Submission to Review of Funding for Schooling

Brotherhood of St Laurence

March 2011

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Summary

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations to the *Emerging Issues Paper*, Review of Funding for Schooling, December 2010.

The Brotherhood has taken a leading role in assisting disadvantaged students and their families to obtain achieve quality learning outcomes. It provides a wide range of programs across the education and training continuum from the early childhood years to older Australians.

It has a very strong history of research and policy development in the key issues considered by the discussion paper, including equity of education outcomes, recurrent and capital funding, needs-based funding, governance and leadership, and community and family engagement.

As a result of this involvement, and in line with our emphasis on economic participation and social inclusion, this submission recommends endorsement of a clear national vision to reduce educational disadvantage, whether it is identified by learning outcomes, associated with neighbourhood, the result of low household income, exacerbated by a breakdown in communication between school and home, or evident at particular life stages, such as when young people are seeking to make an effective through school to work transition.

The BSL wishes to emphasise the crucial, and expanding, role for community organisations working with all education agencies to provide quality learning opportunities and programs that engage disadvantaged students and families and assist them to achieve better educational, social and economic outcomes.

The submission details a number of key programs which the BSL has developed within Victoria and across Australia to increase school and home partnerships in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and recommends that excellent initiatives, including the community VCAL program in Victoria, learning support programs, and student career pathway programs involving parents, are considered for scaling up nationally during the next funding period.

A large portion of our submission addresses the beginning years of education and primary schools which have a central role to play in ensuring all young people get a good start in literacy, numeracy and other key learning capabilities. Most primary-age children attend a local primary school and it is here that much of the initial work needs to be focused to prevent and reduce educational disadvantage.

The BSL suggests that it may be timely to create a new education capability fund which is jointly planned by all education sectors to fund agreed initiatives to redress evident educational need particularly on a neighbourhood basis, and to improve the national mechanisms for describing educational disadvantage.

While the BSL supports increased national effort to lift teacher quality and ensure effective allocation of resources, it has concluded that increased spending will be needed to take Australia above the current OECD average for recurrent school outlays if we are to achieve a world class education for all young Australians.

In light of the extent of educational disadvantage and its complex causes outlined in the first section of our submission, the BSL concludes that consideration may also need to be given to the establishment of a new education capability board with a specific brief to better identify and foster educational interventions which reduce unacceptably high levels of education disadvantage in literacy, numeracy, school retention and school completion.

Recommendations

Our key recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation One: That the following national vision statement should be adopted to guide the reform of funding of Australian schools:

> An excellent and equitable Australian schooling system is one which enables all students regardless of place of residence, school of attendance, household income or personal circumstances to achieve their best possible outcomes in literacy and numeracy and other agreed education capabilities.

Subsidiary principles would then be expected to minimise the risk of learning, locational, income, school and home partnership, and youth transition disadvantage.

Recommendation Two: That, in light of documented concern that the existing system of recurrent funding does not sufficiently redress identifiable educational disadvantage, the Review give due consideration to the development of a more effective national Index of Education Capability for schools which also takes into account the impact of neighbourhood SES factors on student performance.

Recommendation Three: That, given the scale of lower educational performance and attainment in identifiable schools and neighbourhoods, the Review consider the creation of a new Australian Education Capability Fund which would increase resource allocations to achieve excellence and equity for disadvantaged students and communities.

Recommendation Four: That as part of any nationally agreed initiatives to better assess neighbourhood impact on student and school performance, due attention be given to the importance of suitable and well-maintained school building stock, up-to-date equipment and schoolgrounds.

Recommendation Five: That the Review, in consultation with state and territory authorities and the Australian Local Government Association, examine whether it would be practicable for local councils, in conjunction with regional education authorities and school councils, to take an increased role in grounds development and maintenance, with funding from the Australian Government.

Recommendation Six: That priority consideration be given at a national level to the development of a regional or place-based allocation of funds to redress identified and agreed educational and social support needs. An important component of this increased focus on neighbourhoods will be to consider the total pool of upper secondary and vocational education funds.

Recommendation Seven: That significantly increased national schools funding be made available in the next funding period for innovative learning programs which lift all students above minimum expected literacy and numeracy outcomes in the beginning years of primary schooling and expand effective school and home learning partnerships in the early years transition to school, especially those which support the parental role in learning.

Recommendation Eight: That increased recurrent funding be made available to disadvantaged schools and communities to strengthen school and home partnerships in the primary to secondary transition years, to maintain engagement and to begin career and further education planning.

Recommendation Nine: That increased national attention be given to suitable alternative programs in the upper secondary school for less engaged students, and an appropriate funding model for suitable community-based 'second chance' learning programs including the Community VCAL which embrace both education and student wellbeing.

Recommendation Ten: The implementation of a more equitable and effective national system of funding for students with special needs around physical, emotional and intellectual challenges should be a priority focus in the next funding period.

Recommendation Eleven: That the Australian Government and state and territory governments, the Catholic schools sector, and the independent schools sector support the creation of a new Australian Education Capability Board (AECB) comprising representatives of all school sectors. The key task of this new body would be to develop a better targeted, integrated and holistic response to the entrenched problems of low education performance and financial disadvantage.

Recommendation Twelve: That national attention be given to mapping and strengthening the contribution of the community sector in developing effective educational initiatives for student learning and parent and community engagement.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence and the national Review of Funding for Schools

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is an independent non-government organisation with strong community links that has been working to reduce poverty in Australia since the 1930s. Based in Melbourne, but with a national profile, the BSL continues to fight for an Australia free of poverty. We undertake research, service development and delivery, and advocacy with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating the understandings gained into new policies, new programs and practices for implementation by government and others.

We aim to work with others to create:

- an inclusive society in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect
- a compassionate and just society which challenges inequity
- connected communities in which we share responsibility for each other
- a sustainable society for our generation and future generations.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence works to prevent poverty through focusing on those life transitions where people are particularly at risk of social exclusion.

The funding of Australian schools bears significantly and directly on at least three of these transitions, namely the early childhood and family years, youth transition through school and work, and in and out of work.

1 Equity of educational outcomes

Australian schooling has made significant progress towards the twin objectives of excellence and equity (MCEETYA 2008) in recent decades. For example, Australian primary and secondary students generally perform well in international tests of literacy and numeracy (OECD 2009) and retention rates to upper secondary schools also compare well internationally (OECD 2010).

Much of that success can be attributed to successive Australian and state and territory governments and to the combined efforts of the government schools, Catholic schools and independent schools.

The BSL wishes, however, to signal concern about five sets of educational disadvantage that are evident in our schools and which are thwarting the key goal of excellence and equity for all Australian students.

Learning disadvantage

First, Australia does have a long tail of less than satisfactory student performance on the key indicators of literacy and numeracy, and school completion at Year 12. The BSL is concerned that much of that diminished educational outcomes is concentrated among disadvantaged students and households.

The most recent Productivity Commission report on school services (2011) highlights the nature and extent of disadvantage in educational outcomes for literacy, numeracy, ICT, and scientific literacy on a socioeducational and socioeconomic basis.

The learning disadvantage for students by parental level and occupation can be captured as the 'learning performance gap'—the difference in the percentage of students meeting a national minimum standard between those with tertiary-educated parents and with parents with year 11 equivalent or below, and between those with professionally employed parents and with unemployed parents. Table 1 below derived from the Productivity Commission report illustrates that, among Year 9 students 18 out of every 100 who lived in households with no-one in paid work in the previous 12 months did not meet the minimum standard compared with only 2 of every 100 who lived in households of senior managers and qualified professionals. The sizeable, 11-person learning performance gap in Year 3 widens to 16 persons for the Year 5 group.

Table 1 Students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for reading, in years 3,5,7 and 9, by parental education and occupation, 2009 (%)

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Parental education				
Bachelor degree or above	97.7	97.4	98.5	98.0
Year 11 equivalent or below	87.5	83.8	87.5	85.2
Learning performance gap	**10.2**	**13.6**	**11.0**	**12.8**
Parental occupation				
Senior managers and qualified professionals	97.9	97.5	98.5	98.0
Not in paid work in previous 12 months	86.5	81.7	84.5	82.0
Learning performance gap	**11.4**	**15.8**	**14.0**	**16.0**

Source: Productivity Commission Report 2011, Table 4A.43.

Table 2, also derived from the Productivity Commission report, highlights very different completion outcomes for students by socioeconomic status: more than three-quarters of students from higher SES background complete Year 12, compared with just over half of students from lower SES backgrounds.

Of concern is the fact that completion rates fell for both groups in the period 2005 to 2009 and the identifiable learning performance gap, our term, has widened.

Table 2 Completion rates, year 12, by socioeconomic status, all schools, Australia (%)

	2005	2009
All students, high SES deciles	77	75
All students, low SES deciles	60	56
Learning performance gap	**17**	**19**

Source; Productivity Commission Table 4A.130

Other tables which illustrate the learning performance gap between Australian students are provided in Appendix A.

Locational disadvantage

Second, the BSL is concerned that much of the long tail of less than satisfactory educational performance is concentrated in particular schools and lower socioeconomic areas, including rural and remote communities. Vinson's analysis (2004) of the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales, for example, found that 25 per cent of early school leavers came from just 5 per cent of postcodes.

The Australian government, through the development of the My Schools website, has begun to identify the schools and the communities and locations where learning disadvantage is concentrated nationally.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (Feb 2010) reports that the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) which has been developed to enable comparisons across schools for the My School website measures key factors that correlate with educational outcomes. They report that factors like average income, level of education, and types of employment for the households of students enrolled in the school (and after allowing for remoteness and the percentage of Aboriginal students) can be used to predict 68% of primary school performance on NAPLAN tests and 59% for secondary schools. Many of these factors coincide in particular geographic locations.

State and territory government education departments also identify and assess educational disadvantage and allocate additional and targeted resources into schools with lower educational outcomes.

Income disadvantage

Third, the BSL is well aware through its program work with low-income families, communities and neighbourhood schools that there are significant costs associated with contemporary schooling and these do present a major and increasing obstacle for many families. The purchase of these items can be particularly challenging for families in lower SES schools and are generally taken to include the essential items of school levy, school books over and above those provided free by the school, school uniform, school camp (1 per year for five days), excursions (one per term), and technology access and some printing.

The BSL review of education costs for low-income families (Bond & Horn 2009) estimated a 'basket of goods' including transport and home computer use cost $3624 annually per primary student and $3928 per secondary student, with a disproportionate amount of the cost payable in

Term 1 (p.10). Where students are able to undertake higher cost technical and vocational programs the cost could approach $5000.

This BSL research considered several hypothetical families and indicated how much hardship these costs impose. In the first household, a sole parent with two primary-aged children, annual education costs would be $7248 or 23 per cent of total income. The costs for Term 1 of the school year accounted for 44 per cent of income and, after rent was deducted, would leave $20 per day to live on for the remainder of the quarter. In another household, a 16-year-old student living away from home, annual education expenses would account for 30 per cent of income, with Term 1 costs reaching 68 per cent of total income (Bond & Horn 2009, pp. 16–19).

The reality for low-income households, in the view of the BSL, is that they cannot spend such high proportions of their income on education, so many children are unable to participate effectively.

Bond and Horn (2008) also reported that most of the low-income parents whom they surveyed had experienced difficulty paying for aspects of their children's education during the last year. Most parents reported struggling to pay for standard educational items and many children missed out as a result: 56 per cent said at least one child missed out on uniforms; 40 per cent missed camp, sport, recreational activities or subject equipment; 36 per cent missed out on lunch, and around a third missed out on excursions and books.

Around 40 percent of these parents said their children had been absent from school due to costs during the school year. There was evidence that this effective exclusion affected children's self-esteem and how they viewed school. One father said his children were stigmatised at the school as 'poor' while a single mother reported: 'One child in particular has had loss of friends, self-esteem and not wanting to go at all'.

Two-thirds of these parents said their children lacked a computer with Internet access. This posed a problem for children set homework that required a computer, putting them at a disadvantage and getting them in trouble with their class teacher.

Likewise, the BSL's Life Chances study indicates the cost of education represent a barrier to the educational participation of young people in low-income families. School costs that caused problems included books and other materials, uniforms and additional tutoring, while TAFE fees prevented the participation of those ineligible for concessions (Taylor & Gee 2010).

Moreover, there is evidence that the cost of schooling is rising. An analysis conducted in 2009 indicated that over the last 20 years the education CPI for Melbourne increased at a rate 2.5 times that of the overall Consumer Price Index. In the eight years prior to 2009, preschool and primary education costs increased at a rate of 1.4 times the CPI, while secondary education costs increased at 1.6 times the CPI (Bond & Horn 2009, p.6).

School–home partnership disadvantage

Fourth, the BSL is concerned that learning, locational and income disadvantage is often compounded by a low level of partnership between home and school.

Through its work in community and learning support programs, the BSL is well aware that a critical success factor for effective educational outcomes is the participation of parents and carers as equal stakeholders in the learning journey of their children.

Unfortunately, despite the best intentions of many schools and school administrators there are multiple barriers to the engagement of parents from low SES backgrounds that will need to be addressed to secure the goal of excellence and equity. This will require improving parents' information about their child's progress at school and possible career paths, strengthening parent confidence in acting on information, and understanding the important role of parents in supporting their child's education alongside early childhood and education institutions (Boese & Gee 2009 unpublished).

While the value of parent engagement is acknowledged in public policy and there are some promising signs (for example, the appointment in Victoria of Koorie Education Support Officers who liaise between parents and schools to improve parent engagement and student outcomes (DEECD 2008), there needs to be greater investment in programs to support the engagement of disadvantaged parents. A review of the BSL School–Parent Education Engagement Program (SPEEP) indicated some schools still hold Anglo-centric, school-centred and narrow definitions of parent engagement which focus on reading the school newsletter, attending parent–teacher and larger school meetings and contributing to fundraising events.

The BSL acknowledges the value of improved school and home partnership initiatives including interactive parent teacher evenings and the participation of parents and community members on school governance boards. SPEEP has shown, however, the inadequacy of this approach for refugee parents, whose ongoing settlement needs act as a barrier to engagement in their child's education, and who require culturally and linguistically appropriate support in dealing with the school system. The review highlighted the value of recruiting parents from the same cultural background and community to act as parent advocates. These parent advocates aided communication and helped mediate between the parent and school to address family and child related challenges. The review also indicated the need for more parent-centred engagement activities that empower parents to set the agenda and contribute to a broader conversation about Australian schooling and the role of parents in facilitating the learning of his or her child (Bond 2011 unpublished).

Likewise, the role of parents in supporting their child's transition from school into further education, training or employment needs to be fostered. Trusty (1998) found that parent engagement had a positive impact on self-esteem, academic performance, school attitudes, adaptive behaviour, career aspirations and decision making. In studies where students rated various persons as education and career resources, parents were consistently rated most highly.

These issues are discussed at greater length in Section 7 on community and family engagement.

Youth transition disadvantage

Fifth, the BSL is concerned that many young people in the 15–19 age group, and as young as age 12, do experience significant disadvantage in achieving a successful youth to adulthood transition.

The BSL has identified two key aspects of this disadvantage.

- A significant number of young people leave school earlier than their peers and do not make an effective transition through school to work and/or further study.

- A significant number of young people (not necessarily the same students) experience substantial associated health, income and welfare related issues.

While many young people do leave upper secondary school successfully and undertake further studies and or achieve suitable work, this is not the case for all students. The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA 2010) estimates this figure at 16% nationally (for 15–19 year olds who are not engaged in either full-time study or work) and 13% for Victoria.

The BSL recognises that a complex range of factors is associated with early school leaving. A review of two major studies examining non-school risk factors for educational disengagement in Australia drew attention to:

- individual factors, e.g. poor self-esteem, low intelligence, frequent or chronic school non-attendance

- family factors, e.g. large or non functioning family, parental illness, low socioeconomic status

- social factors, e.g. being male, non Anglo race or ethnicity, neighbourhood or regional characteristics (Murray et al. 2004, p.9).

Caseworkers for Peninsula Youth Connections (operated by BSL and Taskforce) record the barriers preventing their clients from participating in education in a DEEWR database. The database lists 23 different barriers: inadequate family support, becoming a parent, young carer responsibilities, disconnection from cultural heritage, current or previous juvenile justice orders, current or previous detention, unstable living arrangements, homelessness, a critical life event, substance use/misuse, abuse / domestic violence, family grief / trauma, out of home care, financial distress, disability, being gifted, suspected or diagnosed mental health issue, medical or other health issue, low self-esteem, bullying, behavioural problems, socialisation issues, anger management issues and low literacy and/or numeracy.

Preliminary research of the barriers faced by clients who had completed/exited the program as of January 2011 highlighted the most common barriers as follows:

- low self-esteem (63%)

- low literacy/numeracy (60%)

- financial distress (50%)

- suspected/diagnosed mental health issue (40%)

- low socialisation (43%)

- inadequate family support (36%)

- behavioural problems (25%)

- bullying, (21%)

- anger management issue (18%).

The extent to which young people face multiple barriers to engagement in education is further highlighted by the fact that some clients were assessed to be facing up to 13 barriers, with the average client facing four barriers. To effectively address these barriers requires a well-resourced program to support students at risk of school leaving before they leave. The BSL is concerned that some schools are currently under-resourced to address these issues, while programs such as Youth Connections focus on students who have already disengaged.

The BSL supports a focus on prevention not just intervention. It recommended, in its response to the Stronger Futures for all Victorians discussion paper, providing a supportive and valued learning space and support system in each secondary school for student welfare and careers pathway transition support (BSL 2010b).

It seems reasonable to extrapolate from the BSL experience in Victoria that there may be a need for more preventative support systems for disengaging youth in other states and territories.

The increased provision of different styles of learning programs, and more applied learning options in the middle years of secondary schooling would also have an important role here in maintaining and retaining disengaging students. It should be noted that such learning programs often involve high cost.

According to the 2008 On Track data, over 50 per cent of early school leavers would have stayed at school if there were 'more vocational programs and a more adult environment'(DEECD 2010, p.21). This evidence suggests that there are significant resource and program factors which contribute to early school leaving.

New national vision for schools funding

The BSL contends that the combined impact of these five sets of educational disadvantage in Australian schooling means that educational disadvantage (Review, p. 17) is not necessarily being addressed wherever it occurs, and significant differences in educational outcomes (Review, p. 18) resulting from differences in personal wealth, income, power or possessions are persisting rather than diminishing.

The BSL considers that an important first step in developing a better funding model that achieves excellence and equity for all Australian students is to adopt a national vision statement to the following effect:

Recommendation One – *That the following national vision statement should be adopted to guide the reform of funding of Australian schools:*

> *An excellent and equitable Australian schooling system is one which enables all students, regardless of place of residence, school of attendance, household income or personal circumstances, to achieve their best possible outcomes in literacy and numeracy and other agreed education capabilities.*

Subsidiary principles would then be expected to minimise the risk of learning, locational, income, school and home partnership, and youth transition disadvantage.

A series of related recommendations are made throughout this submission to implement this vision.

2 Recurrent funding

The BSL notes that the current successes and limitations in Australian schooling are achieved with a level of recurrent outlays on school education that approximates the OECD average.

The OECD *Education at a glance* report (2010) records that Australia spends just below the OECD average on recurrent schooling (3.5% of GDP, compared with 3.6%) and substantially lower on upper secondary education (0.8% of GDP, compared with 1.2%).

The BSL notes further that, partly as a consequence of the constitutional arrangements set in place in our federation and partly as a result of the evolution of school funding in Australia, two-thirds of recurrent outlays on schools are undertaken by the states and territories (estimate derived from Productivity Commission report 2011, Table 4.1) while the remainder comprises funding from federal government (21%) and private sources (12%).

The high proportion of state and territory funding and the high level of private funds are distinctive features of the funding of Australian schools. Australia has the highest proportion of recurrent expenditure on schooling from private sources among OECD countries, with the exception of Korea (Foundation for Young Australians 2010).

World-class schooling

The BSL welcomes the requirement of the Review to reach a conclusion about 'baseline funding' for Australian schooling which is commensurate with 'all students' having 'access to a world class education' (Review Terms of Reference Item 4a).

Factors identified by the Review which will be important in determining changes in funding include growth in student numbers, future price trends in key costs including teacher salaries and communications equipment, and the overall balance between public and private contributions.

While the BSL does favour increased efforts at all levels of government and in all school sectors (government, Catholic and independent) to increase the effectiveness of existing recurrent outlays along the lines identified in the Review's discussion paper, it contends that the twin challenges of excellence and equity will require an injection of additional funds, especially by the Australian Government, into schools and programs that lift the learning of disadvantaged students and communities.

Even if all states and territories were to reduce their outlays on government students to the current Victorian average—approximately $1000 per student less than the the other state government averages, according to the Productivity Commission (2011, Table 4.16)—this would not be sufficient to generate the pool of funds required to rectify the long tail of combined impact of learning, location, income, school and home partnership, and youth transition disadvantages in Australian schooling.

Nor can the significant gaps in literacy, numeracy and other valued learning outcomes be solved by improved quality of everyday teaching and increased engagement of all students alone. For example, new recurrent funding resources will be required to release existing staff for specialised training. More efficient resource allocation and improved teacher quality are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for excellent and equitable Australian schooling.

New Australian Government Education Capability Funding Pool

A major task for a new funding system for Australian schools, therefore, will be to scope out and agree on the scale and form of additional annual recurrent funding that is required to redress the combined impact of the five sets of educational disadvantage outlined earlier in this submission.

The BSL has concluded that it is the federal government which is best placed to inject the increased financial equity and establish the kind of Education Capability Funding Pool required for Australia to make significant headway on entrenched learning disadvantage at school.

The BSL expects that the Review would need to recommend an injection into recurrent funding of Australian schooling over our preferred funding period of six years of sufficient amount to make a significant difference to the learning performance gaps and associated educational disadvantages.

One option for consideration by the Review is for Australia to lift its recurrent expenditure above the average OECD level and to increase the ratio of federal funding to state and territory funding. A ten per cent increase in federal recurrent spending on all schools would inject approximately $4.5 billion into agreed excellence and equity funding on an annual basis.

The BSL notes that increased, well-targeted and coordinated national expenditure to reduce educational disadvantage is a priority for each of the three school sectors, namely government, Catholic and independent, although the nature and extent of disadvantage may vary from school to school.

Consistent with other school spending patterns reported by the Productivity Commission (2011), the BSL anticipates that that approximately two-thirds of the proposed increase in recurrent funding over the next funding period beyond 2013 would be directed to the employment of new teaching staff and to professional development for existing staff. The remaining funds would be used for a mixture of program design and implementation, purchase of necessary equipment and (if required) facilities, and a strong focus on documentation of effective practice and evaluation. A component of this new funding would assist families with the out-of-pocket education costs identified earlier, ranging from school excursions and camps through textbooks and even uniform.

The BSL agrees with the approach floated in the Review discussion paper that schools funding should continue to be a mix of government and private, but proposes an increased contribution from the federal government, and that all schools would be entitled to a minimum level of government support irrespective of background or financial situation. We discuss how best to implement this later in our submission.

Funding model criteria

A particular challenge in the next funding period will be to establish a more effective, nationally agreed planning and reporting mechanism, including priority funding criteria and measurement techniques, to better identify funding needs and to direct resources to agreed and often expanding areas of educational need (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2011; Foundation for Young Australians 2010).

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training discussion paper (2011, p. 9) draws attention to the well-understood 'link between individual student SES and performance', and the fact that 'concentrations of disadvantage at the school level have a powerful additional impact on student performance'.

The BSL would welcome a combined national effort to develop a more refined funding system during the next decade which improves our national capacity to identify and act promptly on those students in school communities most affected by the five interconnected sets of educational disadvantage that the BSL is most concerned about, namely where high levels of educational disadvantage and low levels of income combine with inadequate programs to thwart improvements in student achievement and engagement in schooling.

The current Commonwealth funding system is mainly based on allocations to non-government schools at levels derived from existing government school outlays via the Average Government Schools Resources Cost (AGCRC). Any increase in government funding to government schools automatically leads to an increase in Commonwealth payments to the private sector (Foundation for Young Australians 2010, p. 19).

Further, the NSW submission to the review (2011, Sections 2 and 3) outlines in significant detail both the limitation of existing measures of disadvantage and the need over the next funding period to develop and agree on more effective measures. Their submission (p.13) also spells out a major concern to the BSL in working with disadvantaged families, namely that:

> … there is a considerable 'neighbourhood effect' with regard to SES which impacts on student performance in government schools in NSW. That is, the SES of the other students in a school impacts on the performance of any other student, adding to the already significant impact of the student's own SES on their own performance.

In light of this, the BSL would welcome the review giving due consideration to the creation of a single, new national Education Capability Index which consolidates and builds on federal, state and territory government measurement tools for assessing educational disadvantage and which includes the five sets of educational disadvantage outlined above.

Appendix B lists the kinds of indicators (approximately 30) of a school's overall education and socioeconomic profile that could be used to identify the level additional resources required to reduce serious educational disadvantage, and the appropriate recipients, to ensure that all students irrespective of social and economic background have practical opportunities to excel.

The indicators listed are in common use or available currently and are grouped under three subheadings acknowledged in education and public finance literature: education outputs, compensation factors and responsibility factors.

Educational outputs include items like test results in literacy and numeracy as well as retention and completion rates in secondary schools. Compensation factors (Fleurbaey 2008) include socioeducational and socioeconomic measures and the student profile, while responsibility factors are those which are generally within the power of the school to influence and range from teaching time and staff experience to attendance and school/home partnership initiatives.

Importantly, the BSL foresees a new era of funding calculations where the national emphasis is on what can be done to lift student and school capability (Sen 1993). Schools with high concentrations of lower than expected performance on key educational indicators would then become the strategic focus of a new Australian government Education Capability Fund for schools.

The schools that are grouped in the 'most in need' educational capability band would most likely include those primary and secondary schools with more than 15% of their students not meeting the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Many of these in turn will be located in communities

with lower than average employment and income levels. These schools often need to offer a wider range of quality learning programs to maximise student engagement, but lack the necessary funding to deliver these, while many of their students come from households which struggle to pay for essential items like books and uniform, access to computing and the internet, and often miss out on major school camps and excursions.

While the BSL requests that the Review give specific consideration to new funding for excellence and equity for disadvantaged students across the three sectors and to the option of a better national index of funding need, the BSL wishes to emphasise that there should be more transparent requirements on recipient schools and leadership teams to act effectively on within their responsibility. These should include, at a minimum, increased participation in teacher professional development, increased parent and community engagement, and regular reporting to agreed education capability benchmarks. That is, the increased capability funding would be matched with an agreed set of responsibility factors that are within the power of the school to address systematically.

The BSL favours a six-year funding period with adjustment at three years, not the current four-year funding period which is too short to tackle entrenched inequality. It does not support the proposal for a twelve-year funding cycle of three groups of four years, which runs the risk of being too long and insufficiently responsive to evident educational and financial disadvantage.

In light of the above, the BSL recommends the following actions on recurrent funding.

Recommendation Two: That, in light of documented concern that the existing system of recurrent funding does not sufficiently redress identifiable educational disadvantage, the Review give due consideration to the development of a more effective national Index of Education Capability for schools which also takes into account the impact of neighbourhood SES factors on student performance.

Recommendation Three: That, given the scale of lower educational performance and attainment in identifiable schools and neighbourhoods, the Review consider the creation of a new Australian Education Capability Fund which would increase resource allocations to achieve excellence and equity for disadvantaged students and communities.

3 Capital funding

The BSL welcomes the Review's specific attention to the key role of quality buildings and facilities, access to new technologies and learning equipment, and adequate space for recreation and outdoor activities in delivering excellence and equity to Australian students.

The ABS (2010) estimates the total federal and state government outlays on capital formation (not adjusted for depreciation) at approximately 5 per cent of all government outlays on primary and secondary schooling over the period 2000–01 to 2008–09 ($11 billion of $233 billion). Some $3.2 billion of this was spent in New South Wales and $2.5 billion in Victoria.

The BSL further welcomes the significant injection of capital funding for Australian schools that has been initiated at federal and state levels for new building programs and rejuvenation of older buildings, and the increased outlays on the necessary equipment for these improved facilities, especially in recent years. The BSL anticipates that all governments will continue this important regeneration of the physical and communications infrastructure of Australian schools.

A complicating factor in capital expenditure for government, Catholic and independent school sectors is this that much of the earlier building stock in New South Wales and Victoria, in particular, is in need of major repair or replacement. Moreover, many lightweight timber facilities that were erected during the period of rapidly increasing student numbers (especially in secondary schools) of the 1960s and 1970s, and were only expected to last between 30 and 50 years, are also now in need of refurbishment or replacement to bring them up to the twenty-first century expectations of an increasingly well-educated general public. There is also a very reasonable expectation by teachers, students and school administrators that the physical conditions of work and learning should be continuously improved.

Education Capability Index – capital and equipment component

An important challenge in an improved funding system for Australian schools will be to develop a more comprehensive assessment of suitable building stock, equipment and well-maintained grounds to deliver effective learning conditions for all Australian students, and to ensure that the schools with unsatisfactory buildings, equipment and associated grounds are assisted to rectify that evident disadvantage.

The My School Website reports capital outlays by school, but should over time be able to classify schools by capital and equipment bands ranging from above average to below average, similar to the classification of the socioeconomic and socioeducational status of the school.

School grounds maintenance

Of pressing importance in many of the less advantaged government and Catholic schools is the need for increased resources for school building maintenance, and for that perennial bugbear of school management, grounds maintenance. The BSL is aware of some schools which employ over a dozen staff in grounds and building maintenance, while many poorer parish schools and government schools cannot afford to employ a single person in full-time building maintenance or grounds improvement.

Local councils may play an increased role in the maintenance of grounds, with the benefits to be shared by the school and the wider community.

The BSL advocates two specific initiatives on capital funding.

Recommendation Four: *That, as part of any nationally agreed initiatives to better assess neighbourhood impact on student and school performance, due attention be given to the importance of suitable and well-maintained school building stock, up-to-date equipment and schoolgrounds.*

Recommendation Five: *That the Review, in consultation with state and territory authorities and the Australian Local Government Association, examine whether it would be practicable for local councils, in conjunction with regional education authorities and school councils, to take an increased role in grounds development and maintenance, with funding from the Australian Government.*

4 Targeted needs

The BSL acknowledges that there are well-developed measures and mechanisms at all levels of government in Australia and within the three education sectors to identify and respond to evident examples of needs-based funding including lack of English proficiency, Indigeneity, remoteness, disability and low SES.

The BSL also welcomes the level of concern expressed in the Review discussion paper about an increased need in many Australian schools to reduce social exclusion by providing improved health and counselling services, and responding more effectively to issues of truancy and general behaviour, literacy and numeracy.

The BSL would expect that much of this existing and effective equity in education scaffolding will continue into the next funding period.

As outlined in Section 2, the BSL supports the creation of a new and dedicated Education Capability Funding Pool which would be available across all three education sectors—government, Catholic and independent—during the next funding period, with the explicit intention of addressing evident shortfalls in learning performance, locational disadvantage, income disadvantage, school/home partnership disadvantage, and youth transition disadvantage.

Increased school and community education capability

The BSL, through its history of work with school communities and its extensive role in research and policy, considers that much educational disadvantage results not just from one single factor but from a combination of factors including household income, school location, stage of educational journey, the extent of collaboration between school and home, and availability and quality of support services.

It is for these reasons that the BSL would strongly support any nationally agreed initiatives to address multi-causal educational disadvantage on a collaborative basis between schools and with other key community agencies in well-defined and agreed education/community districts.

The BSL considers that the Review is well placed to reach agreement on the most effective means to tackle entrenched educational disadvantage in schools and communities and requests that consideration be given to adopting an implementation strategy akin to the Victorian system of regional school networks (70 districts within 9 regions) or local government areas (of which there are just over 600 in Australia). Either of these administrative configurations could provide an effective educational/geographical basis for more comprehensive, targeted and integrated efforts to identify and address agreed educational needs.

An associated task here will be to reach agreement about how many schools in a district could receive identifiable and reportable Education Capability funds. Many regional networks in Victoria have about 30 government schools, of which four or five may be secondary schools. If, for example, only 15% of schools were assessed in a district as having a high need for additional recurrent capability funding (possibly including capital funding), the capability funds would flow to five or six government schools, while complementary provision would be made for non-government schools with serious learning shortfalls according to national literacy and numeracy results and school completion targets in the case of secondary schools.

Any new administrative initiative in funding into school districts and agreed schools on a cooperative basis would need to dovetail with existing educational regional administrative arrangements in the government and non government sector.

Responsibility factors

As outlined previously, where educational performance and compensation factors are assessed such that a school, and potentially several schools in the same district from different educational sectors, would receive a significant injection of education capability funding in the next funding period, the funding would be accompanied by an increased set of responsibilities for the schools.

At a minimum, these would include program design features including the development, implementation and evaluation of agreed interventions on low levels of literacy and numeracy, strengthened links between school and home, and new programs of professional development for teachers within and between the schools.

The BSL is pleased to report on the early successes of the SparkL approach which aims to 'spark' literacy and learning among students from low socioeconomic, Indigenous and refugee backgrounds, and which we believe is a good match with these three essential responsibility design factors. The program encourages students to become more confident, creative and literate learners through project-based learning with creative practitioners in schools, supported by an intensive teacher development program.

Currently operating in 10 primary and secondary schools, the program is a joint initiative of Berry Street, Foundation House, the BSL and Ed Partnerships International, with funding from the Dara Foundation. A key aim is to investigate how to best educate students who have limited access to material wealth, social networks and the cultural knowledge that contributes to success at school., The associated research is generating evidence that students who are involved in SparkL show excellent results in both the 'new' and traditional forms of literacy.

Early childhood, families and beginning primary school years

The BSL would like to see an increased national focus in the next funding school period/s on schools and community agencies working together to assist families and beginning students to get the best practical start on their education journey. Primary schooling, and the early years in particular, are a very important stage for effective joined-up work because young children overwhelmingly do attend a local primary school.

The BSL has concluded, from its extensive involvement in and research about early learning programs and the national rollout of the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) in 50 local communities, that the optimal educational stage to intervene for disadvantaged children and their families is in the early years.

HIPPY is a two-year home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program that works with parents of young children during the crucial early years. Parents are empowered and supported to guide their preschool-age children's early learning experiences and help their children realise success by beginning school ready to learn. The program targets families who need support to increase confidence in their own skills and ability to have a positive effect on their child's learning. Children are enrolled in the program in the year before they begin school.

HIPPY's attention to the interactions between children and their parents and its emphasis on early literacy development is consistent with key policy initiatives across Australia and reflects contemporary understanding of the crucial role of parents in their child's learning. HIPPY seeks to build a sense of belonging for families and children and to actively equip parents to support their children and other parents.

Of equal importance is finding and scaling up effective ways to involve parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who often feel unable to assist their children in their schooling. The early learning programs and community–school liaison pilots run by the BSL have been an important source of evidence that it is possible and valuable to develop programs with adult refugees that enable them to play a valuable role in assisting their child's learning.

Middle schooling years

The BSL has recognised through its research projects and program development that maintaining strong links between students, families and schools is very important in the primary to secondary transition years. In the middle years, some children and young adolescents develop patterns of behaviour which both jeopardise continued participation in schooling and have adverse consequences in later life (Butler et al. 2005)

It is also a time when many young people start to think about future education and training opportunities. It was for this reason that the BSL developed the Parents as Career Transition Supports (PACTS) program in the Frankston/Mornington area and now assists other organisations to deliver the program, by providing resources and train-the-trainer workshops.

The PACTS program offers parents of Year 8 and 9 students three school-based workshops to work through how they may see themselves contributing more to their child's approach to further study and career pathway. An evaluation (Bedson & Perkins 2006) found that before the workshops over three-quarters of parents felt ill-equipped to support their child's transition. Afterwards 52 per cent felt they knew enough to support their child and more than nine out of ten felt that after the workshops their child had benefited at least slightly from the knowledge or skills they had gained.

More parents talked to their children about post-school options and there was some evidence that the quality of this communication improved. For example, parents reported feeling less anxious about these communications and a few reported that they were less likely to 'hassle' their children, saw the importance of finding subjects they enjoyed, helped them find information about career paths and avoided being negative about their career ideas (Bedson & Perkins 2006).

Youth learning and support

The BSL welcomes the increased levels of cooperation between the Australian government and the states and territories in improving the education and employment options for young Australians especially through Youth Connections.

Distinctive learning, income, locational and school and home disadvantages are evident for many young Australian students as they move towards upper secondary school and the prospect of further study or seeking paid work.

As noted in earlier, it is often young people from lower-SES backgrounds who are concentrated in communities with a smaller range of jobs and higher levels of unemployment who do not complete their secondary schooling or engage in further training.

Across Australia in May 2010, 16.4 per cent of 15–19 year olds were not fully engaged (i.e. not occupied full time with education, work, or a combination of the two). State figures ranged from 10.7 per cent in the ACT to 20.8 per cent in Queensland (FYA 2010, pp.5–6). Thus, in some areas of Australia up to one-fifth of teenagers are not fully engaged and it is reasonable to assume that a high proportion would like to be engaged. Notably the proportion of young people not engaged in full time education or full time work has increased since 2008 when it was 13.4 per cent.

The BSL considers that combined, concerted initiatives with secondary schools, other educational settings, community agencies, families and business offer the best way forward in encouraging young people to remain at school or assisting them into secure and rewarding work pathways.

On example of an innovative learning option is the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning which may be delivered in a community setting. An evaluation of the Brotherhood's Community VCAL Taster program on the Mornington Peninsular supports the need for flexible learning. The course engaged 16 young people who were seriously disaffected with mainstream secondary school education, and who were facing their transition to adulthood without having acquired important skills. It provided valuable literacy, numeracy, vocational and social skills tuition, as well as the experience these students needed to make judgments about continuing vocational or further education. The evaluation found that 11 students were awarded a Certificate II in Community Service and overall group attendance was 77 per cent. At graduation, 15 of the 16 students enrolled in BSL's Community VCAL course for 2011. When questioned about attitudinal change, students also reported increased confidence, motivation, positive outlooks and understanding of, and respect for, others (Myconos 2010).

However, as stated in the BSL's response to the Victorian Education Department's paper, *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options*, substantial increases in funding are required (BSL 2010a). This is necessary because senior secondary education programs that have a strong personal support role and applied learning tend to be more expensive than more conventional senior secondary school subjects.

One potential task in the next funding period is to examine ways to develop a better national picture of the current extent of in-school and beyond-school funding sources which provide specialised personal, social and economic support to young people in the 12–18 age group and whether these can be made better known by young people and better coordinated.

Increased attention is needed for the development of single point access to support within the school which is also connected to relevant support services beyond the school. Further, given the rapid growth in young people's relationship issues associated with new technologies, alcohol and drug related concerns and mental health episodes, renewed attention should also be given to providing more responsive, accessible student and youth wellbeing support staff, including school nurses and youth counsellors.

The BSL supports the following initiatives to better meet identifiable educational and associated support needs of disadvantaged sub populations in Australian schools.

Recommendation Six: That priority consideration be given at a national level to the development of a regional or place-based allocation of funds to redress identified and agreed educational and social support needs. An important component of this increased focus on neighbourhoods will be to consider the total pool of upper secondary and vocational education funds.

Recommendation Seven: *That significantly increased national schools funding be made available in the next funding period for innovative learning programs which lift all students above minimum expected literacy and numeracy outcomes in the beginning years of primary schooling and expand effective school and home learning partnerships in the early years transition to school, especially those which support the parental role in learning.*

Recommendation Eight: *That increased recurrent funding be made available to disadvantaged schools and communities to strengthen school and home partnerships in the primary to secondary transition years, to maintain engagement and to begin career and further education planning.*

Recommendation Nine: *That increased national attention be given to suitable alternative programs in the upper secondary school for less engaged students, and an appropriate funding model for suitable community-based 'second chance' learning programs, including the Community VCAL, which embrace both education and student wellbeing.*

5 Special needs

As outlined above, the BSL supports a model of government funding across all three sectors which would more effectively target lower performance on literacy, numeracy and other valued capabilities reported in national testing and lower than acceptable levels of student retention and engagement.

It contends that the optimal way to achieve this is via increased cooperation on agreed problems between the government school sector, the Catholic sector, and the independent schools sector. This will depend on an injection of federal funding and reconfigured state and territory funding.

The BSL also supports a model of increased intervention in agreed communities of schools with identifiable levels of learning, locational, income, school and home, and youth transition disadvantage.

There would also be additional responsibility requirements for recipient schools and communities to implement quality programs to lift agreed educational capabilities, strengthen school home relations, and improve teacher quality.

A unified approach

It is within this context that the BSL supports increased national attention to the identification and adequate resourcing of students with special personal learning needs. The optimal approach for special needs students with multiple complex reasons for restricted educational involvement or performance is for each school to account for each of these special needs students in annual planning and reporting of student needs and profiles.

This would mean that in the next funding system for Australian schools a school could receive three layers of government funding: an agreed minimum based on the existing Average Government Schools Resources Cost (AGSRC), supplementary capability funding, and a transparent and separate special needs funding allocation.

If, among five secondary colleges in an agreed education district, there were two very similar government and Catholic schools each with approximately one per cent of their 1000 students with agreed special needs, then the two schools would be treated as follows.

In the case of a secondary government school receiving $10 million for its 1000 students and a loading of a further $1 million for 100 students performing below agreed national literacy and numeracy benchmarks in Years 7 and 9, it could also receive up to $500,000 for ten special needs students.

The nearby Catholic school with a similar student enrolment and similar socioeducational and socioeconomic profile would receive (under current allocations) about 85% of the per capita government school cost and an equivalent $1 million to assist 100 students to reach the national benchmarks. It too could receive up to $500,000 depending on the specific needs for its 10 agreed special needs students.

The two schools receiving the supplementary capability funding and additional special needs funding would be expected to cooperate in the development, implementation and evaluation of these funding streams. The BSL concurs with the Review that the concentration of special needs students often does coincide with areas of greater economic disadvantage.

A unified national funding system for special needs students could also make it easier for the funding to be portable, that is, to be carried from one school to another. The BSL does not think that the funding for special needs could be reduced to a single rate. Rather, a small number of clearly differentiated funding bands ranging from approximately $20,000 to $50,000 per year are needed for special needs students. This is similar to the BSL's proposals for a number of funding bands to address entrenched differences in education capability and capital and equipment.

The BSL contends that the assessment and financing of special needs student may need to be separately developed and reported from broader national educational disadvantage calculations. This is in part because they are an evident and rapidly growing feature of schools funding. The NSW Department of Education submission to the Review (2011, p. 20) reports that in 2009–10 the department spent more than $1.1 billion, or more than one tenth of its budget, on students with special needs. The NSW submission also notes a significant increase in allocations for mental and physical disabilities—consistent also, they note, with an international trend of growth in funding.

Recommendation Ten: *That the implementation of a more equitable and effective national system of funding for students with special needs related to physical, emotional and intellectual challenges should be a priority in the next funding period.*

6 Governance and leadership

The BSL considers that existing governmental and sectoral administrative arrangements have served Australian schools and households very well. However, the challenges of excellence and equity and of improving the learning capabilities of disadvantaged students and schools demand some fresh thinking.

To this end, and in light of previous sections in this submission, the BSL suggests consideration be given to the formation of a new governance structure with a specific public policy and funding brief to develop a better targeted, integrated and holistic response to the entrenched problems of low education performance and financial disadvantage.

Such a body would provide the necessary governance framework to drive a shared agenda on reducing educational disadvantage and minimising the impact of socioeconomic and other key barriers to education participation.

National leadership

The BSL proposes the introduction of a new governance structure called the Australian Education Capability Board (AECB) which would have a specific brief to enhance excellence and equity in Australian schools. The Board would bring together representatives of government schools, Catholic schools, independent schools, training, early childhood provision, and youth transitions.

The Board would oversee the planning, implementation and evaluation of a national program to overcome disadvantage in learning performance, place-based educational disadvantage, income obstacles to effective participation, low levels of school and home partnership, and inadequate pathways from school to work or further study. It would be responsible for allocating funds from a newly created Education Capability Fund and reporting on progress to agreed outcomes.

The new Australian Education Capability Board would oversee the preparation and updating of each school's Education Capability Index, while the state and territory governments, the Catholic sector and, in relation to all non-Catholic independent schools, the Australian government would be responsible to ensure that the funds flowed to each school according to the national education capability index.

The BSL respects the achievements of state and territory school systems, but also believes that coordinated and participatory action on these impediments to excellence and equity of outcomes is warranted and is beyond the capacity of any one state or territory, or schools sector, to achieve separately.

A striking example of a state program that could be assessed by the new board for potential national implementation is the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) program which operates in the final years of secondary schooling as an alternative to the VCE.

If we are to meet the 90 per cent nationally endorsed Year 12 attainment targets, greater investment in flexible and alternative learning is required along the lines of this successful Victorian program. Senior secondary enrolments in VCAL rose from 14,093 in 2007 to 17,699 in 2009 (VCAA 2010). Enrolments in vocational education and training diploma qualifications increased by 16% from 2008 to 2009 and Certificate IV qualifications by 15% (NCVER 2010).

School leadership

The BSL also considers that there will need to be a stronger focus on strong and effective governance and leadership arrangements and culture at a school level.

From experience with educational programs for disadvantaged students and families from early childhood to the final years of secondary schooling, the BSL is concerned that the culture of some schools continues to discourage rather than engage some disadvantaged students and families.

Research involving early school leavers from the BSL longitudinal Life Chances study found that young people gave multiple reasons for leaving school:

> Typically they left because of negative experiences at school, rather than because they had an inviting job or training course to go to; only one left primarily for family reasons. They talked of difficulties with schoolwork, for example being overwhelmed with the work or struggling to catch up after missing school, of poor relationships with teachers, and of other students being bullies or snobs (Taylor 2009, p. v).

While traditional school may not suit all students and more flexible alternatives could be viable options, the study found that schools could retain others by providing greater support for students with learning and behaviour difficulties, ensuring a safe school environment, and providing active support for students returning to school or moving schools (Taylor 2009).

The BSL would like to see an increased commitment nationally to make secondary schooling more inclusive of all students. This will clearly be assisted by increased national action to ensure all students leave primary schooling achieving at or above the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks and bringing parents and carers into the learning journey of their children.

The BSL is also supportive of initiatives to enable existing and beginning teachers, but especially senior school administrations to better understand and manage student and family disengagement.

The following recommendation would form an important part of any improved national funding system for Australian schools.

Recommendation Eleven: *That the Australian Government and state and territory governments, the Catholic schools sector, and the independent schools sector support the creation of a new Australian Education Capability Board (AECB) comprising representatives of all school sectors. The key task of this new body would be to develop a better targeted, integrated and holistic response to the entrenched problems of low education performance and financial disadvantage.*

7 Community and family engagement

The BSL is highly supportive of a wide range of initiatives in Australian schools where considerable efforts have been made to involve parents and carers and to encourage them to actively participate in their children's education and school life.

Key among these initiatives in Victoria are improved communication between schools and homes across a student's learning journey about work being undertaken in classrooms and improved reporting to parents, including overall literacy and numeracy results.

In the secondary schools there is more attention given to individual learning plans and involvement in course planning, careers and future study options. While some of these developments need to be better targeted, they do assist many young people who might otherwise disengage from schooling.

The BSL also welcomes the fact that many schools give explicit attention to holding parent information nights early in the year at key stages, for example moving from Year 6 to Year 7 or entering the senior school in Year 10.

Some other highly productive strategies for increased community and family engagement are now outlined.

Learning support programs

The BSL recommends increased consideration by the Review of the suite of out of school, learning support programs (LSP) that have a positive complementary role alongside in-school reform in assisting all young Australians to realise their 'individual potential and contribute fully to the development of our society' (Smyth 2010, p. 26). Research demonstrates the value of learning support programs, especially for disadvantaged students who often enjoy school less and are otherwise less likely to complete Year 12, and to have a higher risk of unemployment.

Low parental education and a lack of confidence on the part of the parent/carer can be additional obstacles for some children, while many students from low-income households are less likely to participate in important out-of-school activities such as sport, creative arts and or those which involve considerable entry or transport costs.

A BSL literature review indicates that participation in LSPs improves the academic outcomes of students, school retention, grades and engagement in learning. LSPs have significant social and personal development outcomes for participants, improving their confidence, self-esteem, language skills and adjustment to their adopted country. They also provide family or community gains such as improving student relationships with parents (Bond 2009b).

The BSL is also well aware that where there is a constructive relationship between school and home there are major benefits for the learner, the family unit (broadly defined) and the wider community.

The BSL has built a strong record of achievement in working with disadvantaged students and their families in learning support programs at key potential disengagement points along the learning journey including the early childhood to primary school transition, between primary and secondary schooling, and the sometimes volatile move from middle and upper secondary schools into the world or work or further education.

The value of these kinds of LSPs is also acknowledged in major policy and programs in the United States, United Kingdom and New Zealand where governments have developed firm policy and made a significant financial investment in such programs. Recognising the greater long-term benefit and reduction of risky behaviours that learning support and recreation provides, the UK's Aiming High and Extended Schools policies deliver a 'core offer' to young people by creating school hubs and youth centres that provide study support and recreational activities, as well as easy referral to specialists and social services (in Bond 2010). Notably, the provision of LSPs in community settings such as youth centres and libraries is important for young people who have disengaged from school as a means of re-establishing a connection to education.

While Australian policy recognises the potential of LSPs to assist in learning for disadvantaged students, in practice there does not appear to be a longer term coordinated approach to their provision. In Victoria, while the Learning Beyond the Bell program seeks to build the capacity of all LSPs, its main grants have been for programs with predominantly refugee or migrant participants. Moreover, the funding only reaches around 10 per cent of programs in Victoria and is insufficient to meet costs. The BSL believes that more funding should be extended to homework programs assisting disadvantaged students.

LSPs represent one option for more flexible and alternative approaches to learning that complement and interact positively with major reforms within the schools themselves. They are now a demonstrated and internationally recognised means of engaging disadvantaged at-risk students beyond the school gate to improve their commitment to education, enable catch-up learning and strengthen attainment.

Population growth corridors and new youth cohorts

In recent years, the BSL has developed a number of proposals to implement youth, community development and work and learning-focused centres in lower income communities in the inner city and in the western corridor.

It is also planning to establish a youth and community centre in the population growth corridor of Caroline Springs in Victoria, where there are over 10,000 teenagers and several schools with lower than national benchmark performance in literacy and numeracy and considerable levels of early school leaving and student disengagement. The BSL calls for increased national attention to the current and future educational needs of new growth corridors throughout Australia.

Ideally, all secondary schools will be structured and funded to provide the kinds of curriculum and teaching and learning which will keep the overwhelming majority of students engaged. However, various recent reviews, consultations and pilots all agree that schools cannot solve the challenge of poor attainment in isolation. There is a clear imperative to consolidate the array of fragmented youth support programs into an integrated suite of support services both within and alongside secondary schools.

A BSL literature and policy review exploring the provision of holistic and integrated services for young people found significant programs supported by legislation overseas (Bond 2010). These included the UK's Extended Schools and Aiming High policies which create service hubs in schools and youth centres where all young people have access to learning, recreation and social supports. In the US, the 'full-service schools' movement, care models such as Wraparound for young people with complex needs and One Stop Career centres were indications of service

integration. By comparison, the review found that Australia lacked a substantive and well-resourced national youth policy and supportive legislation.

For example, although young people's educational and economic participation is taken up in the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transition, young people are not among the priorities set for the Social Inclusion Agenda and youth unemployment does remain stubbornly high in low income geographies.

While the National Youth Strategy provides a list of programs, it needs a more coherent and unifying vision for integrated service provision for young Australians. Positive movements in this direction include the Victorian pilot of the Extended Schools Hub funded by COAG, Victoria's Better Youth Services pilots, the ACT's Turnaround program for young people with complex needs, and the increasing numbers of 'youth foyers' which deliver housing, social support and training to young people at risk of homelessness. Added to these are youth centres or hubs which often run in partnership with schools, training providers, social services, business groups and government, to provide a broad range of community-based services and programs.

If we are to lift school engagement and achievement, these complex needs must be addressed so that young people are able to learn and succeed in educational settings. While the federal Youth Connections program is a positive step toward addressing disengagement, its focus is on 13–19 year olds. The thin spread of this funding nationally is problematic, for caseworkers are reporting that disengagement is occurring at ever younger ages. Indeed, in a submission on Victoria's Vulnerable Youth Framework, BSL recommended that the framework address children from the age of eight years to enable stronger intervention when it really matters (BSL 2008).

While useful in bringing the work of Local Learning and Employment Networks and former Commonwealth Youth Pathways program together in Victoria, the new Youth Connections focus remains mainly on those who have already disengaged from school. This means that schools are largely responsible for the retention and continued engagement of their students. However, anecdotally we know that the pathway planning of students at risk of early school leaving often depends on a part-time employed careers or welfare officer in a school with one thousand other students. This means that substantially more resources need to be allocated both within schools, and in partnership with the community sector, to address student retention and engagement, especially in disadvantaged areas. This is also critical to move from a reactive model to a more proactive, preventative one.

However, as previously stated, the task of addressing the young people's primary wellbeing needs as well as enabling educational attainment cannot fall to schools and education departments alone. The BSL argues that substantive improvements in the transition of young people will only be achieved if governance arrangements are implemented within individual departments to ensure mainstream public services are inclusive of all young people. This includes developing floor targets for particular indicators to ensure shared accountability for maximising the social and economic participation of young people. In addition to mainstreaming social inclusion principles as core business for individual departments and portfolios, a suite of accessible and responsive support services should be available for young people who have been identified as at risk of not realising their potential, and for their parents or carers.

Recommendation Twelve: *That national attention be given to mapping and strengthening the contribution of the community sector in developing effective educational initiatives for student learning and parent and community engagement.*

8 Appendices

Appendix A Additional data derived from Productivity Commission, 2011

Table 3 Students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for writing, in years 3,5,7 and 9 by parental education and occupation, 2009 (%)

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Parental education				
Bachelor degree or above	98.2	97.4	97.5	95.7
Year 11 equivalent or below	91.5	86.6	85.6	78.6
Learning performance gap	**6.7**	**10.8**	**11.9**	**17.1**
Parental occupation				
Senior managers and qualified professionals	98.4	97.4	97.3	95.4
Not in paid work in previous 12 months	90.2	84.8	82.5	75.3
Learning performance gap	**8.2**	**12.6**	**14.8**	**20.1**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.66

Table 4 Students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for numeracy, in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 by parental education and occupation, 2009 (%)

	Year 3	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Parental education				
Bachelor degree or above	98.1	98.2	98.7	98.8
Year 11 equiv or below	87.5	88.2	89.3	90.1
Learning performance gap	**10.6**	**10.0**	**9.4**	**8.7**
Parental occupation				
Senior managers and qualified professionals	98.2	98.2	98.6	98.7
Not in paid work in previous 12 months	86.5	86.0	86.2	87.3
Learning performance gap	**11.7**	**12.2**	**12.4**	**11.4**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.89

Table 5 – Students at or above proficient standard in information and communications technology literacy performance in years 6 and 10, 2008, (%)

Parental occupation	Year 6	Year 10
Senior managers/professionals	71.7	78.5
Skilled trades, clerical/sales	54.0	62.6
Unskilled manual, office and sales	41.0	52.1
Learning performance gap	**30.7**	**26.4**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.107

Table 6 Students aged 15 achieving level 3 or above in the overall reading literacy scale, by equity group (%)

	Level 3 or above on reading literacy scale, %	
	2000	**2009**
All students	69.0	65.3
Students from low socio economic families	54.3	46.9
Learning performance gap	**14.7**	**18.4**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.109

Table 7 Students aged 15 achieving level 3 or above in the overall mathematical literacy scale, by equity group (%)

	Level 3 or above on mathematical literacy scale, %	
	2000	**2009**
All students	67.1	63.9
Students from low socio economic families	47.2	44.7
Learning performance gap	**19.9**	**19.2**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.113

Table 8 Students aged 15 achieving level 3 or above in the overall scientific literacy scale, by equity group (%)

	Level 3 or above on scientific literacy scale, %	
	2000	**2009**
All students	67.0	67.5
Students from low socio economic families	50.8	49.4
Learning performance gap	**16.2**	**18.1**

Data source: Productivity Commission (2011) Table 4A.116

Appendix B Proposed Flag and Follow School Education Capability Index

Learning outputs	
Skills and content	
	Literacy
	Numeracy
	ICT
	Science
	Arts/Civic
	Sport and health
School programs	
	Retention/Completion
	Year 12/VET in school/VCAL etc
	Technology – hours per week per student
	Post-school destinations
Compensation factors	
Socioeconomic	
	Household income range
	Parental occupation
	Parent by highest level of education achieved
	Proportion on Family Tax Benefit A/ B
	Parents not in workforce (%)
	Students on Youth Allowance (%)
Contextual	
	Students from local LGA (%)
	Male/Female
	Language background other than English
	Special needs (%)
	Buildings/Equipment/Grounds – volume and quality index
Responsibility factors	
Classroom programs	
	Time on task, literacy and numeracy
	Balance of single and double periods
	Number and reach of alternative programs
Teaching profile	
	Average years in teaching
	Average years of further training post initial training
	School provision for professional development
Students	
	Attendance
	Satisfaction
Parent/Community	
	Satisfaction
	Numbers of school/parent interactions

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