

Dear Victorian MP

Subject: Exposure of shocking shortcomings in education in Victoria

As you are aware on 16/11/23 the report by the Vic. Commissioner for Children and Young People - **Let them Learn** was tabled in parliament. The report arises from the extensive enquiry into the educational experience of children and young people in out-of-home care. It confirms all what kinship carers have long been reporting: that Victoria's education system is unresponsive to the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care.

The investigation exposes some shameful data and shares some disturbing stories offered by children and young people. Listen to the children's accounts of their experiences and then, as a Victorian citizen, worry! Worry about the way we are inequitably educating Victoria's most precious resource – **all** its children and young people.

The situation does not get to be this bad in a short period of time. The neglect of the needs of children and young people in care speaks of years of inattention by government and also of neglect of the carers and others who have been calling for education reform for years. The stories told by children and young people in the report are shocking but so too have been the stories told by their carers over many years.

All the recommendations are worthy and should be supported. However, five recommendations are both so critical and urgent that they should be implemented forthwith. These recommendations are outlined on the reverse page of this letter.

Chapter 11 in the report addresses the partnership agreements crafted between DEET and DFH some years ago. We are left wondering how the neglect outlined in the Commissioner's report can possibly have accumulated when this partnership agreement has been in place since 2018. An urgent review of the implementation of the partnership agreement (A KCV summary is attached to this letter) is called for. We call on your assistance to ensure that this occurs.

Once again, the Commissioner and her staff hold a mirror up to our actions and the reflection is unattractive. We commend the report to you and call on you to take action to ensure the recommendations are enacted without delay.

Your colleague in the service of Victoria children



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Director,
Grandparents Vic./Kinship Carers Vic.



**COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

LET US LEARN

5 CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

7...An Increase in carer payments

That the Vic. Government increase the care allowance payments for kinship and foster carers.

8...Ensuring equitable financial support for kinship and foster carers

That DFFH strengthen the care allowance assessment and payment process to ensure assessments are conducted thoroughly and in a timely way, and that equitable financial support is provided to kinship and foster carers.

9...Removing voluntary contributions and other education expenses for carers

That DE ensure that carers of students in out-of-home care are not requested to pay voluntary financial contributions and education-related expenses, including camps and excursions.

10..Providing carers with information/assistance to access flexible education-related funding

That DFFH:

- ensure all carers and the children and young people in their care, particularly those in kinship care and in residential care settings, are provided with information about flexible funding available to cover education and extra-curricular activities
- further streamline the process for seeking this funding.

11..Providing all students in out-of-home care with a free Victorian Student Travel Pass

That the Vic. Government provide all student aged children/ young people in out-of-home care with a Vic. Student Travel Pass free of charge.

Partnering Agreement: School responsibilities checklist

This checklist provides a quick reference for schools to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities under the Partnering Agreement. Schools should commence using the checklist when a child or young person in out-of-home care is enrolled at a school or when the school is advised that one of their students has entered out-of-home care. The full text of the Partnering Agreement provides more detailed information about these responsibilities.

Upon enrolment or when child or young person enters out-of-home care	Within the first week	Within the first term	Ongoing responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrol child or young person without delay or seek endorsement of the DEECD Regional Director or Catholic Education Diocesan Director for any delay of more than one day. • Record out-of-home care status in the school's student information record keeping mechanism (under 'living arrangements' in CASES21 for government schools). • Provide advice to the out-of-home carer about their eligibility for the Education Maintenance Allowance. • Liaise with the child or young person's previous school or early childhood education service to ensure the transfer of relevant information including the Individual Education Plan or Transition Learning and Development Statement (for children entering Prep at a government school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Student Support Group and hold the first meeting. • Develop an Individual Education Plan with input from the Student Support Group and the child or young person. • Provide minutes of the Student Support Group meeting to members. • Ask the Student Support Group to identify the most appropriate person/people to access the Ultranet to monitor the child or young person's attendance and progress (government schools). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With input from the child or young person, identify a teacher/staff member to act as their learning mentor. • Review the Individual Education Plan with input from the Student Support Group and the child or young person. • Provide a referral to Student Support Services (government schools) or Student Services (Catholic schools) for an educational assessment for children and young people who have resided in out-of-home care for three months or longer. • Ensure that referrals to school-based health and wellbeing services are prioritised. • Facilitate access to appropriate support services and programs to support the child or young person's learning and wellbeing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track and monitor the child or young person's attendance and achievement. • Hold Student Support Group meetings twice per year and more frequently if there are attendance or behavioural issues. • Regularly review the Individual Education Plan. • Work with the case manager to participate in case planning meetings or processes. • Support the child or young person to remain at the school or to maintain a connection if they have to change schools. • If the child or young person changes school or is transitioning to secondary school or another education or training setting, provide all records and information to the new school/setting. • Inform the DEECD Regional Director or Diocesan Director of Catholic Education in advance in all cases when expulsion is being considered. • Track the young person's destination for six months following their exit from school (where relevant).

Partnering Agreement: Case manager responsibilities checklist

This checklist provides a quick reference for DHS and community service organisation case managers to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities under the Partnering Agreement. Case managers should commence using the checklist when a child or young person enters out-of-home care or enrolls in a new school.

Upon enrolment or when child or young person enters out-of-home care	Within the first week	Within the first term	Ongoing responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the Principal in writing that the child or young person resides in out-of-home care. • Provide a record of the schools or early childhood education services the child or young person has previously attended. • Provide information to the school on key roles and responsibilities of DHS, the case manager and carer. • Ensure that accurate information including the school's details is recorded on CRIS or CRISSP. • Work with relevant early childhood professionals to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for every child entering Prep at a government school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in the first meeting of the Student Support Group. • Contribute to the development of an Individual Education Plan for the child or young person and keep a copy on file. • Advise the Student Support Group who is the most appropriate person or people to have access to the Ultranet to monitor the child or young person's progress and attendance (government schools only). • Work collaboratively with the school to develop appropriate strategies to support the child or young person at school and maximise their attendance and engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work collaboratively with the school to make referrals or applications to relevant services and supports for the child or young person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend Student Support Group meetings twice per year and more frequently if there are attendance or behavioural issues. • When there are changes, ensure that the school is provided with relevant and up-to-date information about the child or young person's circumstances, care arrangements, legal status, case plan, placement details and key contacts. • Make all efforts to support the child or young person to continue to attend their current school when making case management and placement decisions. • Maintain an ongoing partnership with the school and ensure that the case manager, parents and carers are known to the school and involved in decision-making. • Invite schools to participate in case planning meetings or seek appropriate input into planning processes. • Ensure that carers inform the school when the child or young person will be absent and alert the school to any issues impacting on attendance or behaviour.