring of vulnerable cohorts', all of which was seen as not helping break down some of the more entrenched (poor) transition outcomes.



18 March 2015 | Education Transitions

VAGO
Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Students transition from a wide range of schools

Selection of 10 schools

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

The concerns expressed in the VAGO Report are about this situation being a contributing factor to what it observes is a continuing decline in engagement and academic outcomes as students move from Grade 5 to Year 7, including uneven transitions between male and female students. This is partly supported by national

NAPLAN results for 2015 that indicate Year 7 and 9 are at best “stable” and actually “declining” in the case of writing (ACARA, 05 August 2015). The VAGO Report also felt the DET was not providing consistent leadership and advice in this area, something VAGO argues is necessary in a system where schools operate with high levels of autonomy.

There are multiple, varying, and constantly changing social, cultural, economic and political factors that weigh against the DET, Catholic or Independent systems and schools being able to guarantee consistency from year to year, including current radical changes to the Australian Curriculum that will produce significant upheaval and re-direction of effort and resources for many years ahead. Local and practical factors vary dramatically too, as illustrated by the VAGO table of the number of schools students transition from, using a sample of 10 secondary schools.

When students entering the VAGO sample secondary schools came from an average of 20 primary schools or service providers - in one case 271 students coming from 48 separate primary schools - achieving equal, fair, trusting and carefully monitored transitions and collaborative inter-school relationships is a policy, process and practice milieu of daunting proportions regardless of the goodwill and professionalism of all those involved.

Of the 7 Recommendations made in the VAGO Report to the DET, support for the most vulnerable students was high on the list. The DET responded quickly to each of the 7 VAGO recommendations, with the details published at the end of the report.

The intent is to ameliorate current actions and move through a series of policy adjustments and professional development initiatives to make productive use of the VAGO assessment. It is an ambitious list of actions, with fidelity of implementation an operational matter needing its own strategy, but it is a transparent and publicly accountable strategy and other systems should look at DET actions to see if they fit their needs too.

The DET (2014, p.5) report defined transition as “a movement from one set of circumstances to another, with changes to environments, relationships, behaviours, routines, roles and expectations.”

Also worth attention is the 2014 DET Report on transitions that focused on ways of supporting students with additional or complex needs that arise from disability. The report outlined key elements for successful transitions including responding to student needs, family liaison, personal care support, the need for continuity of support, communication and co-ordination between services, and professional learning, as well as practical issues like transport and access to buildings.

The DET Report includes helpful templates for timetabling, planning transitions, orientation programs and checklists for primary and secondary schools. General principles for success are summarised below.

Element of a successful process (Victoria Department of Education and Training - 2014)

General principles underlying successful transitions, with an emphasis of students with disabilities, include:

- planning well in advance of the start of the transition process,
- providing the student and parent/guardian/carer(s) with sufficient information to make an informed choice about future settings, including specialist settings, and
- effective collaboration between transition settings that results in sharing of all relevant information.

Transitions are varied and sometimes complex. Children and young people undertake a number of important transitions at key points during their education: moving from preschool to school, primary school to secondary school, between mainstream and specialist school settings and finally from school to pursue post-school options.

Transition is a process, not a one-off event, which requires both time and commitment. It is a process of building relationships and understanding, with the aim of supporting students in their transition, identifying barriers to a student's learning and any adjustments that can be made. All students with additional or complex needs that arise from disability and difficulties in learning require support and/or services at transition points.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/diversity/Pages/transitionframework.aspx>

1.1.3 Research Findings on School Transitions / Vulnerable Young People

Remarking on a review of 198 countries, Te Riele and Gorur (2015, p. xi) found that only 43 countries did not have a national youth policy (see www.youthpolicy.org). They conclude that 'youth' has thus become a major area of concern for contemporary governments and non-government agencies, "in particular, the perceived vulnerabilities of youth".

Te Riele and Gorur note how the terminology those 155 governments use varies from 'vulnerable', 'at risk', 'disadvantaged', 'marginalised', 'disenfranchised' and so on, making definitions difficult to pin down and use appropriately. Policies are also profuse, adding to the confusion through a lack of commonality of description, explanation and characterisation of the problem(s) and insights into potential solutions. This lack of coherence was one of the major concerns of the VAGO and DET Reports noted above.

The other contemporary issue confronting to, and being confronted by, schools is the early age at which disengagement from school is occurring. In 2015, we are not talking about the type of disengagement "Sesame Street" tackled when it started decades ago. It is no longer just about students sitting idly in class, or disrupting classrooms through boredom or challenging a teacher's authority in one way or another.

Modern-day disengagement is increasingly about whether the student is even at school, for children who have barely started their schooling. This worrying development was the topic of a major Australian conference in July 2015, reported on as follows:

National Summit on Student Engagement told children learning to hate school in first few years

July 9, 2015

Brittany Vonow, The Courier-Mail

CHILDREN are learning to hate school in the first few years after starting Prep when they are often pushed into classes they don't understand, an expert claims. With pressure put on them to get through set lessons and be NAPLAN-ready by Year 3, kids are losing their excitement for school within two years, says Queensland University of Technology School of Cultural and Professional Learning Associate Professor Linda Graham. Students, particularly those from lower socio-economic areas, were becoming "hardened" against school soon after starting.

"There are the kids who are always at the bottom of the ladder, who are always under a sad face on the whiteboard who feel like they're not the good kids or the smart kids," she said. "They quite often feel like their teachers don't like them and over time they decide to retaliate and think 'I can't win so I'll give up'."

At the National Summit on Student Engagement, Learning and Behaviour at QUT this week, she said school was an "uphill race" for many. "If you don't start off well in those early years, the academic school curriculum ascends and you can't catch up," Prof Graham said. "If you don't have the fundamental building blocks, particularly in numeracy, you can really struggle."

In a recent survey of 33 male students from low socio-economic areas, Professor Graham said she found students did not come to school already hating it. Instead, most began disliking school between Prep and Year 2 as they received little support from teachers and even received their first suspensions in their first years of school, with more than 870 suspensions of Prep students in state schools in 2014.

1.2 Barriers and Opportunities

There is an extensive research literature on educational transitions though, as alluded to earlier, much of this is about transitioning from home or child-care into an early years school setting, or transitioning into the senior years of education or into higher education or vocational education and training.

However, the transition from Grade 6 to Year 7 has a long history of being recognised as one of the major leaps forward a young person makes as part of the process of becoming an adult. It is marked much more than the others not only by a change of institution and location, but also by a change of peer and adult relationships (how students love it when their teacher is able to treat them more as an equal), alongside major changes to their body shape throughout puberty and to their mental maturation.

Local and international studies emphasise the multi-layered barriers to engagement that children and young people may face including factors related to issues such as health, housing, transport, income, family functioning and social connectedness. These can influence the ability and the extent to which a child or young person can effectively participate in learning opportunities.

Barriers identified in the literature mostly revolve around measures of disadvantage: having a cultural and / or linguistic 'deficit', special needs, a history of bullying or being bullied, lack of psychological well-being, low attendance, poor academic achievement, obesity, disputed and disrupted home environments, poverty, refugee status, low social capital, lack of trust in authority figures, negative labelling, and poor hygiene. While these barriers are all real for many young people, too much of the research literature sets up the transition equation as one of a challenge versus a threat (Sirsch, 2003). For many young people, and their teachers, this is a false dichotomy.

Waters et al., (2012, p.190) depict young Australians as going through a difficult period for which "...there is urgent need for a longitudinal intervention trial (...) to help ameliorate the negative impacts...". In studies like this, it is researchers who define students as 'disadvantaged', 'difficult' or having some (or many) 'deficits', or at least it is the premises and hypotheses the researchers pose that lock them in to narrow concepts and incomplete findings.

School testing, by definition, means significant numbers of students will "fail" and thus be at risk of falling into or compounding one or more of the categories listed above. But how helpful are deficit categories compared to starting with what the student succeeds in and can do, often from extensive informal knowledge?

Much of the literature dwells on barriers to a successful transition on the correct premise that this is important as an outcome. But there are also opportunities.

Transitioning to Year 7 and further on into secondary education can certainly be a challenge for many young people, but they are more resilient than some researchers give them credit for, and there has to be a place in transitioning programs and activities for expressing and exploiting the joy, positive hopes, anticipations, aspirations, excitement and even dreams also felt, versus a focus on discontinuity, alienation and insecurity.

Despite anxieties about what might happen on the first day - finding their classroom, using the toilets, getting the right bus home and the like - students also report a degree of excitement and expectation about moving on from being a primary school student, even when that experience has been positive.

This is an aspect of the transition process that needs stronger action and activity, as found in a number of the case studies below that aim to elevate excitement about transition where negative words are never used.

While the content and structure of transition programs indicate thoughtful, well-intentioned activities, with high levels of commitment and professional judgment, there remains a lot of uncertainty about what happens from year to year suggesting a level of *ad hocery* within programs, and an inadequate awareness of what other schools or community groups are doing, even though many programs include some element delivered by groups outside the school.

People working in transition programs are aware of, for example, transition forms they use, but were less aware of official documentation. The 'presentism' (focus on getting through lessons, meetings, sports events and the like each day) that plagues schools is largely to blame for this, not a lack of enthusiasm or goodwill on the part of teachers and school leadership. But it is a problem. The exemplars of practice, outlined in the following case studies, are intended to help bridge these gaps between what we know.

1.3 Case Studies

The Cities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira have strong and vibrant community groups, acting both independently as well as in partnership with state and local government departments and personnel over a range of community issues.

The levels of commitment and resourcing evident in these collaborations is an exemplar of a democratic community and active civic life in Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira that is worthy of comment and acknowledgement.

This is a rich and diverse basis from which to build and extend the work being done in these three local government areas, particularly around the contributions made through these collaborations assisting successful transitions from primary to secondary schooling, especially for vulnerable young people. This section will briefly outline a sample of these local initiatives, focusing on the strengths and particular foci of each.

1.3.1 SFYS/Stonnington Youth Services

In 2013 SFYS, in partnership with local government and community services, developed STEP UP (Secondary Transition Engagement Program Utilising Parents). STEP UP places a large focus on practical issues (how to get to school, what to do if late, how to read a timetable) as student anxiety around these issues was identified as a primary concern.

Students receive a Grade 6 to Year 7 'Transitions Passport'. This booklet is comprehensive, informative and fun, building around the concept of going on a holiday with pages on 'travel tips' and 'travel checkpoints'. Each page contains an information box for parents/guardians. Parents can be briefed on the passport's contents at a separate parent information evening.

1.3.2 South Port UnitingCare

South Port UnitingCare's "Step Up: Grade 6 to Year 7 Transition" builds on the STEP UP program (see above). Early collaborations led to requests from other teachers to come into their school and assist with getting students through this phase of their life. South Port UnitingCare operates in about 5 primary schools each year.

The program is made up of a set of classroom worksheets that would feel familiar to students. The program also operates around the notion of students going on a voyage. This centres the transition experience around exciting new things that are going to happen, even if there is an element of uncertainty as found in any travel experience.

Working with secondary schools in this space, there is the potential to prevent long-term social and economic costs to Australian society if students transition successfully, stay in school, gain a qualification that will help get them employment, and more generally improve their life chances, health and well-being.

BOLT (Bikes Over Lunchtime) is an ancillary South Port UnitingCare program that builds skills, self-esteem and friendships for 'at risk' boys in 10 primary schools during 2015. Mentors offer support and advice over issues such as masculinity, violence, and anger management. BOLT has been very successful and is likely to expand.

South Port UnitingCare is conscious that follow-up in Year 7 and beyond, where needed, is important to provide a safety net for those students who do not transition successfully and is exploring how to link Grade 6 to Year 7 transition programs to Years 10 to Year 11 in future, recognising there are logistical and developmental obstacles both for South Port UnitingCare and the relevant secondary schools.

1.3.3 Bentleigh Secondary College

Bentleigh Secondary College is an un-zoned school that has a strong and valued reputation for transition case management, and for the integration support team that gives support and care to students, many of whom come to the school with a disability that they and their family feel will be professionally assisted and supervised at BSC. For example, BSC nearly always has 2 guide dogs in training in the school and is the school of choice for students with autism, some travelling long distances to attend.

BSC also has a strong record for academic success and while parents and students are attracted primarily to the calm, ordered and safe environment, they are also keen to know from the start that the student will exit with a quality Year 12 qualification.

The school matches a care and well-being focus with a focus on academic achievement, using Hattie's Explicit Instruction Model, bolstered by professional development for staff.

Bentleigh Secondary College has a process in 2015 whereby the feeder primary schools let the school know there are students looking to enrol in Year 7, following which meetings are held with the BSC staff, child and parent(s) to discuss what the school can do to assist with the transition and what areas of support can be offered beyond that. For the BSC context, it is the parents who are most anxious about the school. There follows a series of pre-orientation days and a half-day session where parents also attend.

For Bentleigh Secondary College prospective students, the focus during the transition program is to explore what they are looking forward to, not their fears or misgivings.

BSC also offers advice about practical transition experiences, enhanced by a very strong commitment of staff numbers and time to get to know the students, based on mindfulness training that casts the student in a positive light, rather than around assumptions about inadequacies, limitations and incapacities.

1.3.4 Glen Eira Youth Services

The Glen Eira Youth Information Centre, just behind Bentleigh Community Library, is the focus of a broad range of support activities for young people in the local area aged between 10-25 years old who live, work, study and/or socialise in the City of Glen Eira. The Centre offers flexible and proactive services, support, information and advocacy through staff that are enthusiastic and committed, appreciating the multi-faceted dimensions of becoming and being an adolescent, many requiring a skilled and sympathetic listener.

The GEYS “Moving Up” transition program in primary schools evolved over a few years and now reaches out to up to 600 students. The program runs over 3 sessions, held at the same time each week towards the end of the school year, with a focus on where and who to go to for help in secondary school. The program is backed up with a parent information night, usually with a guest speaker. Once in secondary school, an additional lunchtime program for Year 7 students (SWAG) provides a safe space to meet other students and youth workers in a supported environment, as well as a one-off “Moving Up” secondary school session.

The focus is on friendships, self-esteem, teamwork and breaking down fears and myths. The GEYS strategy is to use youth workers to deliver the program, building rapport to provide a platform for openly discussing concerns and hopes in a way some students may not with their classroom teacher.

Follow up with Year 7 is part of the program, re-visiting the fears students spoke of in Grade 6 (most likely laughing them off now) and reminding students where to find support. Where possible, the youth workers run lunchtime games with Year 7. These youth workers build up a big picture of what is happening across a number of schools and across a broad cohort of students, who they can go to in the first instance in each school, and also reassure transitioning students that they are not alone in their experiences. GEYS staff meet regularly with relevant DET staff about a broad range of planning and collaboration matters.

1.3.5 Stonnington Primary School

For Stonnington Primary School students the nearest government school is about 40 minutes away from where they now go to school and where they live, so there are real concerns about transitioning not only to a new school, but also to a new suburb, to an unfamiliar setting and different ambiance far from home. Families also express similar concerns, including about the travel costs involved and safety of their child.

Over the past two years SPS have utilised Stonnington Youth Services to deliver STEP UP. The program runs every week for 6 – 8 weeks, with separate program for Grades 5 and 6 as the school receives a high number of enrolments in these final years of primary school. While Grade 6 transition activities are timed after the students have selected their preferred secondary schools, this year the school has placed a concerted effort into discussing transitions throughout the school year. A new development in 2015 is the school has engaged with secondary school transition officers where ever and whenever possible.

1.3.6 Avenues Education

Avenues Education (AE) supports students who have been referred to Child Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS) and require support with their schooling. AE has developed a transition project in Bayside / Kingston as part of the School Focused Youth Service in that region. One of the senior staff completed a Master of Education thesis on transitions and this, added to extensive professional experience of the staff, is the basis for high levels of knowledge about the issues and solutions.

A consultant supports the AE targeted transition program. This retired school principal helps with each student’s well-being with assessment helping to identify Grade 6 students (usually around 10% of the cohort) needing extra transition support. Support includes extra transition sessions, an additional booklet and other

strategies. The aim is to help each student quickly gain a sense of belonging in, and to, their new school by connecting each with at least one adult in secondary school they feel they can go to with any worries.

Once the student has started Year 7, AE encourages a meeting within 5-6 weeks with the family, school staff and the school's student support officer. The student's most recent primary school teacher may also be invited. Follow-through is also a key element, given that health and well-being issues are at the heart of strategies adopted and may not disappear even with a successful transition, as health and well-being issues often require long-term case management through adolescence.

1.3.7 The Inner Eastern Learn Local and Employment Network (IELLEN) – Fire Up DVD

The IELLEN, in partnership with the OELLEN (Outer Eastern Local Learning and Employment) and teachers from CBC St Kilda and Middle Park Primary School, have produced a short DVD called "FIRE UP!" to assist parents in supporting their children as they make the transition from primary to secondary school. Education expert, Angie Wilcock, appears in the DVD outlining the changes children can expect and providing some helpful tips for parents. The idea for this resource stemmed from group discussions in the Careers Transition and Education Network (CTEN). This network is facilitated by the IELLEN and meets once a term. The video and a range of other handy resources can be accessed at <http://www.iellen.org.au/news/72-fire-up-dvd-about-transition-from-primary-school-to-secondary-coming-soon>

2 DEVELOPING A TRANSITION FRAMEWORK

2.1 Guiding students through change

The research literature and case studies presented above suggest transitions must be student-centred. They need to cover the practical matters of organisational differences between primary and secondary school, and the real concerns students have about getting to and from school, getting around their new school, getting to know and trust new authority figures, and being academically ready for what is seen as a big jump in expectations about student abilities and content knowledge. They must also be positive and fun.

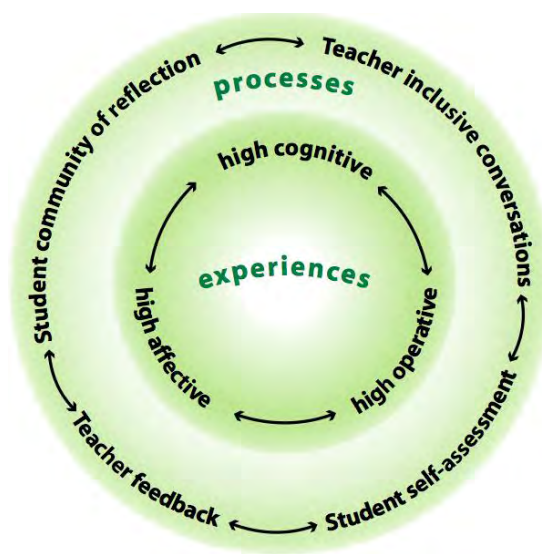
2.1.1 Transitions Models

Transition models are common, not only in education and training, career services and government agencies, but also across the business world to deal with internal and external changes that personnel need guiding through, whether a re-structure, amalgamation, take-over or shut down. In mid 2015, a company in Australia sent an SMS to 97 workers telling them to read their email, one of which was a dismissal notice. Most organisations manage transitions a lot better than that, realising the benefits of guiding people through changes, both positive and negative.

One example is Bridges' Transition Model for business, as published in "Managing Transitions" (1991). In Bridges' model, it is what is happening in a person's mind as they go through change that shapes the actions required to guide them through it successfully. This happens over a period of time and through a sequence of phases including learning to let go, moving through a neutral zone, and entering a new beginning.

The main strength of Bridges' model is that it focuses on transition, not change. The difference between these is important. Change happens to people, often quite quickly, even if they don't want it to. Transitions are mostly internal, often occurring over a substantial period of time and, when managed well, can be liberating.

This is not a 'one-size-fits-all' model, with Bridges arguing people need to move through these stages at their own pace, though clearly the model is designed to activate various strategies to ensure people do move on and not linger too long or fall by the wayside. Various inputs are required for activating transition such as preparation, individual recognition, personal renewal, institutional and locality reorientation, reconciliation and reconnection (<http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/bridges-transition-model.htm> adapted by the authors).



<http://socialventures.com.au/case-studies/uws-fair-go-project/>

A recent model in the field of Education has been developed for the “Fair Go Program” by Munns, Sawyer and Cole at the University of Western Sydney, as published in their book *Exemplary Teachers of Students in Poverty* (2013), itself an addendum to the 2006 publication *School is for Me*, by the Fair Go Team. This model focuses on pathways to student engagement through the ‘MeE’ Framework where the lower case ‘e’ represents engagement as in ‘on task’, and the upper case ‘E’ represents engagement as in ‘school is for me’. The model embodies engaging messages (mostly from teachers) to low SES students, engaging processes and experiences, and aims to build motivation through individual focus on the value of school, persistence and achievement.

Other transition models emphasise the need to act collaboratively across a range of stakeholders, the primary role of schools to provide practical support and access to information to assist informed choices, and the need for integrated specialist additional support for those at risk of not transitioning successfully (not only those experiencing disadvantage but also might be high achievers going into an academically selective or elite sports school, etcetera). Other considerations include the need to reach out to those students with low attendance who miss out on transitioning events, the importance of facilitation and following up students as they move through destinations, and emphasise the need to continually review and update strategies.

2.1.2 Transition as “Rounding”

During the primary to secondary school transition process, by definition lasting months and regularly across at least 2 calendar years, students pass through a number of areas of responsibility within and across schools. Throughout this process, students are guided by and cared for by multiple adults, many of them strangers, often for only one area or only once. This can be confusing and disempowering.

A lot of this is unavoidable, given the complexity of educational institutions, and is reminiscent of what happens in other institutions such as hospitals, where there are multiple stages of being received, treated, cared for and discharged by constantly changing nursing, medical and administration staff.

In hospitals, the same type of 'transition' happens for every patient, whether day surgery or longer term stays. For most, hospitals are alien worlds, places in which they rapidly lose control of what they do and where they can go once inside the front door. Hospitals are institutions people move through where they lack knowledge to be part of decisions being made about them, and have little say about when they can leave.

To ensure the medical safety and appropriate health outcomes specific to each patient during all the above, hospitals use 'patient rounding' to ensure that each person's information is accurately passed on to the next stage of their treatment to ensure a successful outcome through minimising medication and surgical errors.

For the patient and staff, the rounding process can be repetitive and based on tedious and unvarying paperwork – one soon knows the question before it is asked. Yet there is indisputable value using rounding to ensure each 'transition' through the institution is successful and improves the life chances of every patient.

A lot of what happens in 'rounding' in hospitals is not directly appropriate for use with minors, who are not legally responsible for information about themselves, but it does suggest a way forward in addressing the VAGO Report finding about poor process and lack of communication and coordination of transitions within and between educational institutions.

Adapting the process of 'rounding' for schools has the advantage of keeping each student, their teacher and family informed. Rounding would formalise students being engaged in what is happening by (repeatedly) asking them to clarify what stage of the transition they are at and what is likely to happen next, as well as what the outcome is that they are working towards. As the saying goes, 'Knowledge is power'.

A 'rounding' process should include a record of achievements that students make along the way as they move through various transition 'procedures'. If any sudden change or negative transition experience occurs, 'rounding' brings it to light and triggers an attempt to rectify it before the student moves on to the next phase.

2.2 The '5C' Transition Framework

The 5C Transition Framework presented below has been developed through consideration of the research literature, government and system reports, and the lived experiences of students, teachers, families and community services briefly outlined in the case studies and consultation undertaken for this project and report. It is an amalgam of practice, though does not claim to be exhaustive. The intent is that the 5CTF acts as a guide to undertake an audit of current practice and then as a guide to future planning, coordinated with fellow agencies, as well as identifying the resourcing required or to be requested.

The Framework is based on 5 key factors: -

1. CURRICULUM
2. CONNECTEDNESS
3. CHILD-CENTREDNESS
4. COLLABORATION
5. CONTINUITY

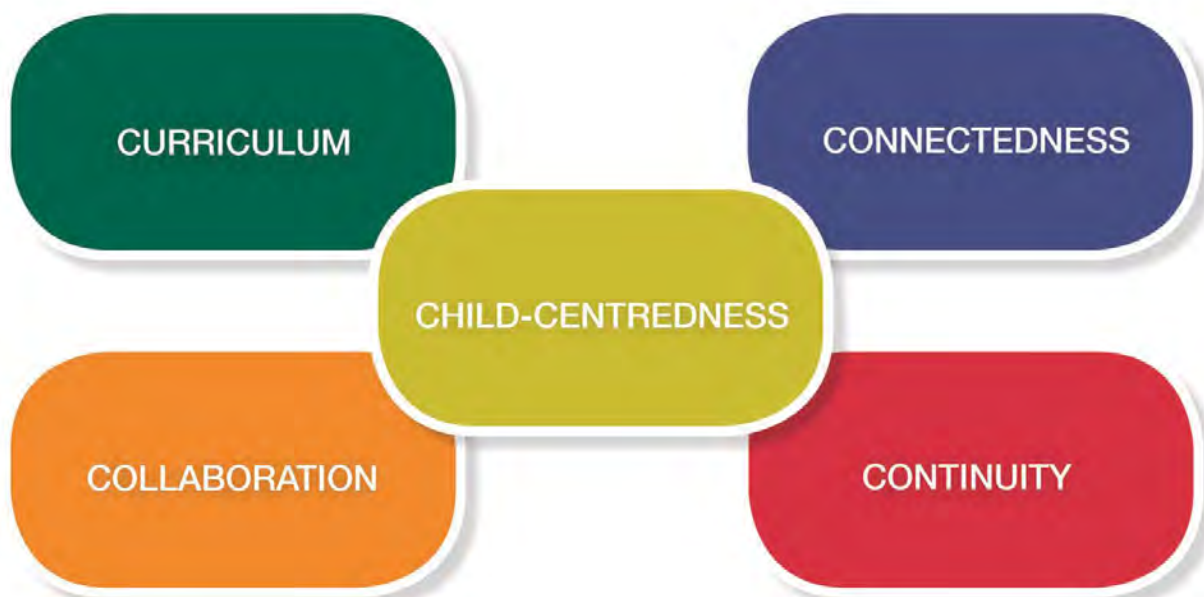
Each of these factors has a suite of sub-headings indicative of action areas to consider when using the 5C Framework to plan and coordinate the next round or stage of transition interventions.

No single school or agency will emerge from this process with the same plan as another, but there will be overlap and commonalities so that experiences and strategies can be shared.

The umbrella headings are designed to give flexibility so that local contexts, teacher skills, community resources and the needs of the students are the driving force behind the collaborative decisions made, not some pre-determined model that schools try to squeeze their programs into regardless of context.

The 5C Transition Framework is represented in Figures 1 and 2. Each transition program audit would emphasise different areas relevant to program and local strategies, and focus on different areas under each heading as the planning and coordination process gets underway.

Figure 1: 5C Transition Framework - overview

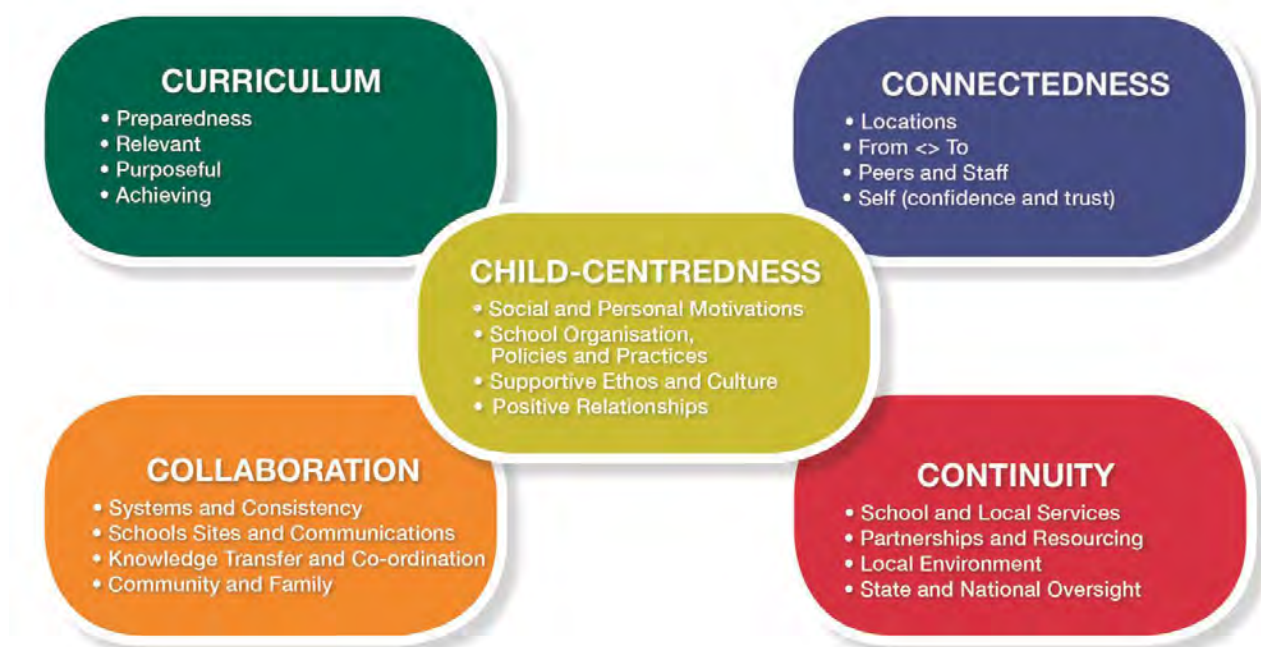


This model was extensively re-developed by Stephen Crump based on Brown, N., & Adam, A. (2010, June), University of Tasmania. Use is permitted for non-commercial purposes with attribution to the authors.

Areas to explore in the audit and co-ordination stage for each of the 5Cs include:

- **CURRICULUM:** *Preparedness, Relevance, Purpose, Achievable.*
- **CONNECTEDNESS:** *Locations, From – To Events, Peers and Staff, Self (confidence and trust).*
- **CHILD-CENTREDNESS:** *Social and Personal, School Organisation, Policies and Practices, Supportive Ethos and Culture, Positive Relationships.*
- **COLLABORATION:** *Systems and Consistency, School Sites and Communications, Knowledge Transfer and Co-ordination, Community and Family.*
- **CONTINUITY:** *School and Local Services, Partnerships and Resourcing, Local Environment, State and National Oversight.*

Figure 2: 5C Transition Framework – action and audit guide.



This model was extensively re-developed by Stephen Crump based on Brown, N., & Adam, A. (2010, June), University of Tasmania. Use is permitted for non-commercial purposes with attribution to the authors.

There are multiple ways that the 5CTF audit and planning can occur. Schools and similar agencies are familiar with effective processes for undertaking tasks like this.

Technology provides a swathe of options for entering, processing, presenting and disseminating each 5CTF, but a good starting point for open discussion is always something less permanent at this stage – a meeting over coffee and cake, or fruit platter, and time to talk things over.

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Notes

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