



**An alliance of Victorian
Public Education community campaigns**

**'Every child in Victoria should have access to high quality
state primary and secondary education in their local community'**

Friday 2nd March, 2018

Tim Pallas MP
Victorian Treasurer
Level 4
1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne 3002

Dear Minister Pallas,

Funding the required public school builds and upgrades as an Education State priority infrastructure project that supports inclusion and access, including active travel.

Our Children Our Schools (OCOS) is an alliance of 31 Victorian, parent led, community public school campaign groups. We advocate for every child in Victoria to have equity of access to high quality State primary and secondary schools in their local community.

OCOS applauds the ongoing work by the Andrews Labor government on planning and funding new and upgraded school infrastructure and the increased overall expenditure in the education portfolio.

In the attached submission, we ask for further funding considerations in the 2018/ 2019 Education State budget.

Thank you for your time in advance and we look forward to an opportunity to discuss our budget submission with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Hall', is written in a cursive style.

Catherine Hall
President
Our Children Our Schools

cc: The Hon James Merlino MP



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OUR CHILDREN OUR SCHOOLS

VICTORIAN BUDGET SUBMISSION

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Recommendations

Our submission has three overarching themes and recommendations flow from these in the areas of **1. Principles and areas of school funding**, **2. Active travel** and **3. Inclusion**. Our Children Our Schools (OCOS) recommends the following provisions be made in the 2018/2019 State Budget:

1. New School Funding -An increase in the number of new schools receiving full construction and fit out funding. Communities (new, infill, established and regional) should not have to wait every year to see when (or if) a school will open. Funding the construction of ten new schools a year is insufficient to meet escalating population demands. OCOS strongly recommends the transparent 5-year school infrastructure pipeline in Infrastructure Victoria's *30-Year Strategy* should be implemented this budget.
2. Funding of non-government school new builds and capital works should only occur once all State schools are at a *community standard of provision* and all required State school new builds and land acquisitions have been funded. All government schools should be allocated funding for an all abilities school design which includes a masterplan, a complete asset management plan, building, fit out, landscaping (including annual grounds maintenance), playgrounds, outdoor seating, indoor or outdoor sport facilities (goals, basketball/ netball hoops, long jump pit etc.), bike and shade shelters, as well as specialist rooms such as arts, music, science and inclusion services;
3. Increase kindergarten infrastructure funding to meet increases in births.
4. Funding of a suite of measures to enable, support and promote active travel to school, including the provision of secure bike shelters and the mapping and construction of safe active routes. The high numbers of students being driven to school was a highlighted health issue in Infrastructure Victoria's 30 year strategy. Refer Appendix A for our more detailed response;
5. Funding for inclusion programs in all Government schools. More funding should be allocated to students with learning needs and to increase the number of speech therapist, occupational therapist and psychologists within our government schools. This will assist with earlier interventions and ease the mental health of teachers work load. Refer Appendix B for our more detailed response.
We recommend funds be available to cover the costs associated with a program beginning in 2019 for Autistic Students with an average to high IQ and who are disengaged or at risk of disengagement from school. The structure of the program should be based on the Specialised ASD Learning Program from Western Australia which can be implemented within the current Mainstream School Structure and which aligns with the Government's Inclusion Agenda. Refer Appendix C for our more detailed response;

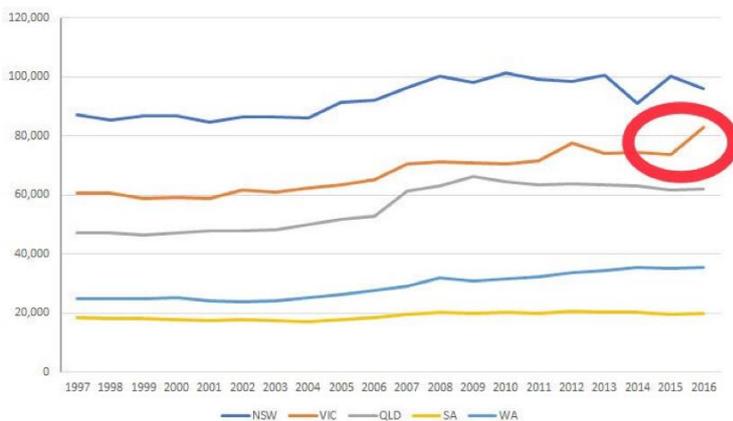
Introduction

Our Children Our Schools (OCOS) applauds the ongoing work by the Andrews Labor government on planning and funding new and upgraded school infrastructure and the increased overall expenditure in the education portfolio. In this submission, we ask for further funding considerations in the 2018/ 2019 Education State budget. We have included a full analysis and evidence base for aspects of our budget letter in the attached appendices.

The State School system requires a comprehensive, transparent school building program to meet our State’s fast-growing need. More local schools will enable healthy, active and connected communities with access to lifelong education while also creating additional local long term jobs.

New data released in January 2018, shows it is hard to ignore the double-digit percentage growth since 2015 only two years ago “... the number of registrations in Victoria, where there was a 13% increase on the 2015 figure (from 73,568 to 82,892). This is a significant departure from the last decade, when the number of births was generally between 70,000 and 75,000.”¹

Number of births, NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia – 2007-2016



Source: ABS, Births Australia (Cat. no. 3301.0)

OCOS would like to highlight that the 82,892² children born in 2016 will hit Primary School in 2021, four short years. We believe this is sufficient time to construct new public schools to meet this demand plus meet existing outstanding demands in the system from new, infill, established and regional communities.

¹ [https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-](https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084)

[8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084](https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084)

² [https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-](https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084)

[8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084](https://blog.id.com.au/2018/population/demographic-trends/birth-numbers-in-australia-hit-an-all-time-record/?utm_campaign=Blog+article+notification&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=60175084&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8zkVp98boNulrPscDpwIOAqBKDWjnJ561DVt7ZTr1S4YOxdqT2pEKyyicMfr54m48J-6S8QDsA20RQznZTh5NbNRfA7EH9ga0RkrONSOyK-6nrjA&_hsmi=60175084)

Funding is the key. If the funding model continues to only provide for the construction of approximately 10 new public schools a year, Victoria is in further trouble. The new public school building rate and therefore school openings needs to increase significantly. We observe that it is a challenge for the Department of Education to service existing demand across many communities. Let alone this double-digit percentage increase coming in 2021. Victoria’s poorly serviced communities and overcrowding issues will worsen with overcrowded classrooms, student teacher ratios not meeting AEU targets and further sacrifices to outdoor learning space. Not forgetting that additional kindergarten places will be required to educate these children.

We draw to your attention the table below, which demonstrates which year infrastructure is required by children by their birth year. As Grattan Institute’s Peter Goss has stated in the past “Planning is a long-term game a child born today would be starting primary school in 2023.”

OurChildrenOur Schools Prep & Year 7 Starting Year

Born	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Before 30th April 2006	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12												
Before 30th April 2007	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12											
Before 30th April 2008	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12										
Before 30th April 2009	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12									
Before 30th April 2010	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12								
Before 30th April 2011	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12							
Before 30th April 2012	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12						
Before 30th April 2013	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12					
Before 30th April 2014	Kinder	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12				
Before 30th April 2015		Kinder	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12			
Before 30th April 2016			Kinder	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12		
Before 30th April 2017				Kinder	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	
Before 30th April 2018					Kinder	Prep	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12

Local provisioning

A quality, local public school is one of the basic building blocks of a healthy, connected community. OCOS is of the strong view that public school provision needs to be LOCAL to fully enable many of the positive benefits to community and savings to government. These benefits are spread across many important areas of government concern, including access to education and life-long learning, the family-school community partnership, planning, local economy stimulation, access to local jobs, health, obesity, inclusion, community connectivity, congestion and air pollution.

Benchmark recommendation

OCOS believes it is vitally important for the government to establish minimum benchmarks, a community standard, for public school facilities which ensure curriculum resources and facility equity are met. All State government schools should be allocated funding for an all abilities school design which includes a masterplan, a complete asset management plan, building, fit out, landscaping (including annual grounds maintenance), playgrounds, outdoor seating, indoor or outdoor sport facilities (goals, basketball/ netball hops, long jump pit etc.), bike and shade shelters as well as specialist rooms such as arts, music, science and inclusion services.

New school builds

OCOS requests that government make further provision for at least 25% more of the projected required schools (excluding existing new schools of the announced list), including land acquisitions and construction timeline commitments.

Funding for a new school is not currently guaranteed in one budget. It takes several budgets to obtain funding for each step (land acquisition, design, construction and fit out, stage two) and election cycles are too heavily involved. Several schools allocated land acquisition funding in last year's state budget 2016/17 missed out and the communities of these new schools are still facing major uncertainty until at least the 2018/19 budget.

Funding the construction of approximately 10 new schools in each budget does not keep pace with the demands of the existing baby boom.

Additionally, projected funding should factor in land overlays/future acquisition of land, planning and design costs for schools for existing and established suburbs in order to accommodate rapid infill development and ease enrolment pressures.

Transparent school funding pipeline

Last year in our budget submission we recommended that the Government should implement the recommendation made by Infrastructure Victoria 30-year Strategy report for a transparent school funding pipeline. This would remove new school funding from the election cycle and enable long term community planning for shared use of school facilities with other community stakeholders thus enabling more efficient use of school infrastructure. The transparent pipeline would also, importantly, allow relative certainty for families.

At the time of writing this submission, OCOS is aware that the State Government has accepted the transparent school funding pipeline recommendation. However, what remains unclear is when any details about funding for schools within that pipeline will become publicly available.

We would highly recommend that information about the transparent school funding pipeline be published immediately as part of the 2018-2019 budget announcement. This would increase the likelihood of school funding decisions prior to the 2018 election being based on need and equity, not influenced by local political considerations.

Appendix A - Promoting Active Travel to Schools



PROMOTING ACTIVE TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

Summary

It is now well accepted that Australia is experiencing an obesity and [inactivity epidemic](#) which unfortunately includes our children and puts them at risk.

The *Education State* has set a [specific target](#) for increasing daily activity of students – **Our Children Our Schools (OCOS) believes an efficient way to increase students' regular activity is to focus on daily trips of students to and from school.** This is effectively ten sessions of activity a week for the students which can also 'rub off' on other family members.

So it was pleasing to see the recently released [Victorian Cycling Strategy](#) includes a focus on [active travel to school](#) and makes a similar case to that of OCOS – pointing out many benefits including the fact that getting students cycling (or walking) can positively influence the behaviour of other family members.

OCOS will be asking the State Government to make funds available in the upcoming budget to support and enable active travel to school including providing bike shelters in schools, building walkable neighbourhoods and safe active travel routes, mapping safe routes, supporting bike education and promoting the benefits of active travel to the broader community.

Providing bike facilities at schools, including undercover and secure parking, racks, and pumps is likely to improve active travel to schools. 3

Additionally, education programs should be rolled out both online and in school newsletters to increase parents' knowledge. One OCOS member who rides to school with their child, fielded several questions from multiple migrant parents about road and other safety rules at her local primary school. She believes as cycling wasn't a promoted form of daily transport, parents did not have basic knowledge about helmets or co-riding.

³ CPF, *Active travel to school 2012 survey findings*. 2012: Kensington, VIC.

Background

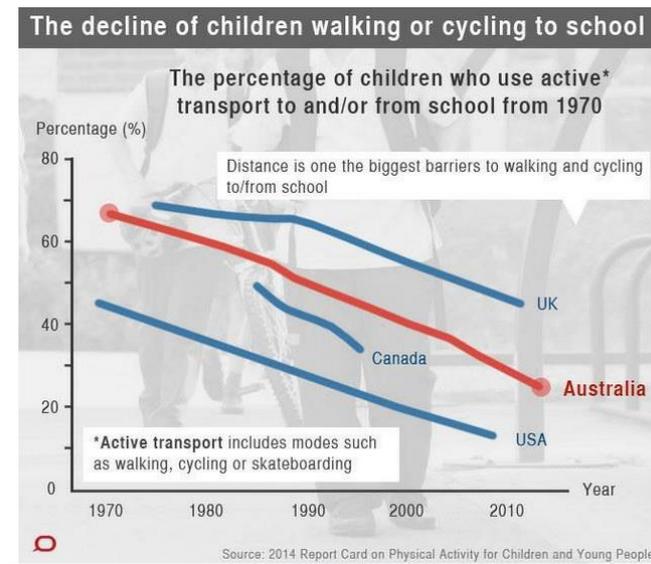
In their [30 Year Strategy, Infrastructure Victoria](#) highlighted the high number of children being driven to school as a key aspect of this public health challenge but did not address this problem directly with strategies.

Pg 80 Need 4 Enable physical activity and participation

A particular challenge is the health and wellbeing of Victorian children. Some key state government indicators show that children are walking to school less and being driven more. In 2013, approximately half of all Victorian children aged 5 to 12 were always driven to school, and in 2014 only one in four children in school years 5, 8 and 11 met the recommended amount of physical activity on all days of the week, with children in rural areas more likely to meet guidelines than children in metropolitan areas.

Infrastructure can enable both incidental and planned physical activity through the provision of walking and cycling networks

Data published by Active Healthy Kids Australia (refer graph below) shows the significant decline in the percentage of children who use active transport to and/ or from school since 1970 across a number of countries

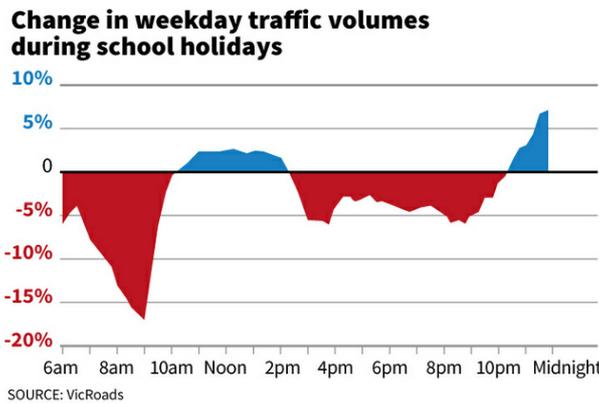


Source: Active Healthy Kids Australia

Data released on 22nd January, 2018 by [LiveLighter](#) public health campaign, run by the Heart Foundation and Cancer Council Victoria shows that in Australia, 64% of children travel to school by car.



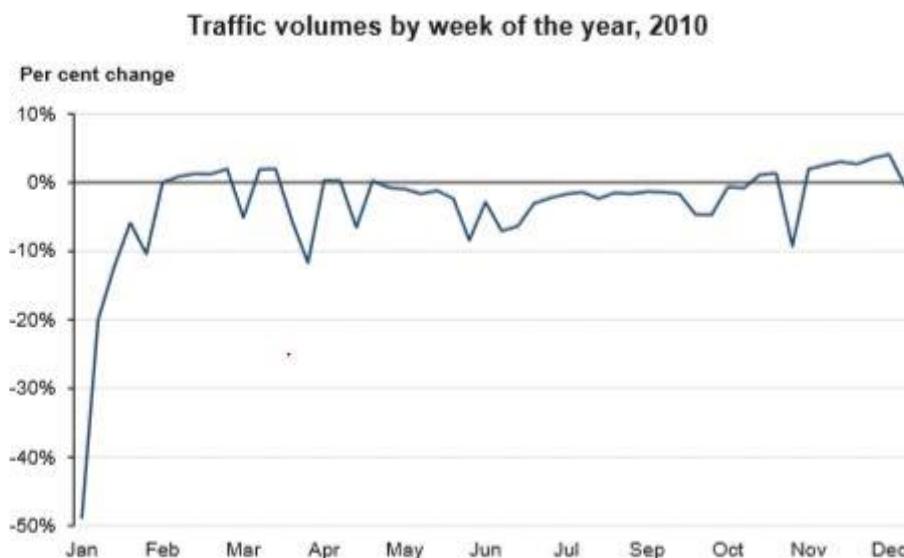
However it doesn't have to be this way. Why not school holiday roads all year round? Data published by VicRoads (refer graph below) shows significant reduction in traffic volumes during school holidays.



The 2013 Victorian Auditor-General's [Report on Managing Traffic Congestion](#) identifies car trips to school as a significant contributor to road congestion and suggests demand management (Pgs 23, 24 & 57):

“The use of cars to drive children to school has risen steeply over the past three decades, contributing to widely dispersed areas of localised congestion. It further notes there is the opportunity for travel demand management measures to encourage mode shift for school journeys.

[The graph below] highlights the changes in traffic volumes across the 12 months of 2010, and shows the significant decline in volumes during school holiday periods. This suggests that changes in road use behaviour for school commuting have the potential to reduce current traffic volumes by around 5 to 10 per cent. This could lead to substantial improvements in road network performance and accessibility.”



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office from VISTA 2009.

A key factor in morning peak hour demand management could be travel mode shift for the trip to school. This year the Leader Newspapers' number one 'top tip' for getting ready for school was "*Practice **driving** the route to a new school*" (Moreland Leader, 22 January 2018). Why not walking, cycling or scooting?

We all need to work together to reverse this trend.

At the announcement for the new Preston High School, it was encouraging to hear Education Minister, James Merlino say that the Government would work with Vic Roads and Council to ensure safe active travel routes to the school. OCOS would like to see this approach formalised for all schools.

Safe active travel will need to be supported with a range of measures including mapped safe routes, separated path infrastructure, where possible, and bike parking provision at schools coupled with education and promotion programs in schools and the broader community.

We believe there is an appetite in communities for positive stories about active travel to school – as evidenced by OCOS's biggest tweet ever being on this topic and receiving 6350 impressions. Some in government may be concerned that cycling can be a contentious topic – we say no one begrudges a child on a bike and a public focus on school-aged active travellers could result in a positive shift in attitude and uptake.

OCOS welcomes the recently released [Victorian Cycling Strategy](#) focus on active travel to school however the stated strategic approach for the Victorian Government to "*work with local councils to improve cycling routes and facilities at schools*" is going to require clear mechanisms, governance, and of course funding.

Victorian Policy Context

Education State target

By 2025: *The proportion of students doing physical activity for an hour a day, five times a week, will grow by 20%.*

Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-2028

- 2.3 Support cycling to school: *The Victorian Government will work with local councils to improve cycling routes and facilities at schools, which will help increase the number of children cycling to school.*
- 1.6 Work with local councils to address gaps in strategic cycling corridors: *We will work with local councils to join up strategic cycling corridors on local streets, arterial roads, highways, rail corridors and green spaces. We will work closely with local councils to plan, identify and deliver improvements to strategic cycling corridors and to support the 20-minute neighbourhood concept, especially for cycling to schools, train stations and activity areas.*

Active Victoria Strategy

Direction 3 Additional focus on active recreation

- Key area of change: *School-based actions to improve children's physical literacy and levels of physical activity.*
- *Planning for active recreation infrastructure connected to other community uses and urban development.*

Plan Melbourne 20 Minute City

The concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood is simple. It's all about giving Melburnians the ability to 'live locally' - meeting most of their everyday needs within a 20-minute walk, cycle or local public transport trip of their home.

Those everyday needs include; schools.....

Recommendations

See Appendix 1 for an evidence base for key recommendations.

1. The Victorian Government retrofits or provides secure, covered bike parking at all public schools – possibly via the Victorian School Building Authority.
2. The Victorian Government will fund local governments to mark and/or sign safe routes to school, and undertake targeted infrastructure improvements, in combination with safe route to school maps. (Moonee Valley Council's [mapping for every school in the municipality](#) is a good example of what could be rolled out by all councils)
3. The Victorian Government, wherever possible, will fund walking and cycling paths that are separated from road traffic.
4. When funding Strategic Cycling Corridors, as per the Victorian Cycling Strategy, the Victorian Government will give priority (after black spots) to Corridors that make up routes to schools.
5. For schools being planned, Active Transport Victoria (ATV) will work with the Victorian Planning Authority, Vic Roads, local government and the Department of Education to develop a connected, direct and safe cycling (and walking) network, traffic-calmed areas and street hierarchy and network that will make active transport the preferred option for travel to and from school (consistent with a wider approach for 20 minute neighbourhoods).
6. If, as indicated in the Cycling Strategy, ATV is deemed to be the body tasked with overseeing much of this work, the Victorian Government will staff and fund ATV commensurate with the breadth and scale of the work.
7. The Victorian Government will provide the ATV, or relevant responsible body, with the means to promote active travel and tell positive cycling and walking infrastructure stories. Examples include the Sydney Cycleways social media accounts and Victorian School Building Authority story telling.
8. The Victorian Government will support schools to promote active travel within their school communities including education regarding the benefits and teaching some of the skills required.

Appendix 1.

Evidence base for key recommendations

(As provided by researchers working in the field after consultation with OCOS)

- **Local public schools within walking/cycling distance of homes**

There is a need for provision of government schools of consistent high quality within residential areas so that children have good local access to quality education. This will discourage parents from shopping around for schools that are located further away from home and require their children to be driven there. There is evidence from Australia [1] and the UK [2] that freedom of choice of government schools is related to children travelling greater distances to school.

- **Separated bicycle infrastructure**

Concern about road safety is a key reason why parents do not allow their children to cycle to school [1, 3]. Children are more likely to cycle if there are separated bike paths [4]. Recent [research](#) shows that for teenagers, well separated bike paths are even more important than distance in determining a preference for cycling,

- **Reduced speed limits around schools**

If a pedestrian is struck by a vehicle travelling at 30km/h they are likely to suffer only minor injuries. However, if struck at 60km/h they are likely to be killed [5]. According to the World Health Organization [6] traffic speeds should be 30km/h or less in road environments that are shared between motorized vehicles, cyclist and pedestrians. Higher speeds should be allowed only where roads are designed to allow separation of vehicles, cyclist and pedestrians [6].

- **Provision of bike facilities at schools**

Providing bike facilities at schools, including undercover and secure parking, racks, and pumps is likely to improve active travel to schools [7].

- **Preferred routes to school**

Identification of preferred routes to school (e.g. with safer pedestrian/cyclist infrastructure, low traffic volume) are likely to encourage active transport to school [8].

- **Education for children and parents and community**

The promotion of active transport to school can include educational opportunities in the classroom for children and online or via newsletters for parents. They can learn about how active transport can help them to meet the national physical activity guidelines [9] and the related health benefits. There may also be opportunities to learn about walking and cycling as sustainable forms of transport that can help lower carbon emissions and reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.

Promotion and education also needs to occur into the broader community.

- **Training and skills**

Countries that have high rates of active transport to school have implemented school-based skills training for cycling [10]. Australian research also indicates that cyclists will make safer drivers [11].

- **Ongoing encouragement for walking and cycling to school**

Although good for encouraging walking and cycling at the time of the event, single events such as Walk to School month and Ride to School day are not the only solution if parents return to driving their children once these events have ended [3]. There is a need for ongoing and broadly applied programs that provide sustained interest in active travel – which can include driving part way. Research also shows that children who walk and cycle to school are more focused and ready to learn.

- **Promotion of active travel to local destinations**

There is a need to encourage active transport to other neighbourhood destinations and extra-curricular activities so that children who do not reside within walking/cycling distance to school can still feel engaged and benefit from this activity [1, 12]. (Although families should be reminded that active travel can include being driven part-way.) An Australian study found that parents of primary school-aged children made 3-4 car trips per week to transport their children to places that were within walking distance of home [1].

- **Safety from crime**

If road infrastructure supports walking and cycling by reducing road safety concerns, more adults and children will engage in active transport. As a result there will be greater social interaction on neighbourhood streets as well as informal surveillance. This may help to reduce parental perception of 'stranger danger' which tends to be a further barrier to children's active transport [3, 13].

References

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Appendix B - Funding for inclusion programs in all Government schools

Appendix B- Funding for inclusion programs in all Government schools

Children with additional needs are not limited to students with disabilities. This term includes atypical learners and students with learning difficulties.⁴

Once children start school, they age out of all the pre-school early intervention programmes. DET assume responsibility for these various support programmes. OCOS suggests a more integrated planning approach which will address access, needs and quality provision for students with additional needs delivered within the school. This integrated approach will improve teacher wellbeing and reduce their workload burden.

To assist Victorian Government school students with additional needs, we recommend additional funding, including but not limited to the following areas of specialty services.

Occupational therapy

Occupational Therapy Australia definition

Occupational therapy is an allied health profession that uses scientific evidence to provide interventions that promote the participation of students with disabilities in all of the daily occupations that they want and need to engage in. Occupation refers to activities such as basic self care (i.e. using a tissue, dressing, tying shoes laces; using a toilet; eating or manipulating lunch box items; putting on a coat); school/academic activities (i.e. writing, turning the pages of a book, physical education and using computers) and playing (i.e. socializing with other students in the school grounds, taking turns during games and manipulating art supplies or classroom items). Occupational therapists are skilled professionals who work with students with disabilities to optimize the „fit“ between what students want and need to do, aspects of the school environment and what students are required to do.⁵

...Occupational therapists have a key role in the education and support of teachers and classroom or disability inclusion aides/teachers aides so that the student remains active in the learning environment and enabled to

⁴ <https://www.otaus.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/18/20110524submissionfinal.pdf>
pg15

⁵ <https://www.otaus.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/18/20110524submissionfinal.pdf>
pg4

participate.

Classroom teachers are often primarily responsible for overseeing the needs of their students. Teachers require education and skills to manage the education of students with additional needs. Teachers frequently report that they do not possess the skills or experience to assist students who cannot access the curriculum or school grounds in the way that typically developing students do. This situation creates undue stress for the teacher, the student and the parents of the child.

...The current lack of access to occupational therapists places a burden and liability for teachers, and reduces their capacity to be inclusive. 6

Ensuring that all students have equitable access to occupational therapy services through timely, school-based interventions will foster the development and inclusion of many students with special needs into mainstream schools.⁷

Inclusion of occupational therapists within schools to provide direct occupational therapy services to students (to improve handwriting, practice social skills, learn how to manipulate lunch box items, desk top items, appropriate application of low and high technology, etc).⁸

OCOS recommends that a permanent Occupational Therapist is provided to every Victorian public primary school (metropolitan and regional) rather than at regional level by the 2019 school year to provide education and support services for teachers so that they are well equipped to meet the needs of students with special needs in the classroom. No child is left behind.

⁶ <https://www.otaus.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/18/20110524submissionfinal.pdf>
pg15

⁷ <https://www.otaus.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/18/20110524submissionfinal.pdf>
pg17

⁸ <https://www.otaus.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/18/20110524submissionfinal.pdf>
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Speech therapy

A speech pathologist should be a permanent staff member in every Victorian public school not shared within a region. Timely identification of an individual's language difficulties at a young age and early intervention are the key. It is well documented that undiagnosed communication difficulties can lead to poor outcomes.

The current model of one speech pathologist for one day per week is unsatisfactory and leaves many children behind, especially when they are just under the funded thresholds but even children with ongoing funding remain under-provisioned.

In Australia, it costs \$400-\$800 per day to keep a juvenile in detention. Research indicates 50% of juvenile offenders have an underlying communication difficulty. Around 7000 young people are under juvenile justice supervision. If intervention by a speech pathologist reduced the length of stay by five days for 3500 young people, that is a savings of around \$1.4 million.⁹

To our knowledge only a small handful of schools in Victoria have a permanent speech therapist allocated to one individual school. The current system has many DET speech therapists travelling across large regional area covering multiple schools. This reduces their student face time and could possibly lead to children falling through the gap by not providing timely identification and early intervention support. OCOS calls for a permanent speech therapist in every public Victorian school to assist with earlier screening, communication and improving literacy.

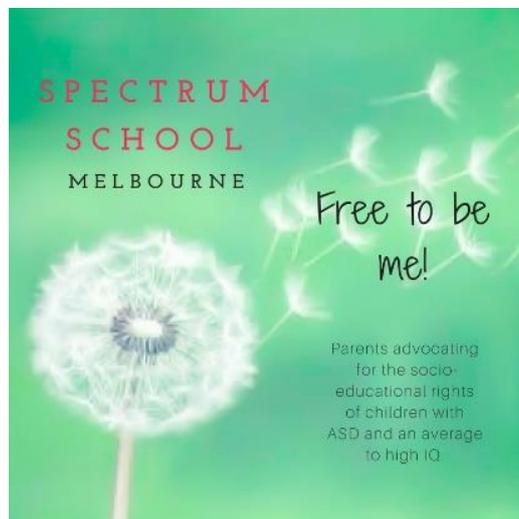
Speech Pathology Australia quote

Communication is a basic human right and Australia needs to do more to facilitate communication access just as we have for wheelchair access.¹⁰

⁹ http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/spaweb/Document_Management/Public/Fact_Sheets.aspx#anchor_lit

¹⁰ <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=06fb3394-1a48-49b8-a22d-71d86fd56bea&subId=510593>

Appendix C - Proposal for a Specialised ASD Learning Program to be piloted in Victoria.



Spectrum School Melbourne is an OCOS alliance member

Appendix C- Proposal for a Specialised ASD Learning Program to be piloted in Victoria.

Submitted To: Minister James Merlino,

cc'd: MP Colin Brooks,

Todd MacBeth, Alan Wilson and Mark Tainsh

Department of Education Victoria

Submit Date: 26th June 2017

Submitted By: Spectrum School Parent Advocacy

Spectrum School Parent Advocacy Contact:

Lisa Whittam

Founder

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Spectrum School is a parent advocacy group, with members exceeding 1,200, advocating for the socio-educational rights of autistic children who have an average to high IQ, and may have comorbidities such as ADHD, ODD and anxiety.

Spectrum School is a member of Our Children Our School (OCOS) an alliance of government school community groups in Victoria headed by Catherine (Cate) Hall.

Many of these students are slipping through the cracks of the current public mainstream school system and we strongly believe they would benefit from a more supportive, nurturing and specialised learning program within Mainstream Schools.

Spectrum School Parent Advocacy are pleased to submit this proposal to improve access to quality education for autistic children who have an average to high IQ. We feel that this proposal shows the need for improved programs, a cost effective yet high quality program which can be implemented within the current Mainstream School Structure and which aligns with the current Government's Inclusion Agenda.

We have an opportunity to transform the lives of some of our most vulnerable children through access to a quality education while providing the necessary tools for them to become active and contributing members of society.

Our Proposal

We propose that The Department of Education Victoria liaise with The Department of Education Western Australia to pilot their Specialised ASD Learning Program in Victoria in a Secondary College in the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne. The program can be released at an inter-departmental level and can then be modified to bring it into line with the Victorian Curriculum F-10

Spectrum School Parent Advocacy have completed some investigations into Secondary Schools. We have a preferred school in mind based on many positive characteristics that we feel will be critical for the success of this program.

Supporting Autistic Students Across the Victorian Education System

At the Departments discretion a separate arrangement could see a University provide research to the Department of Education Victoria, relating to the success of the Specialised ASD Learning Program piloted in Victoria. The Department of Education will then have the option of extending the program by implementing it at other schools at both primary and secondary level across the state.

Why specifically ASD children with an average to high IQ?

Autism is the fastest growing diagnostic category of developmental disorders in children. It is a lifelong condition that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people and their environment. There are thousands of autistic children in our public mainstream schools, many of whom do very well. There is however, a subset of these children who have no intellectual disability, exhibit very complex and challenging behaviours and who require more support than what is currently offered. When their unique needs and behaviours are catered for, these children have amazing potential.

As it currently stands in Victoria, autistic children who have an average to high IQ (high functioning autism):

- Typically do not qualify for a Special School
- Typically do not qualify for an Autism Specific School
- Have no viable public alternatives to mainstream schools
- Typically do not receive any additional individual funding within public mainstream schools
- Often have comorbidities such as ADHD, ODD, SPD, anxiety etc.
- Have high rates of:
 - disengagement, school refusal, being the victim of bullying, moving schools (often multiple times), academic under achievement, social difficulties, anxiety and depression, withdrawal behaviours, severe challenging behaviours.
 - exclusion socially and from school in the form of suspensions, expulsions, exclusions from excursions and camps etc.

- school dropout and/or school refusal
- Have incredible potential IF their needs are met in a supportive and nurturing educational environment.

Spectrum School Parent Advocacy Survey

There is much literature around intervention having huge positive impacts on helping autistic children to live to their full potential. On the flipside however, it is commonly represented (Bureau of Statistic, AMAZE etc.) that 8 out of 10 autistic children do not complete school and unemployment rates disproportionately high for autistic people. Approximately 65% unemployed compared to 6% for the whole population and even significantly higher than all other disabilities. This is a particularly vulnerable cohort of children who, with the right support and funding at school could live to be active, engaged, well educated and employed members of society.

A survey of school experiences of over 300 Victorian families with one or more autistic child/ren with an average to high IQ was conducted by Spectrum School Parent Advocacy in 2016. The results were alarming to say the least. A snapshot of the results include:

- 98% had experienced social or academic difficulties.
- 99% had experienced behavioural issues or difficulties.
- 56% had moved schools at least once due to issues and/or difficulties and 1 in 5 had moved AT LEAST twice.
- 75% had difficulty keeping up at school despite an average or high IQ.
- 82% had difficulty making friends and 77% had difficulty retaining friends.
- 68% experienced bullying.
- 95% suffered anxiety and 54% suffered depression.
- 71% experienced school refusal and 33% were considered a flight risk.
- 70% demonstrated challenging behaviours such as defiance, lashing out and swearing.
- 84% of parents felt teachers were not appropriately trained and $\frac{3}{4}$ of parents felt resistance from a teacher to act on their suggestions or concerns
- 60% of parents felt blamed for things that happened at school.

These results are just the tip of the iceberg. The long term costs to the government are astronomical if you look at the mental health issues and unemployment rates alone. With the implementation of this proposal we would expect a reduction in all of these results.

Specialised ASD Learning Program – Department of Education Western Australia

The Specialised ASD Learning Program was created in Western Australia to help support the socio-educational needs of autistic children who have an average to high IQ, within public mainstream schools. Its implementation into Western Australian schools began with, Gosnells P.S., in 2017. The program will be rolled out to a total of 16 Western Australian schools by 2020.

The program is specifically aimed at autistic children of average to high IQ and who are not currently coping within mainstream schools. The program schools manage the enrolment process, guided by specific eligibility criteria for students:

- a diagnosis of autism;
- no diagnosed intellectual disability;
- significant social, emotional and/or behavioural issues and challenges directly attributed to the impact of autism;
- independent self-management of personal care requirements; and
- eligibility for enrolment in Western Australian public schools.

The teaching and learning aspects of the programs are in line with the Western Australian Curriculum (and can be modified to bring it into line with Victorian Curriculum F-10). The programs use principles and methodologies of effective, evidenced-based teaching structures including 'explicit teaching' and 'positive behaviour support' which will help students to achieve their best. Each student will have an individual education plan which will address their specific needs associated with autism. They are also continually reviewing the Program Operational Framework based on the experiences of the first school.

Due to the complex needs of these students, the program uses a combination of mainstream classes with support as well as small group work with specialist teachers focusing on academic engagement, organisation skills, social thinking, peer relationships, self regulation as well as guidance and support to transition into life after school. Students participating in the program are, at all times, active members of a mainstream school while still receiving the specialised support that they require to succeed at school.

We propose that this Specialised ASD Learning Program be piloted in a Northern Suburbs Secondary School in Victoria. Spectrum School Parent Advocacy have completed some investigations into Secondary Schools. We have a preferred school in mind based on many positive characteristics that we feel will be critical for the success of the program.

Stuart Percival, who has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the Specialised ASD Learning Program in Western Australia has confirmed that, at an inter-Departmental level, permission can be granted to release the revised framework to Victoria. He welcomes any enquires about this.

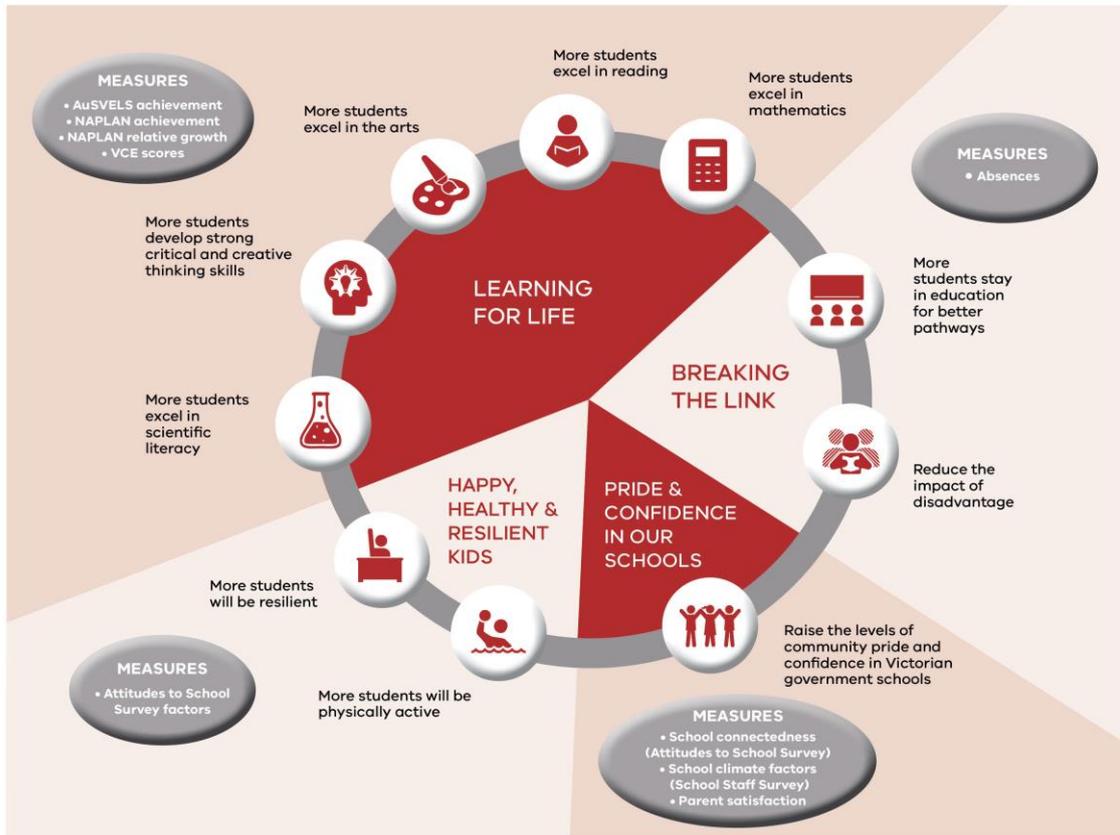
Key Contact:

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School of Special Educational Need: Disability

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Framework for Improving Student Outcomes

The proposed program will support the Victorian State Government to meet the goals articulated in the Education State Plan and operate within DET policies and protocols.



Expected Results

Any potential University research and other DET measures such as the Parent, Staff and Student Opinion surveys, school attendance rate and assessment data would form the basis of program outcomes analysis. The following anecdotal benefits would be expected.

Benefits to Autistic Students

- Ease of transition from Primary to Secondary School.
- Improved academic engagement and results.
- Improved school attendance and retention.
- Improved mental health and self worth.
- Improved feeling of inclusion and acceptance, improved friendships and social skills.
- Improved self regulation and organisational skills.
- Increased rates of school completion and improved prospects when transitioning to life after Secondary School.
- Improved family relationships.

Benefits to School

- Reduced principal/administrative time spent dealing with behaviours of concern and/or disengagement in education.
- Inclusive strategies and environment will benefit all student regardless of their abilities and background.
- Reduction of disruptive behaviours; promotion of safe, orderly and positive learning environments.
- Improved morale for both staff and students.

Other Benefits

- Reduced trauma and incidence of mental health issues for autistic students associated with multiple school transitions, disruptive behaviours/exclusion and school refusal.
- Reduced incidences of bullying through a more inclusive school approach.
- Reduced long term costs associated with unemployment, disability or other welfare benefits.
- Reduction of the number of autistic students outside of the government mainstream school system eg. Home Schooling, Distance Education, Coburg Teaching Unit, Alternative Education Venues etc
- Support for the wider education system: provision of a model of best practice that supports the Department's goals (FISO), supports successful inclusion and the implementation of School Wide Positive Behavior Support.

Timeline

We propose the following timeline for the first students to benefit from the Specialised ASD Learning Program at a pilot school:

2017:

- Discussion between the stakeholders – including DET Vic and DET WA and Pilot School

- Finalisation of the Agreement.

2018:

- Planning and preparations for the program including staffing, resources and framework.
- First group of children identified for participation in program for the beginning of the 2019 school year.
- *DET have the option to make a separate arrangement with a University for research.*

2019:

- Implementation and first group of children to participate in the program at a Pilot School

2020 and beyond:

- The program moves into its 2nd year etc.
- DET Vic have the option to extend the program to