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# P-12 Education Research Project

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**Summary Report  
May 2007**

**Country Education Project Inc.**



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### FOREWORD

The development of P-12 schools began in rural Victoria in the late 1970's when Higher Elementary and Consolidated schools retained many of their senior students. Many parents and teachers felt that the personal assistance given, reduced travel, and community support outweighed the benefits of schooling in a larger provincial setting.

In the late 1980's P-12 schools were recognised by the Department of Education, the union movement and local communities as a viable organisational structure. Exciting new teaching methods were used. For example, telematics, and in some clusters common senior timetables were adopted.

The 1990's saw significant changes in the way the state government funded schools and greater school autonomy over many decisions previously made centrally. The introduction of global budgeting, self management and district provision focused many rural communities on the P-12 option. The number of such schools grew significantly, including metropolitan settings. Unfortunately, we believe, this trend occurred for administrative convenience and savings rather than pedagogical commitment and an awareness of the learning and teaching possibilities once artificial divisions were theoretically removed.

The Country Education Project has always promoted the wonderful opportunities available to students, teachers and their communities in a P-12 setting. We have supported P-12 schools by providing professional development, student programs and advocacy. We felt several years ago that the time was right for research into existing practice in the areas of curriculum, management, leadership and community engagement. We are grateful to the Department of Education for its support of this research.

We thank all those who have worked to complete the report, particularly Kerryn Swann (Project Officer), John Stafford (Glenlyon Consulting) and Phil Brown (Executive Officer CEP). Also our thanks go to the members of the Reference Group; Wallace Anderson, Bryan Ward, Brad Madden, Terry Harrington and Brenda Keenan (2005).

In particular CEP Inc would like to acknowledge the specific involvement of the following:

- the fifty P-12 school communities involved in the information collection and interviews.
- the P-12 schools who attended the various forums and workshops.
- Country Education Project Inc. personnel
- personnel from the various stakeholder organisations including the principal associations, the Australian Education Union and universities
- personnel from the Department of Education central and regional offices – especially to Wallace Anderson who provided valuable input into the project.

We present this report and its recommendations to you.

**GARY ALLEN**  
Chair  
Country Education Project Inc.

**NIC ABBEY**  
Chair  
P-12 Research Reference Group

**May 2007**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The aim of the study was:

*To examine and document the curriculum, organisational and school-community partnership developments in P-12 schools and assess their impact on student learning.*

The objectives outlined in the funding proposal were:

- (i) To research the educational impact of P-12 school growth on young peoples' learning including:
  - the capacity of the P-12 schools to provide a curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of their students.
  - the relationships between students, between staff and between staff and students to gain an understanding of what impact (if any) these have on student learning outcomes.
  - the school community relationships and how these might have changed as a result of the P-12 school existing within a community.
  - the documentation of experiences of P-12 schools
  - the documentation of curriculum development and provision across the P-12 spectrum and its impact on student learning
  - advice on the resource model that supports student learning for government schools within a P-12 context.
- (ii) To propose approaches that enhance student learning outcomes within P-12 schools including:
  - possible curriculum/learning initiatives that could be developed.
  - professional development activities that support and promote curriculum leadership within these schools.
  - the allocation of resources within the school resource package.

### 1.2. RESEARCH FOCUS AREAS

In conversations with P-12 school principals, key education personnel and other key stakeholders, four key areas of focus were identified for this project:

- Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
- Leadership, Management and Governance.
- School Community Relationships.
- Wellbeing and Developmental Pathways.

Within each focus area there are a range of research questions and issues that were explored through this project. These include:

#### *Curriculum, Teaching & Learning*

- approaches to teaching and learning implemented
- learning structures. eg year level, stages of learning
- curriculum and learning provision
- use of teacher expertise and professional development
- school structures and organisation.

#### *Leadership, Management & Governance*

- school council structures
- parent engagement arrangements
- school facilities and site management
- organisation, leadership and staffing structures
- budget and finances
- charter, strategic plan, review process.

#### *School Community Relationships (internal and external)*

- links with industry and local community organisations
- parent engagement
- links with higher education/TAFE/ACE/kindergartens/etc
- links with local government
- role in community – use of facilities.

#### *Wellbeing and Developmental Pathways*

- mentoring, cross-age tutoring, peer support programs for staff and students.
- student participation in leadership/governance
- transition periods within the school
- support systems – counselling, etc.

### 1.3. METHODOLOGY

The project was divided into six stages to ensure that targets were met. The six stages and tasks involved in each were:

#### *Stage 1:*

- The establishment of the project reference group with representation from the Office of Teaching and Learning in DET, host school – Timboon P-12 College, P-12 schools, the Catholic Education system and Country Education Project Inc.
- Appointment of the Research Project Officer and Research Partners.

#### *Stage 2:*

- Literature search and review.
- Preparation of research plan.
- Preparation and distribution of survey to targeted P-12 Schools.

#### *Stage 3:*

- Compilation of information from surveys
- Compilation of school interviews.
- Conducted forums for representatives from P-12 schools.
- Conducted a briefing for representatives from key stakeholder organisations.

#### *Stage 4:*

- Collation and analysis of information and data collected.
- Preparations of discussion papers on the four focus areas.

#### *Stage 5:*

- Conducted a forum for schools volunteering for the pilot projects.
- Supported a number of pilot schools and documented learnings
- Conducted meetings with key stakeholder groups to discuss the identified systemic issues.

#### *Stage 6:*

- Key Findings and Recommendations identified.
- Completion of final Report and presentation to Department of Education.

### 1.4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The development and growth of P-12 schools within Victoria has been steady across the three education sectors over the past twenty years.

Such a development began in the late 1970s with a number of government consolidated schools and higher elementary schools within rural Victoria wanting to provide an education for their students past year 8. Families saw advantages in smaller class sizes and their children spending more time in their communities and with their families. In addition there were a small number of rural catholic schools developing similar facilities. Prior to this, communities would be expected to send their students, generally by bus, to a larger centre for education post year 8. Some families took the option of boarding their children in larger regional centres or Melbourne – usually in a private school that offered accommodation. As a result, a small number of government schools (ten) and one catholic school supported young people staying at their school past year 8.

The way in which this development occurred varied from location to location. The majority, (if not all) of these communities seemed to ‘grow’ to P-12 schools from consolidated schools as the students got older and required further schooling. During this development, some schools would support the learning of students involved in post year 8 programs through staff support; other schools would support students in undertaking correspondence schooling while others provided a combination of both.

As the students moved through the post year 8 levels, the first students from these schools involved in a Higher School Certificate program occurred in the late 1970’s. Within the catholic sector, this development seemed to only occur to year 10 and the students who then wanted to study year 11 or year 12 were required to travel to a neighbouring secondary school.

In the mid nineteen eighties, the Commonwealth Government allocated resources to rural and remote secondary school communities through the Commonwealth Resource Agreement. This initiative provided valuable resources to P-12 schools (and other rural secondary schools) to support the use of communication technology (telematics) for the provision of year 11 and year 12 programs for students. The program also provided a valuable opportunity for these schools to cluster with other P-12 schools and secondary colleges to provide units at this level and to be less reliant on the distance education centre for senior student programs.

At this time, the Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals, along with the Country Education Project formed the Victorian Association of Rural Small Secondary Schools (VARSSS) to provide specific support and a voice for rural and remote secondary schools. Within this association there was an informal P-12 group established for principals of P-12 schools .

The different awards and conditions for teachers in the primary and secondary sectors were explored in depth as part of these discussions. It was recognised that for these schools this issue hampered the use of staff across the primary and secondary divide. In conversations between P-12 schools, the Teacher Unions and representatives from the Department of Education, a proposed P-12 agreement was developed.

In the early 1990’s, the schools that had “grown” into P-12 schools were able to change their names from either a consolidated or higher elementary schools to a P-12 school.

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This resulted in the P-12 schools being recognised as “an equal” with primary and secondary stand alone schools.

In the mid 1990s, with the change of government at a state level, there were a number of new education policy directions introduced. The discussions that had been held in relation to the development of an agreement for P-12 schools ceased and initiatives such as self managing schools and indicative school budgets were introduced. The impact of such policies meant that P-12 schools were resourced as one school.

The allocation of resources was (and remains) based on primary and secondary student enrolments. During this time the P-12 schools raised a number of concerns with the department highlighting the complexities of running a P-12 schools. The then Director of Education acknowledged a need in this area and provided a “complexity allowance” for P-12 schools to address some of the issues highlighted. The amount determined was dependent on principal classification and has gained increases over the years reflective of indexation.

At the same time as these new policies were being introduced, the Quality Provision initiative was implemented with a number of communities being encouraged and supported to consider the P-12 model. The discussions associated with Quality Provision in relation to P-12 schools tended to focus on management and efficiency issues rather than educational opportunities. The allocation of the complexity allowance was also seen by these communities as a “carrot” when considering the P-12 model.

As a result of these policies and initiatives, the number of P-12 schools increased across the state with a small number of metropolitan communities developing P-12 schools to address the issues highlighted through the Quality Provision initiative. The majority, however, were rural and remote communities who saw the Quality Provision initiative as one that threatened their individual school and they saw the development of the P-12 model as an option to retain schools in their communities. Towards the end of the 1990's there were approximately 45 P-12 schools established across the government and catholic sectors. In addition a number of independent schools began linking their primary and secondary school sectors and referring to them as P-12 education settings.

In more recent times (early 21st century) there have been a small number of P-12 schools established and these seem to have been developed in response to changes occurring within these communities – especially declining student enrolments. In addition, within the growth corridors of Melbourne there has been consideration given to P-12 models for education provision, for example Caroline Springs and The Boardwalk in the western suburbs.

## 2. PROJECT FINDINGS

The potential of a P-12 school to provide a continuous and connected learning experience for young people is growing in popularity and interest. This popularity is not only occurring in Victoria, but also in other states of Australia. P-12 schools have existed within the education system since the 1970s, yet little is known of their potential, their impact on the communities they serve, or how they differ from other school structures. Indeed P-12 schools have focused their efforts on being 'good' primary and secondary schools.

This project has highlighted the need to challenge and question the dominance of the primary / secondary dualism. In light of the changing needs of young people and the need to prepare them to be effective lifelong learners in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century society this traditional view needs to be re-examined.

*There is a need for a more unified P-12 pedagogy and common educational language.*

P-12 schools have struggled to develop and identify themselves as schools different from stand alone primary and secondary schools. In education systems that are structured around the primary/secondary sectors, where the culture is different in primary and secondary and where facilities, resource allocations and staffing have been established as either primary or secondary, it will take a significant policy and operational shift to create a P-12 culture, curriculum and approach.

P-12 schools (especially in regional and rural communities) have made a significant contribution in a range of areas including student learning; curriculum planning and organisation; staff employment and leadership/management. Unified education provision within a community results in stronger relationships being built between the school and its community. Furthermore, it enables education providers to support young people through their entire schooling.

### 2.1. CURRICULUM TEACHING AND LEARNING

Through this research project it was evident that P-12 schools hold a real advantage for the development of a truly P-12 approach to education. In discussions with P-12 schools there was much debate about the concepts of "P-12 schooling" and "P-12 schools". For the purpose of this project the following definitions were adopted:

**P-12 School** – any educational institution governed by a single body, managed by a central administration and operating under the same name that offers schooling for students from Prep (at least) until the end of year 12.

**P-12 Schooling** – refers to a pedagogical approach to schooling across the lifespan incorporating ideals such as lifelong learning, curriculum alignment and/or seamlessness. It is not reliant or dependant on the P-12 school; it may exist in communities where there is no P-12 school if the schools in that community integrate their practices.

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*While P-12 schools have the opportunity to explore the concept of “P-12 schooling”, the degree to which they have done this varies markedly.*

Many P-12 schools have been established for administrative or community reasons, not for the purpose of developing and delivering curricula, pedagogy or teaching and learning reasons. This is true for schools that have been formed as a result of district provision initiatives; the amalgamation of a number of schools due to declining enrolments; or changing demographics.

Many of the “original” P-12 schools (which tend to be smaller rural schools and often the only school in their communities) demonstrate more consistent P-12 schooling approaches than do the P-12 schools that have been formed as a result of a restructure and/or amalgamation. This also seems to be the case within those P-12 schools that have been established in recent times.

Whilst P-12 schooling is still in its infancy, with little research having been conducted, the recent introduction of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) is providing P-12 schools with both the opportunity and the impetus to investigate this idea of P-12 schooling further.

### **Curriculum Structure and Organisation**

There are two key elements relevant to curriculum structure and organisation within P-12 schools; namely ‘continuity’ and ‘flexibility’.

The degree to which continuity of curriculum is achieved varies markedly in P-12 schools and depends on school size, geographic location and the way in which the school was established.

The majority of P-12 schools continue to structure their learning on the traditional primary/secondary structures and modes of operation, with smaller, rural P-12 schools more likely to investigate flexible models of delivery.

There is little evidence that P-12 schools are developing a plan for “seamlessness” or of continuity, or even for identifying the characteristics or qualities of a “seamless” curriculum across the P-12 spectrum. The recent Middle Years’ initiatives have, however, assisted P-12 schools in beginning the conversation and consideration of continuity of curriculum. This is highlighted by the research conducted on the Middle Years (MYRAD, 2002; the MYPRAD project, ongoing).

*The research project found that having a consistent underlying philosophy for student learning across the P-12 spectrum has advantages for ensuring curriculum continuity.*

With respect to flexibility there is similar diversity. Whilst there are still a significant number of P-12 schools operating on a traditional primary/secondary model, many schools are beginning to adopt a stage of learning approach by changing the management and administration structure, the physical layout of the school, or the nature of curriculum planning teams and curriculum programs.

The impetus for the move towards a ‘stages of learning’ approach is based on recent research suggesting that education experiences and pedagogy should be suited to the developmental needs of students at different stages of their schooling experience. The Middle Years and Early Years initiatives have opened the way for this approach and the recent introduction of VELs lends further support to this idea.

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Smaller P-12 schools (especially those in rural communities) have developed more flexible organisational structures to cater for the needs and interest of their students compared with larger P-12 schools.

Werrimull P-12 College (total enrolment of 84 students), for example, has developed flexible, vertical grouping structures to enable them to meet their students' individual needs and to provide a comprehensive curriculum from Prep to year 12.

The potential for cross-age activities and programs in a P-12 school is obvious and well recognised by many of the principals of these schools. Activities such as older students tutoring younger students, or helping out with younger learning programs are seen to develop self esteem or responsibility in older students and provide younger students with positive role modelling and leadership examples (Paglin and Fager, 1997). However, the data suggests that few P-12 schools have taken advantage of this potential.

### **Curriculum Planning**

There was very little evidence of curriculum planning occurring across the P-12 spectrum other than that promoted through the introduction of VELs, PoLT and MYRAD.

*There is a lack of understanding of what a P-12 curriculum approach is, (or could be) and the qualities of a 'seamless' P-12 curriculum.*

The overwhelming reason given by P-12 schools for the curriculum not being planned on a P-12 basis related to the cultural differences that exist between the primary and secondary components of the school. These cultural differences seem to be underpinned by:

- teacher education courses training teachers in only one sector
- different industrial awards applied to the two sectors
- different language and its use within the two sectors
- each sector utilising different approaches to learning .

*A large number of P-12 schools indicated that they were moving their curriculum planning from a primary and secondary approach to one based on stages of learning.*

An issues highlighted by a number of P-12 schools was that the current student performance data is not linked across the P-12 spectrum. This makes it difficult for P-12 schools to gain an accurate picture of students' progress over the total P-12 spectrum.

### **Professional Interaction of Staff and Use of Staff Expertise**

Conversations undertaken in this project highlighted that P-12 schools have a distinct advantage in encouraging and supporting collaboration and sharing of teacher expertise and knowledge across traditional primary secondary sectors. However, the extent to which this occurs is limited and dependent on a number of factors:

- the difficulty of having multi-site P-12 schools
- staff not being prepared to teach across year level from Prep to Year 12
- the different award conditions for primary and secondary teachers
- the differing cultures of primary and secondary education

*Management of staff has generally been focused on primary/secondary schooling. For those that do manage staff across the sectors, this generally occurs in the middle years or in specialist curriculum areas.*

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The organisation of staff facilities was identified as a significant factor in encouraging communication amongst staff across the P-12 spectrum. Such organisation varied significantly between schools within this project.

*Schools where staff facilities were organised on a P-12 basis were able to promote more P-12 education discussion and curriculum planning and development.*

There is a large variation in the way in which professional development is planned and supported within P-12 schools and this is not significantly different to stand-alone primary and secondary schools. Informal interaction between staff is extremely important in a P-12 school and usually occurs through co-location of staff work spaces, the use of common staff rooms, and the provision of whole-of-school staff meetings.

The significant cultural differences between primary and secondary schooling reduce staff co-operation, collaboration and professional development across the P-12 years. These differences appear to stem primarily from teacher training, the different industrial awards and the different language, and its use, in both sectors.

Smaller P-12 schools involved in this project seemed to be more effective in developing a P-12 culture and challenging the traditional primary/secondary cultures. Such approaches tend to increase the potential for collaboration and relationship building in such schools.

*Amongst P-12 schools there is a desire to explore a language that better reflects the provision of learning across the P-12 spectrum. With the move within a number of P-12 schools to a 'Stages of Learning' approach to curriculum planning and provision, schools highlighted the need to develop a language and culture which reflects this approach.*

## 2.2. LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The overwhelming impression of the leadership, management and governance of P-12 schools is that they are essentially the same as stand-alone primary and secondary schools

Leadership, management and governance of schools are increasingly demanding and complex in today's modern, decentralised system. School leaders and governance bodies are required to make their own decisions and manage their resources to meet the needs and expectations of their community.

### **Leadership**

Leaders in P-12 schools are faced with the same issues as stand-alone primary or secondary schools, in particular the increasing demands of management responsibilities. However, they did indicate that they spent a significant amount of their time, effort and resources in managing the primary and secondary divide within their schools.

In general, leadership structures within a P-12 school are organised around either the physical layout of the school or sub-schools or based on year levels and curriculum. These leadership structures involve positions such as principals, assistant principals and leading teachers.

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*In conversations with P-12 schools it appears that schools are only just beginning to consider the uniqueness of the P-12 situation and the potential for interaction between the sectors through restructuring the leadership structure to reflect the stages of learning. Such consideration has been prompted by initiatives such as PoLT and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.*

Budgets are a primary and secondary construct, staffing is primary and secondary based and most professional development is based around primary and secondary sectors. The most notable exception to this is the Middle Years and the Innovations and Excellence Clusters within the Government education system.

P-12 schools have generally not developed and improved as they could have because they are always applying policies and systems that are designed for primary and secondary schools.

### **Systems Leadership**

Leadership from the various education systems on P-12 schooling has not been strong. In the main the education systems organise themselves around the sectors – primary and secondary.

*Leadership from across the education systems is needed to rethink the way P-12 schools are built, resourced, staffed and managed if they are to achieve outcomes for their students that are significantly better.*

### **Student Leadership**

The student leadership structure supported in most P-12 schools are the Student Representative Councils.

*Even though P-12 schools are well placed to utilise student leadership through use cross-age and mentoring activities there is limited evidence of this occurring in P-12 schools.*

### **Governance**

P-12 schools operate according to departmental guidelines with all schools being governed by a single governing body – usually with associated working groups.

School governance was not identified as a problem area in P-12 schools – on the contrary, less time is spent on recruiting council or board members and people tend to stay longer on Councils or Boards in P-12 schools.

*There were also advantages noted by many P-12 schools in the increased length of time that councillors engage with the school through their involvement in school governance bodies. School Council members can, and do stay involved from primary years through to secondary years and this connection is not broken by a change of school and new leadership.*

There is some evidence to suggest that having one school council or board changes the nature of the involvement, rather than reducing it

The overwhelming majority of schools indicated that they address P-12 goals in their strategic plans or charters. However, this project believes that more detail needs to be collected about what these particular goals are and in what way they are considered to be specific to P-12 schools.

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### **Management**

Indications are that school leaders are spending considerably more time on management responsibilities. This is also the case in P-12 schools.

*In more recent times P-12 schools have been developed with the view that there are management and educational advantages. However, there needs to be a stronger commitment from the education systems to the P-12 learning model or approach.*

This project explored whether the P-12 approach provides the opportunity to address the increase in management responsibilities. While there doesn't appear to be any significant differences within P-12 schools compared to the stand-alone primary and secondary school there are two of areas worth noting.

#### 1. Budget and Finances:

The Student Resource Package within government schools is designed to provide greater flexibility to schools. However P-12 schools reported that this was not necessarily the case. The staff/student ratio requirements in the P-2 area, along with the need to offer a broad range of subjects in years 10, 11 and 12, means that schools have limited flexibility in the allocation of resources across the middle years.

*Government P-12 schools also indicated that the complexity allowance is extremely important to their operations. However, this allowance has reduced in "real value" over time (Note: Catholic and Independent schools do not receive such an allowance).*

#### 2. Facilities

Most schools have become P-12 schools as a result of mergers or re-organisations and there has been little or no change to facilities. Therefore schools have been required to organise around existing facilities.

P-12 schools that have been established as a P-12 (from a Higher Elementary School) are generally smaller, rural schools and have over time created more P-12 friendly facilities and environments.

Currently, the facilities schedule is divided into two components - a primary component and a secondary component. This does not accommodate the needs of P-12 schools. Indeed it limits their capacity to respond to students needs in flexible and innovative ways.

### 2.3. SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The P-12 structure provides real opportunities for schools to form significant and productive relationships within the school itself and between it and the wider community. The amount of time students (and therefore, families) spend linked to the P-12 school is greater than for stand-alone primary and secondary schools; thus longer term relationships are built between students, staff families and the wider community.

This project focused on four areas related to school community relations:

- Student – teacher relationships
- Student – student relationships
- School – family relationships
- School – community relationships.

#### ***Student-Teacher Relationships***

P-12 schools provide a unique opportunity for students and staff to develop relationships over a longer period of time. It is advantageous for staff to witness the development of students over a longer period of time so they are able to respond to student aspirations and needs from Prep to Year 12.

Within the P-12 setting, staff can ensure that information relating to individual students is managed across the whole school life of the student. A number of P-12 schools have developed formal structures, or programs, to ensure that communication and information transference occurs across the P-12 spectrum

In addition, this project found that students with special needs are able to have their needs met across their school life, as information about students is able to be passed (in either direction) more easily from one year level to the next, especially across the primary/secondary sectors.

*An overwhelming response from P-12 schools in this project indicates that such relationships provide invaluable opportunities for the schools to develop an education program that is responsive to the individual student over his/her entire school life.*

#### ***Student-Student Relationships***

In a P-12 school, peer relationships can be maintained for the total P-12 years of a students' life. The pastoral care and cross-age relationships that occur at peer level in a number of P-12 schools have been highlighted as positive aspects for students. Often older students take care of younger ones.

The idea of the P-12 school representing the family situation is mentioned frequently in interviews with principals, teachers, students and parents. The interaction between students across the stages of development is seen to be advantageous for all involved.

While not a focus area of this project, anecdotal information gained from schools, as well as comments made through the interviews undertaken suggests that behaviour such as bullying is less prevalent in P-12 settings. More specific research is required in this area to ascertain its validity.

There are also significant advantages inherent in the use of cross age activities within a P-12 setting. However, few P-12 schools have really investigated this potential.

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Rushworth P-12 College provides a good example of the effective use of cross-age tutoring activities. VCAL students are involved in primary classrooms to complete some of the components of their VCAL program. The school is also considering programs in years 9 or 10 that would also allow students working with younger students through an established and assessed elective program. The school indicates that this has led to an increase in the level of responsibility shown by these year 9 students; they are very useful in the junior classrooms and the primary students respond well to their presence.

### **School-Parent Relationship**

*The links that are developed between the P-12 school and parents (especially in rural P-12 schools) is a long lasting one and many of the schools indicated that this was one of the most positive elements of a P-12 school.*

P-12 schools reported that parents of secondary students tend to stay more involved in their child's education compared to stand-alone primary and secondary schools due to the continuance available within a P-12 school.

The majority of P-12 schools have active parent bodies acting across the P-12 spectrum. Parents' involvement in these groups were continuance across all levels, but tended to be higher for the younger students.

### **School-Community Relationships**

A number of P-12 schools have developed strong links with their community – more so in rural communities. While this would be the case with stand-alone primary and secondary schools, having to build a relationship with only one school is seen as advantageous by community organisations, industry and the local community.

Many of the P-12 schools (especially those in rural communities) are seen as “community learning hubs” – often being the only education provider within their community.

The advantage of the P-12 structure in a number of communities is especially notable as the community has only one school with which to 'link', or liaise. This often leads to a very strong sense of ownership by the community and also means that a larger proportion of the community has direct links with the school. There were numerous examples of strong partnership that have been developed between the P-12 schools and local community organisations and businesses. One example is the Apollo Bay P-12 School and its involvement with the local Surf Life Saving Club.

### 2.4. WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS

This project explored student wellbeing from two perspectives:

- the potential that P-12 schools have in providing support throughout the various stages of learning
- the nature of this support and how it may have differed from stand-alone primary and secondary school settings

Within these, the three areas of focus were:

- Transitions and developmental pathways
- Student connectedness to school
- Student support services.

#### ***Transition and Developmental Pathways***

Research indicates that movement from one education setting to another has an impact on young people. This impact occurs in two main areas:

- the discontinuity between curriculum, teaching and learning practices between the schools that students are in transition from and to, and;
- the loss of student social networks and peer groups and the resulting affect this can have on student self-concept and self esteem (particularly for students in the early years of adolescence when social relationships are seen to be especially important).

The P-12 education model has a significant advantage in reducing the potential negative impacts on young people moving from one setting to another.

*Information collected through this project indicates that this is the case. Transition is generally not an issue in P-12 schools. The P-12 school environment supports staff communication across the P-12 spectrum thus supporting the development of learning pathways for students.*

Some schools reported that families select a P-12 school or move students at grade 4 – grade 5 to avoid the year 7 transition.

A number of rural P-12 schools indicated that they have a Pre School on site. While these initiatives have generally begun through the need to develop creative ways of providing pre school learning, the result has been a relatively “seamless movement from Preschool into Prep.

The exploration of developmental pathways has focused on the post compulsory years of learning in recent times. Many P-12 schools reported that with the move towards the stages of learning, they are beginning to develop learning and reporting approaches which support developmental learning pathways for students across the P-12 spectrum. Such an approach allows for students to undertake learning across the traditional year levels, especially within the middle years.

*There are examples that highlight the advantages that P-12 schools have with regard to developing student knowledge and learning approaches across the P-12 spectrum.*

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### **Student Connectedness to School**

Research indicates that a student's connectedness to their learning environment is impacted on through a range of factors including sense of belonging, attitude to school, feeling safe and secure, their own, and their parents, aspirations and the attitude of their peers, especially relating to learning.

P-12 schools have numerous benefits for developing student connectedness with education as they remain at the same school from Prep through to Year 12. This enables them to establish and maintain more meaningful relationships with their school and key adults within their school community.

*There is scope for further research to examine student connectedness issues within P-12 schools and how they may compare with stand-alone primary and secondary schools.*

### **Student Support Services**

The support services that are available within a P-12 school generally reflect those available within a primary or secondary school. School size and geographic location (rurality) are critical factors influencing the range and scope of such services.

From the information collected through this project, the way support services are structured and managed within the P-12 school varies significantly. The majority of schools organise their support services around year levels and primary/secondary sectors. This approach generally reflects the way in which these services have been funded.

*While P-12 schools have the potential to “merge” the various services, and make them available across the P-12 spectrum, thus allowing for a more holistic approach to student support, the majority of schools structure their support services according to year levels.*

A small number of P-12 schools, such as Goroke P-12 College, are beginning to develop a student support service approach across the P-12 spectrum – pooling resources to allow this approach to occur in areas such as nursing and student welfare. The feedback from these schools indicates this is an advantage, particularly for younger students and the developing approach to curriculum development and provision based on the stages of learning

*Through this project, the P-12 schools expressed a desire for the education systems to review how support services are resourced with consideration being given to the development of funding on a P-12 basis, rather than a primary and secondary school. This would allow P-12 schools to allocate these services in a manner consistent with their other P-12 planning processes.*

### 2.5. OTHER ISSUES

Throughout the consultations of this project, there were four key systemic areas constantly reflected in forum discussions, data, and school responses.

The four issues were:

- Industrial issues
- Budget and resourcing
- Teacher training and recruitment
- Facilities.

The project facilitated a number of forums to explore these areas further. Representatives from P-12 schools, education sectors and key stakeholder organisations were involved in the discussions.

#### ***Industrial Issues***

The different “industrial conditions” for primary and secondary teachers has historically created challenges for the leadership of a P-12 school and its staff.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the special circumstances of the P-12 school were recognised as part of the “Award Restructuring for the Victorian Government Teaching Service”. Principals from the P-12 schools met with representatives of the Teacher Union to explore the notion of a P-12 award for such schools. A P-12 School agreement was negotiated and drafted as part of this process.

Under such arrangements, most P-12 schools have secondary teachers teaching primary classes, particularly in the specialist areas, and many have primary teachers teaching secondary classes up to years 8 or 9. The introduction of MYRAD initiatives and Innovation and Excellence clusters are two initiatives that may have enhanced these developments.

Currently P-12 schools address the issue of primary and secondary teachers teaching across sectors through local agreements. These local agreements seem to be more prevalent in rural and/or smaller P-12 schools. In general, within these local agreements, teachers work to the conditions of the sector in which they are teaching predominantly, or the sector relevant to their training.

*The exploration of a teacher award, incorporating a P-12 education approach and based on the stages of schooling, rather than primary and secondary education was seen as essential.*

*Such an award should include:*

- *support for Local Agreements for P-12 schools within statewide guidelines. Local flexibility was considered desirable as P-12 schools vary significantly in size, location and access to resources*
- *support for a standard set of Year 5 – 12 conditions*
- *support for a standard set of P-4 conditions that include consistent group size e.g. 20 students.*

## P-12 Education Research Project.

### ***Budget and Resourcing***

#### Student Resource Package

The Student Resource Package (SRP) was introduced into Victorian government schools in 2005 to bring about improvement in learning outcomes for students as part of the “Blueprint for Government Schools”. Prior to the SRP, schools were funded using the Schools Global Budget format and policies.

The main features of the Student Resource Package are:

- Student-based funding: the major component of the package. It has two main elements – “core student learning” (based on per-student rates) and “equity” (based on family and community characteristics).
- School-based funding provides for school infrastructure and programs specific to individual schools.
- Targeted initiatives include programs with specific targeting criteria and/or defined lifespans.

Within P-12 schools the objective of “fairness” is not considered to have been achieved when the levels of funding of each of the different year levels is considered.

Whilst P-12 schools acknowledge that the SRP is an improvement on the Global Budget, the reality is that by the time schools have met their planning and class size commitments in Prep – Year 2 and provided the range of post compulsory curriculum options considered necessary, there is little room for flexibility.

In the current SRP student funding, the “dip” in resources allocated to schools in years 3 – 6 are significantly less than in Prep – Year 2 and Years 7 – 8. This resource allocation model helps maintain the differences in the way teaching and learning is organised within schools – i.e. primary and secondary education approach. This discontinuity in funding is more obvious in P-12 schools.

#### Complexity Allowance

The complexity allowance is considered to be extremely important to the government P-12 schools.

The complexity allowance was originally included in the School Global Budget to take account of the additional ‘complexity’ of the school management and administration responsibilities in the P-12 school. In particular these complexities centred on the differences between the primary and secondary sectors. The amount determined was dependent on principal classification and has increased through indexation over the years.

Independent sector and Catholic sector schools do not receive such funding.

In this study most schools indicated that they absorb the complexity allowance funding into their general staffing allocation, however, some schools use the funding for SSO support, support for student programs and ICT.

*The complexity allowance is one of the few system initiatives that are targeted specifically at meeting the different needs of the P-12 school.*

## P-12 Education Research Project.

### **Teacher Training and Recruitment**

Teacher training was raised as an area that needed investigation, especially as it relates to the preparation of teachers to teach across the P-12 spectrum.

P-12 schools indicated that there are more schools now employing, or advertising for, staff that have specific P-12 training and/or experience.

Specific conversations with P-12 qualified staff determined that these teacher training courses continue to focus on a primary component and a secondary component. There were examples given that universities expected trainees to undertake placements within a primary and secondary setting.

*It was generally acknowledged that the current provision of teacher training needs to be reviewed in light of developments such as Middle Years, and the growing acceptance of “stages of learning”.*

*Such a review needed to consider a number of aspects including:*

- *exploration of the structuring of teaching training courses based around the “stages of learning”*
- *teachers being prepared to teach in at least two of these stages of learning*
- *teacher trainees having experience in a minimum of two stages of learning.*

### **Facilities**

Throughout the consultations undertaken in this project it was clear that a major impediment to P-12 schools operating in a more ‘whole of school’ way included the planning and development of facilities. This report explores these two areas in greater depth:

#### Facilities Planning

In many cases, P-12 schools commented that their school facilities are those of primary and secondary schools and have often come about as a result of a merger and/or reorganisation. Such mergers and/or reorganisations have utilised existing school facilities and therefore haven’t explored (or supported) the potential a P-12 school allows in the development of facilities.

In the current planning approach for facilities a number of these schools highlighted the need to provide two workspaces to accommodate the needs of different student age groups (e.g. art spaces) rather than being able to explore the potential of one space for the whole school. Principals reported that currently there is limited capacity to share facilities between primary and secondary sectors.

*The current planning for school facilities tends to indicate that it occurs with a focus on primary and secondary components, thus making the planning of facilities that are reflective of a P-12 curriculum approach more difficult.*

However, schools have reported that having the availability of specialist classroom areas within a secondary school component does allow the school to develop programs which cater for primary students within such facilities.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

*There is a great opportunity for the education sectors to support a “facilities planning approach” that allows for the flexibility of teaching and learning styles within a P-12 setting - a P-12 planning approach with primary and secondary requirements, as opposed to a primary and secondary approach that P-12 school need to meld together.*

### Facilities Resourcing

Facilities schedules are used to determine a schools' facilities entitlement and to assist planning. Currently there are three types of facility schedule:

- primary school schedule
- secondary college schedule
- special school schedule.

Currently the resourcing of facilities for a P-12 school is determined by the separate schedules. An example was given where a school was not entitled to a specialist facility under either the secondary or primary schedule and therefore did not get the facility, even though under the combined enrolment they would have been entitled to such a facility.

Within P-12 schools there are few situations where the facilities have been developed to enhance the whole of school approach

*Education sectors need to consider the planning and development of facilities within schools based on a P-12 whole of school approach focusing on the “stages of learning”.*

### 3. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The insights from this project provide an exciting base upon which to consider the provision of education for young people into the future. While the current framework upon which education is provided in this state (and in other Australian states) centres on primary provision and secondary provision, this project has highlighted the need to challenge and question this framework in light of the changing needs of young people and the need to prepare them to be effective lifelong learners in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

The P-12 project has highlighted the significant contribution that P-12 schools have made (especially in regional and rural communities) in a range of areas including student learning, curriculum planning and organization, staff employment and leadership and management.

Unified education provision within a community results in stronger relationships being built between the school and its community. Furthermore, it enables education providers to support young people through their entire schooling, from Prep through to Year 12 and, in some cases, from Pre School to Year 12.

Throughout this project it became evident that there is a difference between P-12 schooling and a P-12 school.

In current education discussions and policy formulation consideration should be given to a P-12 schooling approach. It was evident that the majority of P-12 schools within Victoria have been established for management and administrative reasons or due to community changes (e.g., declining enrolments) and hence focus on the concept of P-12 schooling has not been given the attention it deserves.

### 3.1. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

#### ***Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning***

##### Curriculum Structure – Continuity

- The degree to which continuity of curriculum is achieved varies markedly in P-12 schools and depends on:
  - school size
  - school geographic location
  - the management of staff awards at a local level
  - the way in which the school was established
  - the extent to which a P-12 philosophy has been developed, articulated and implemented.
- Within P-12 schools, curriculum is largely organised into primary and secondary areas with continuity across the P-12 spectrum maintained through informal means. In recent times, however, initiatives such as VELs, PoLT, MYRAD and MYPRAD have promoted the organization of curriculum across the P-12 spectrum.
- Schools that have had an underlying community philosophy for P-12 organisation tend to have a higher degree of curriculum continuity across the P-12 spectrum.

##### Curriculum Structure - Flexibility

- While a small number of P-12 schools are investigating flexible structures for the delivery of learning, the majority continue to structure their learning on the traditional primary / secondary structures and modes of operation.
- In recent times, P-12 schools have begun exploring organisational approaches to learning that is reflective of the “Stages of Learning”. Apart from a small number of rural P-12 schools, this has not tended to be reflected in the use of staff across the P-12 spectrum.
- Smaller, rural P-12 schools are more likely to investigate flexible P-12 models of delivery. The most significant factors contributing to this appear to be the ability of smaller schools to deal with the different industrial awards and the strong underlying P-12 philosophy that these schools tend to have (perhaps due to being the only school within the given community).

##### Curriculum Planning

- There is very little evidence of curriculum planning occurring across the P-12 spectrum. However, the introduction of VELs, PoLT, MYRAD, etc. has recently promoted discussion across year levels and primary/secondary sectors with a resultant focus on stages of learning.
- There is a lack of understanding of what a P-12 curriculum approach is or could be. There is little support for P-12 schools in developing a plan for ‘seamlessness’; or of continuity; or for identifying the characteristics or qualities of a ‘seamless’ curriculum across the P-12 spectrum.
- The Middle Years initiatives have resulted in some P-12 curriculum planning and utilisation of staff across the Year 5 to Year 8 spectrum.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

- There is little evidence of P-12 schools developing different ways of assessing and monitoring students to take account of the P-12 potential.

### Professional Interaction of Staff and Use of Staff Expertise

- A number of factors encourage/support professional development and interaction across the P-12 spectrum including:
  - the use of staff in delivery of learning across traditional primary/secondary divides
  - the co- location and use of staff workrooms and social areas
  - scheduling of school meetings on a P-12 basis.
- There is large variation in the way in which professional development is planned and supported within P-12 schools. While a number indicate that they support a P-12 approach to professional development, the resources are generally allocated to year levels, KLAs or specific projects.
- Informal professional development and interaction occurs in P-12 schools through co-location of staff work spaces; the use of common staff rooms; and the provision of whole of school staff meetings. Such arrangements have promoted the sharing of information, the generation of a P-12 dialogue and the development of P-12 curriculum initiatives.
- Cultural differences between primary and secondary schooling reduce staff co-operation, collaboration and professional development across the primary/secondary years. These differences appear to stem from:
  - teacher education institutions providing teacher training on primary and secondary approach
  - the different industrial awards applied to the two sectors, and
  - the different language and its use by both sectors.

### ***Leadership, Management and Governance***

#### Leadership Structures

- Leaders in P-12 schools are faced with the same issues as stand-alone primary or secondary schools, in particular the increasing demands of management responsibilities, thus less opportunity for educational leadership.
- A significant amount of a leader's time and effort is devoted to managing the primary secondary divide in P-12 schools.
- All P-12 schools participating in the project have one principal regardless of whether the school is on one site or on multi sites.
- Leadership structures within the schools are strongly student management focused.
- P-12 schools are only just beginning to consider their uniqueness and the potential for interaction between the sectors. Curriculum planning and the distribution of leadership roles are two early indicators of some change in this approach.
- Assistant principals are generally allocated responsibilities based on primary/secondary sectors and/or complementing the principal's background.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

- In those schools that have a leadership teams based on primary and secondary, there is an indication that integration between primary and secondary is more limited.
- There is a need to develop new thinking around leadership within a P-12 setting.

### System Leadership

- P-12 schools have been developed with the view that there are management and educational advantages – there needs to be a stronger commitment to the P-12 learning model or approach
- Leadership from the education systems in relation to P-12 schooling has not been strong. In the main the systems are organised around primary and secondary schooling.
- Currently student data is provided to schools on a sector basis and doesn't allow for schools to access information across the total P-12 years.

### Student Leadership

- The student leadership structure supported most in P-12 schools is the Student Representative Council.
- There is limited evidence of cross-age student leadership within P-12 schools.

### Governance

- All P-12 schools operate within the guidelines and role definition required by the education systems – one school governing body with working groups.
- No school indicated that school governance was a problem area – to the contrary less time is spent on recruiting council or board members.
- The result of P-12 schools forming as a result of a “merger” or re-organisation has meant that fewer people are required to fill school council positions within a community.
- There is some evidence to suggest that having one school council or board changes the nature of the involvement, rather than reducing it.
- The majority of schools indicate that they have developed P-12 goals within their charter/strategic plan, but little information was presented on how this is achieved.
- The data indicates that people on Councils or Boards in P-12 schools tend to stay involved for longer and across the primary/secondary sectors.

### Management

- P-12 schools indicated that the complexity allowance is extremely important to their operations. This allowance has reduced in “real value” over time (Note: Catholic and Independent schools do not receive such an allowance).
- Management of staff has generally been focused on primary/secondary schooling. For those who do manage staff across the sectors, this generally occurs in the middle years or in specialist curriculum areas.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

- The Student Resource Package was designed to provide greater flexibility to schools. However P-12 schools reported that this was not necessarily the case. The staff/student ratio requirements in the P-2 area and the need to offer a broad range of subjects in years 10, 11 and 12, means that schools have limited flexibility in the allocation of resources across the middle years.

### Facilities

- Most schools have become P-12 schools as a result of mergers or re-organisations and there has been little or no change to facilities. Schools are required to organise using current facilities.
- Those P-12 schools that have been established as a P-12 (from a Higher Elementary School) are generally smaller, rural schools and have, over time, created more P-12 friendly facilities and environments.
- The current facilities schedule is divided into two components, primary and secondary – this does not enable P-12 schools to adequately respond to student needs and plan for appropriate facilities.

## **School Community Relationships**

### Student - Teacher Relationships

- Students and teachers are able to develop relationships over a longer period of time within a P-12 school thus a responsive learning program for the students total school life can be developed.
- It is advantageous for staff to see the development of students over a longer period of time so they are able to respond to student aspirations and needs from Prep to Year 12.

### Student - Student Relationships

- In a P-12 school, peer relationships are able to be maintained for the total P-12 years of a students' life.
- The pastoral care and cross-age relationships that occur at a peer level in a number of P-12 schools have been highlighted as a positive environment for students. Often older students take care of younger ones.
- Anecdotally, there are indications that the cross peer environment results in less anti social behaviour, such as bullying.

### Family - School Relationships

- The links that are developed between the P-12 school and parents (especially in rural P-12 schools) is a long lasting one and many of the schools indicated that this was one of the positive elements of a P-12 school.
- Parents tend to stay involved in the P-12 school for longer periods of time.
- Communication between the P-12 school and parents follow similar strategies used within stand-alone primary and secondary schools. The advantage for the P-12 school model is that parents are more aware of what is happening in the other areas of the school as this communication is provided on a P-12 basis.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

### School-Community Relationships

- Many of the P-12 schools (especially those in rural communities) are seen as a “community learning hub” – often being the only education provider within their community.
- A number of P-12 schools have developed strong links with their community – more so in rural communities. While this would be the case with stand-alone primary and secondary schools, having to build a relationship with only one school is seen as advantageous by community organisations, industry and the local community.

### ***Wellbeing and Developmental Pathways***

#### Developmental Pathways

- Transition is generally not an issue in P-12 schools.
- Some schools reported that families select a P-12 school or move students at grade 4 – grade 5 to avoid the year 7 transition.
- There are significant advantages for co-locating preschools on school sites (especially in rural settings) because it supports student transition into school.
- Learning pathways have generally been organised on a primary/secondary basis – however, in recent times a number of P-12 schools have begun developing stages of learning pathways for students.
- The P-12 school environment supports staff communication across the P-12 spectrum thus supporting the development of learning pathways for students.
- Cross-age learning and mentor programs are under utilised in P-12 schools although acknowledgement is frequently made of the potential for such programs.

#### Student Connectedness

- P-12 schools are well placed to achieve greater student connectedness. Students, teachers and parents are able to develop and maintain links over a longer period of time.
- Further research is required into this area to investigate the potential for student connectedness within a P-12 school.

#### Student Support Services

- The support services that are available within a P-12 school generally reflect those available within a primary or secondary school. School size and geographic location (rurality) are critical factors influencing the range and scope of such services.
- While P-12 schools have the potential to “merge” the various services and make them available across the P-12 spectrum thus allowing for a more holistic approach to student support, the majority of schools structure their support services according to year levels.

### 3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations target three key groups:

- The Department of Education
- Stakeholder organisations and
- P-12 Schools.

1. That the various education sectors review the current divide between the primary and secondary sectors and explore the possibility of developing a school education approach that is based on the stages of learning.
2. That the Department of Education, (and other education sectors) in consultation with P-12 schools and other key stakeholders, develop a “P-12 Education Framework”. Such a framework needs to explore a range of issue including:
  - pedagogy within a P-12 approach
  - the provision of learning based on stages of learning
  - curriculum in relation to continuity and flexibility
  - school community interface
  - student wellbeing, especially in relation to connectedness.
3. That the Department of Education (in conjunction with other education sectors) establish a Taskforce with representatives from early years, middle years, post compulsory units and P-12 schools to develop approaches that focus on:
  - the development of learning programs across the P-12 spectrum
  - P-12 schooling and stages of learning
  - exploring and documenting the impact of P-12 schooling on student engagement and connectedness
  - links with other relevant education provision approaches
  - the development of a resource package (including tools) that supports P-12 schooling
  - the development of professional development
  - the provision of leadership programs focusing on P-12 schooling.
4. That the Department of Education (in conjunction with other education sectors) review current data collection, analysis and provision approaches relating to student performance so that P-12 schools are able to access data to enable the tracking of students through years 3, 5, 7 and 9.
5. That the resources and facilities section of Department of Education review its current resource schedule arrangements (currently based on primary and secondary) to reflect a P-12 approach.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

6. That the Department of Education (in conjunction with other education sectors) initiates a project focusing on the design of P-12, P-9, and P-10 learning environments – what should a new P-12 school look like within a P-12 schooling framework? How can design be used to maximize opportunities in a P-12 schooling framework?
7. That in the future, schools merging to become a P-12 school are provided with funding to enable the facilities to support a P-12 schooling approach rather than as a co-located primary and secondary school. This process should involve the preparation of an “educational specification”, with the funding grant being directed towards an initial re-design of facilities.
8. That the resource section of the Department of Education explore a P-12 funding model that takes account of the stages of learning and addresses the current 'dip' in resources allocated to Years 3-6 students.
9. That the Department of Education (in conjunction with other education sectors) support a project that explores the links that pre schools could develop with schools, particularly in rural and remote communities.

10. That Australian Education Union, in conjunction with Victorian Institute of Teaching, P-12 schools and education sectors, develop one award for all teachers within a P-12 setting that includes:
  - support for a standard set of P-4 conditions that include consistent group size
  - support for a standard set of Year 5 – 12 conditions.
11. That within a P-12 award, conditions are developed through Local Agreements within statewide guidelines.
12. That Victorian Institute of Teaching and Deans of Education support a review of the provision of teacher training with a view to structuring teacher training courses around the stages of learning (Prep to Year 4; Year 5 to Year 8/9; Year 9/10 – Year 12).
13. That as part of this review, VIT and Deans of Education ensure that teacher trainees having teaching experience in a minimum of two stages of learning during their training and are fully prepared to teach in at least two of these three stages.

## P-12 Education Research Project.

14. That P-12 Schools establish and support a “P-12 Schooling Network” that:
  - centres on P-12 schooling and stages of learning
  - supports P-12 schools in developing a “P-12 culture”
  - in partnership with DOE explores and documents the impact of P-12 schooling on student engagement and connectedness
  - supports the promotion of innovative thinking in relation to education provision across the P-12 spectrum
  - support the development and provision of professional development
  - can share best practice within P-12 schooling, including the exploration of cross-age and mentoring activities for students.
15. That P-12 Schools, in conjunction with education sectors, establish systems and structures that encourage and support curriculum planning across the P-12 spectrum.
16. That P-12 schools explore and document their activities in relation to “continuity” and “flexibility” in curriculum organisation.
17. That P-12 Schools, in conjunction with state principal organisations, develop leadership roles across the spectrum P-12 that support P-12 thinking and planning.
18. That P-12 schools, in conjunction with education sectors, explore and document improved assessment monitoring systems across the P-12 spectrum.