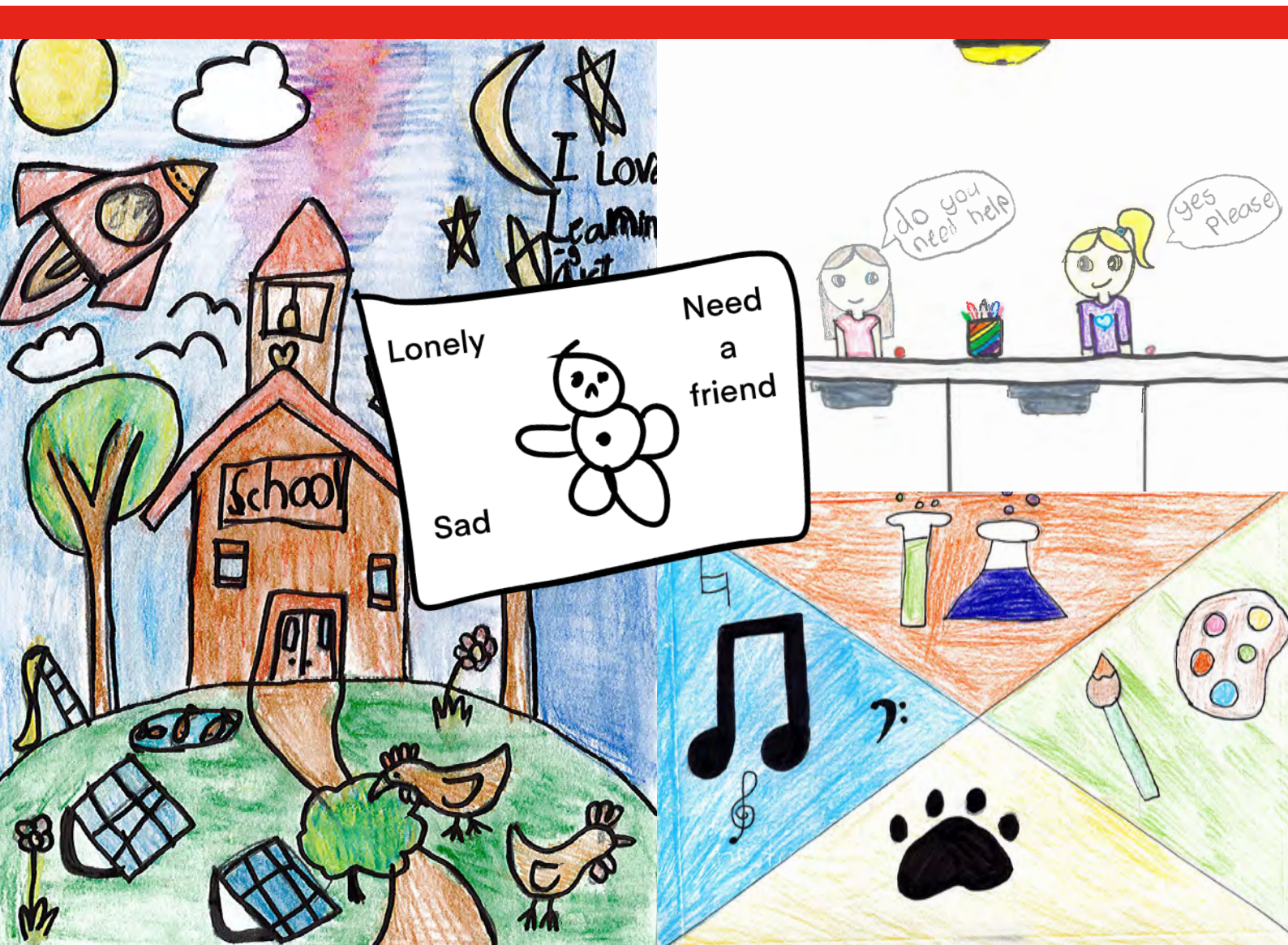# Learning at home during COVID-19: Effects on vulnerable young Australians

Independent Rapid Response Report

April 2020

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About the Peter Underwood Centre

The Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment is a partnership between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian State Government in association with the Office of the Governor of Tasmania.

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Terminology

Allied professional	Professional staff, other than teachers, who support students in schools, including psychologists, social workers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists.
Family	Two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering, and who usually live in the same household (ABS 2016c).
Home	The dwelling in which school students are undertaking their 'learning at home', including residential care homes.
Learning at home	School students undertaking their formal school learning in their home rather than on the school site, supported by their school and parents/carers, in the specific context of COVID-19. (In the context of COVID-19 also referred to as Remote Learning)
Online learning	Delivering learning programs through a digital device, inclusive of a range of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT), including mobile learning.
Blended learning	Employing a combination of both online learning, and face-to-face synchronous learning on an educational site in order to meet learning objectives.

Glossary

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTAC	Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres
AHPPC	Australian Health Protection Principal Committee
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

ANU	Australian National University
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AOD	Alcohol & Other Drugs
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ASBA	Australian School Based Apprenticeships
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CACF	Count of All Children in Family
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEDA	Committee for Economic Development of Australia
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DoE	Department of Education (Tasmania)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
HPE	Health and Physical Education
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGPA	Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis
IRD	Index of Relative Disadvantage
LSAY	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
MDT	Materials Design and Technology
MH	Mental Health
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
NBN	National Broadband Network
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
OOHC	Out Of Home Care
PAYG	Pay As You Go
PE	Physical Education
PDHPE	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
ROGS	Report on Government Services
SA2	Statistical Area Level 2
SES	Socioeconomic status
SLN	Special Learning Needs
TAFE	Technical And Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
TasCOSS	Tasmanian Council of Social Service
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSW	University of NSW
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia

Executive summary

Nearly half the national school student population is at risk of having their learning and wellbeing significantly compromised by not being at school because they are in a vulnerable group, due to their young age; social disadvantage; specific needs; or family employment context.

As soon as health restrictions permit there is an urgent need to reconnect these students to the physical context of school-based learning to support their learning and wellbeing outcomes. Concurrently there is a need to invest rapidly in developing significant capability in schools to deliver education both online and on-site.

FOR HEALTH REASONS EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA HAS SHIFTED TO PREDOMINANTLY HOME-BASED, ONLINE LEARNING

The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and the virus has now spread to each State and Territory in Australia. To help contain the spread of COVID-19 a significant number of public, Catholic and independent schools have implemented home-based, online and offline learning.

HOWEVER, THE HOME-BASED, ONLINE MODEL IS HARMING LEARNING, ESPECIALLY IN THE EARLY YEARS AND IN VULNERABLE GROUPS

Nearly half (46%) of Australian children and young people are at risk adverse effects on their educational outcomes, nutrition, physical movement, social, and emotional wellbeing by being physically disconnected from school.

It is already clear that nationally, children and young people are experiencing learning losses. This means that there will not be the expected cognitive gains for these students over the period of learning at home. These losses will cause a delay in cognitive gain and achievement in some students and result in others being lost to the education system. The impacts are particularly evident in:

- the early years, which are critical years for learning, with an established body of research demonstrating the return on investments made in these years;
- vulnerable students for whom learning loss is difficult to recover;
- students who are at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged, noting that the longer they are away from school the higher the likelihood that they will never adjust or re-engage;
- students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds; and
- students undertaking VET subjects who are unable to do their practical or workplace-based components.

The reason for these losses is that many families lack the physical spaces, technology and other resources to support learning at home. Additionally, many parents and caregivers lack the time needed to support their children's learning. This is occurring irrespective of socio-economic status, with full-time waged and sole parent-waged families reporting difficulties.

Further, parents who have lower levels of educational attainment, or have limited capability with technology, face particular challenges in facilitating children's learning at home.

More broadly, despite the best efforts, a great many teaching staff have not previously had to develop the specialist skills required to develop and deliver online learning and are required to upskill very quickly, exacerbating the challenge of sustaining the rate of learning and level of engagement.

The gap in digital inclusion across Australia means that online learning is not possible, or suitable, for all students.

In addition to the learning losses, many families, especially those in vulnerable groups, are confused and stigmatised by the current policy positions.

A TARGETED STRATEGY OF PHYSICAL RE-ENGAGEMENT AT SCHOOL COULD MITIGATE MANY OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

There is a need for a coherent cross-jurisdictional communications strategy and implementation plan to incentivise and support vulnerable students to physically attend school. The strategy should:

- Ensure schools have the safety protocols in place for physical reconnection of a significant number of students including ensuring that allied professional staff (social workers, psychologists, speech pathologists, and school nurses) are able to provide services on site where possible.
- Where full time reconnection of a significant number is not going to be possible for safety or logistical reasons plan for a blend of on-line and physical presence through a week.
- Encourage universal full-time on-site attendance for pre-school to year 2 nationally.
- Utilise direct and personalised invitations to specific vulnerable school students and their families/carers to see those students attend school and complement this group with invitations to a balanced cohort of students to reduce stigmatisation of specific groups and 'normalise' attendance.
- Enable universal on-site attendance at dedicated Flexible Learning Options, Schools for Special Purposes and Re-Engagement Programs nationally.
- Invest in targeted and personalised learner engagement for students who are not physically attending and who cannot access online learning, are not engaging in learning, or are at risk of disengaging over the short and long term.
- Invest in, and support, teachers:
  - to manage the increased workload of teaching both offline and online by providing additional staffing on a short-term basis: teachers, teacher assistants, and social/youth workers; and
  - with professional learning for skills and expertise in the creation of non-school based learning strategies, such as high-quality online content, lower technology radio, as well as television content; and
  - for re-engagement and trauma-informed approaches for the most vulnerable students.
- Recognise that the necessary input from parents to support learning at home goes beyond physical provision of resources. Many families require additional support beyond the current web-based material (e.g. utilisation of television and radio, as well as outreach through community networks, and support in the moment).

THIS STRATEGY HAS ONLY MODERATE COST AND REGULATORY ISSUES

Most of the cost will likely be related to additional resourcing at the commencement of the strategy and short to medium terms, as well as for teams with ongoing responsibility for implementation and oversight of operations, and reporting. Immediate investment can achieve social impact through maximising the value created by Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Government spending on education.

The financial costs may include:

- provision for teachers to have time to enhance skills in, and implement, online pedagogy;
- additional resources for allied professionals within schools;
- co-construction and implementation of an Indigenous strategy;
- attendance incentivisation strategies;
- resources to facilitate learning in the home (e.g. a national hotline for parents supporting their children's learning; TV and radio content; enabling part-time employment for a period with Commonwealth support to sustain full-time equivalent superannuation entitlements); and
- provision to effectively resource and implement Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) safety regimes.

There could be a consideration of regulatory changes to enable final year pre-service teachers to work on Limited Authority to Teach or as Teacher Assistants; and counting those hours worked towards practicum. This group may provide a valuable additional resource for schools.

THERE ARE KEY RISKS AND SENSITIVITIES TO THE STRATEGY

- There are risks and sensitivities in targeting specific groups to attend school as it can be stigmatising and counterproductive. The risk of stigmatisation does not only include students who may be classified as 'at risk' or vulnerable, but also children of essential workers, who may be perceived by other parents/children to be carrying the virus.
- States and Territories may resist elements of a national approach. Integrating the communications plan with known positions can mitigate this risk.
- Negotiating a consistent cross-sectoral approach (public, Catholic and independent schools) will alleviate parent and care-giver confusion.
- There is a risk that employers are unable to effectively meet workplace health and safety and other industrial relations obligations on school sites.
- There is a risk of industrial disputes if changed practices are not effectively negotiated and lawfully implemented.

THE STRATEGY HAS CLEAR MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The strategy mitigates risk of educational losses into the future. The success of the strategy could be measured by assessing:

- the pre- and post-COVID-19 attendance rates of children and young people across jurisdictions;
- the pre- and post-COVID-19 suspension and exclusion rates of children and young people across jurisdictions;
- engagements with online learning;
- the pre- and post-COVID-19 rates of workplace health and safety incidents;
- the pre- and post-COVID-19 incidence of industrial disputes;
- the pre- and post-COVID-19 rate of VET completions; and
- the expanded capacity, nationally, to respond to pandemics in the future.

Mitigating the risk to future educational losses requires:

- Annual evaluation of readiness and capacity to respond to a pandemic, which could include more in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of different online pedagogies and strategies for different cohorts:
  - Establishing performance indicators upfront to minimise pressure on States and Territories through the process.
- Longitudinal research tracking the impact on educational inequality and identifying effective measures to mitigate the risk of increasing inequality due to COVID-19.

ASSUMPTIONS BASED ON AHPPC ADVICE

The strategy assumes that:

- advice from the AHPPC published 16 April 2020 on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools is followed;
- each jurisdiction considers their local epidemiology and context; and
- the AHPPC position that there is a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools is correct.

1   Introduction

Key Finding 1

There are a large number of Australian children and young people who are vulnerable to adverse effects on their educational outcomes, nutrition, physical movement, social, and emotional wellbeing by being physically disconnected from school. This number is estimated to be 46% of the student population.

The dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic requires each jurisdiction to develop responsive and adaptable policy positions in relation to many facets of government responsibility. Each of the national and state level governments is developing an approach that reflects their local epidemiology and context. Finding a balance between attenuating for place and advancing a coherent and equitable strategy to support the learning for vulnerable Australian children and young people requires urgent attention and investment. Appendix A provides an overview of the National Principles for School Education agreed by the National Cabinet on 16 April 2020.

Much of the debate about keeping schools fully or partially open has been based on health and economic imperatives. These are important concerns. This report adds a different, and essential, perspective on children and young people (and their parents and caregivers) and their learning at home. The key question is:

What are the impacts of learning at home during COVID-19 for vulnerable young Australians?

Students are a crucial – perhaps even the most important – 'stakeholder' in education, but they have been relatively invisible in the debates to date.

Teachers and other staff in schools (and other organisations) are doing tremendous work to support the learning of all students, including those from vulnerable backgrounds. Throughout this report, examples are highlighted of the ways in which these professionals are providing important support for learning at home, often in innovative ways – and in ways that go well above and beyond what can usually be expected of them.

Upfront, this report acknowledges the mammoth effort and deep commitment of educators and other professionals around the country to prevent and mitigate negative effects of learning at home, especially for vulnerable children and young people. Their workload has been, and will continue to be, significantly magnified. The report also recognises concerns about the health not only of students but also of all school staff, and the importance of following the advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC, 16 April 2020) on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.

Understanding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) and the implications of balancing rights in the context of COVID-19 were key considerations underpinning our approach. In particular our understandings of Articles 28 and Article 29.1 which set out the aims and rights of children and young people to an education were key.

In addition to the UNCRC, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration forms a foundation for the report, in particular the statement that:

> Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives. (Education Council 2019: 4)

1.1 Learners and learning

The focus of this report is on school students, beginning with those in preschool in the year prior to full time school, all the way up to those in Year 12 (see Figure 1), specifically those who are vulnerable and whose education may be impacted by learning at home during COVID-19 (see 1.2).

Australian School-Aged Learners

Early Years F-2

We are children aged 4-8. We bring a wide range of experiences, abilities, needs, and interests.

We build on our learning from the Early Years Learning Framework. We have a natural curiosity about the world. Our desire to make sense of the world provides a platform to plan and review our learning through interactions with others, experimentation, scaffolding, explicit teaching, practice, and play in the classroom and beyond.

Upper Primary Years 3-6

We are children aged 8-12. We have been in schooling for a few years now and understand how school works.

Our learning is focused on assisting us to develop: our ability to take positive action for well-being; relate and communicate well with others; pose questions and solve problems; make informed decisions and act responsibly. We are engaged more purposefully with the discipline knowledge, understanding, and skills of the eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum.

Secondary 7-10

We are teenagers aged 12-16. Most of us have moved to a different high school after our primary school.

We continue to learn across a broad range of learning areas and capabilities, deepening our knowledge and skills, as well as our general capabilities. We enjoy the opportunity to start making more choices to specialise in learning we are interested in.

Senior Secondary 11-12

We are young people aged 16-18, pursuing our plans for the future.

Our learning is now aligned with what we are interested in and think we want to do after school. We may be focusing on hands-on learning, including vocational credentials, or on theoretical learning to lead to university.

Figure 1: Key learner groups in mainstream schooling, adapted from the Australian Curriculum

The report recognises that learning is dynamic and is influenced by both individual factors and structural conditions and factors, and takes a broad view of learning, including:

- the formal curriculum, defined by the learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curricular capabilities identified in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2020 website);
- play-based learning, especially for early childhood, and project-based learning, especially for older students;
- vocational learning, for example through VET in school and school-based apprenticeships;
- non-formal learning, for example by engaging in home tasks such as cooking or gardening; and
- engagement with learning.

Schools are critical institutions for the future of children and young people. The education program offered by and through schools is holistic and comprehensive. Apart from supporting learning in the broadest sense (as indicated above), schools also provide:

- support for students' health and wellbeing;
- specific programs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students;
- specific programs for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students;
- adjustments for students with a disability;
- support for children and families who are experiencing economic hardship, or who face challenging social and personal circumstances; and
- advice and support for other agencies supporting vulnerable students and families, for example in relation to child protection.

1.2 Vulnerability

COVID-19 presents unprecedented challenges for children's and young people's learning. More than half of the world's students have been affected by not being able to physically attend school in at least 120 countries (UNICEF 2020a). Understanding the impacts of learning at home for Australian school aged children requires an understanding of vulnerability within the specific context of COVID-19.

At times, social and education policy considers all children and young people to be vulnerable, simply by virtue of their age – due to their cognitive development as well as social limits on their ability to control or manage factors and situations that affect them (Te Riele 2015). In 2010, a government report into Victoria's vulnerable young people described them as young people:

> who, through a combination of their stage of life, individual, family and community circumstances and barriers to participation, are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes (Victorian Government 2010: 3)

During COVID-19 to some extent all Australian students may be regarded as vulnerable, in the sense of having their education disrupted. However, evidence from the disruption to education following the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch in New Zealand shows that the academic performance of many students recovered well (Hattie 2020). For the current context, Hattie argues that:

> The most likely implication of school closures relates to equity. Students who come from well resourced families will fare much better than those from lower resourced families. ... Remember, we made schooling compulsory because teachers are better at teaching than

parents. We need to be doubly concerned about those students who most need teacher expertise. (Hattie 2020: n.p.)

Treating all school students as vulnerable creates a significant risk that that those children who are particularly vulnerable do not get the support they need. This is due to a number of factors: the scarcity of resources, and the danger of them being spread too thinly; more generalised support may not match the specific needs of the most vulnerable students; and, those who are most vulnerable may become relatively invisible in the midst of widespread cries for help.

Similar to the practice of triage in emergency medicine, identifying which children and young people most require support for their learning helps schools, education systems and other agencies to make the best possible choices in this complex situation (Te Riele 2015).

It is also important to recognise that vulnerability is a dynamic characteristic of particular children and young people – it changes as circumstances evolve. It is widely acknowledged that vulnerability is associated with a diverse range of factors, and these can be cumulative in effect.

Children and young people identified in vulnerable groups will themselves have a variety of experiences and viewpoints. It has also been recognised that identifying children and young people as vulnerable can have effects that are both negative (in particular stigma) and positive (providing support where it is needed) (Brown 2017; Cummins, Scott, & Scales 2012; te Riele 2015; Victorian Government 2010).

Keeping those complexities in mind, this report identifies five specific groups who are vulnerable to negative impacts of learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1: Severe social and educational exclusion

Children and young people who are already facing severe social and educational exclusion, including children and young people:

- in Out of Home Care (OOHC);
- in families where there is domestic violence or neglect, or drug or alcohol addiction;
- in youth justice themselves, or with parents/carers in jail or before the court;
- who are homeless; and/or
- who are already significantly disengaged from school education.

(Commission for Children and Young People Act Vic 2012; Miranti et al. 2018; Victorian Government 2010; Watterston & O'Connell 2019)

2: Facing persistent disadvantage

Traditional markers of disadvantage include children and young people who:

- are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds;
- are of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds;
- are themselves carers for parents and/or siblings;
- live in rural and regional areas; and/or
- who live in poverty.

(Davidson et al. 2020; Productivity Commission 2018; Australian Government 2020)

Not all students in these groups are educationally or socially disadvantaged, and care needs to be taken not to stigmatise all children and young people who share particular demographic characteristics. Persistent disadvantage is most likely when children and young people not only belong to one (or more) of the first four groups but also live in poverty.

3: Newly disadvantaged due to COVID-19 context
The COVID-19 context has placed students into social and educational disadvantage which they had not previously experienced. In particular this includes children and young people:

- in families where the primary wage earner has lost their job; and/or
- with a disability or health condition, who had been provided with supports in school which do not transfer (easily) to the home.

4: Working families in COVID-19 context
Families where all parents/carers in the household have full time employment face challenges for supporting the learning of their children at home.

5: Families supporting learning in the early years
Providing quality early years education is *particularly* difficult over an extended period within the home and is *critically* important to lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes.

Figure 2 indicates estimates for the number of children and young people in each group (see Appendix B for details on calculation).

Noting that there is likely to be some overlap between groups, a conservative estimate is that 2 million children and young people are likely to be vulnerable to negative impacts of learning at home in the context of COVID-19.

There are almost 4.3 million students enrolled in formal schools and preschool in the year before full time school starts (ABS 2020c; Productivity Commission 2020a).

This means about 46% of (pre-) school children and young people are vulnerable in some way in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2: Estimated number of children and young people who are educationally vulnerable in COVID-19 context

1.3 Overview of our approach

The scope of this enquiry was based on one central question:

> What are the impacts of learning at home during COVID-19 for vulnerable young Australians?

This report is presented at a time when there is significant change, debate and evidence being presented regarding the many impacts of COVID-19. Rapid response reports have particular value for policy makers when circumstances are changing quickly (RICS 2014: n.p.):

> What distinguishes this rapid response work from other policy-relevant research is the provision of high-quality information at relative speed (from two weeks to several months), and the relationships of collaboration and trust built up with government officials.

The rapid response nature of this report prohibited seeking insights from students and parents/carers directly. Instead, the report draws on secondary sources that include their views – and on the insights of professional staff who work with children and young people and/or with parents and carers. The limited timeframe for this report also necessitated a purposeful approach to our inquiry. Pragmatic research methodology offers an action-oriented research framework oriented towards social issues which affect the pursuit of equality and justice (Kaushik and Walsh 2019; Koenig 2019). It is focussed on generating practical insights and informed understandings of real-life conditions and has significant utility in social and educational research.

The request from the Federal Minister for Education, Hon. Dan Tehan, MP, for a report on the impact of learning at home on vulnerable children and young people was received by the Peter Underwood Centre on 9 April 2020. The work was conducted and report completed between 9-23 April 2020.
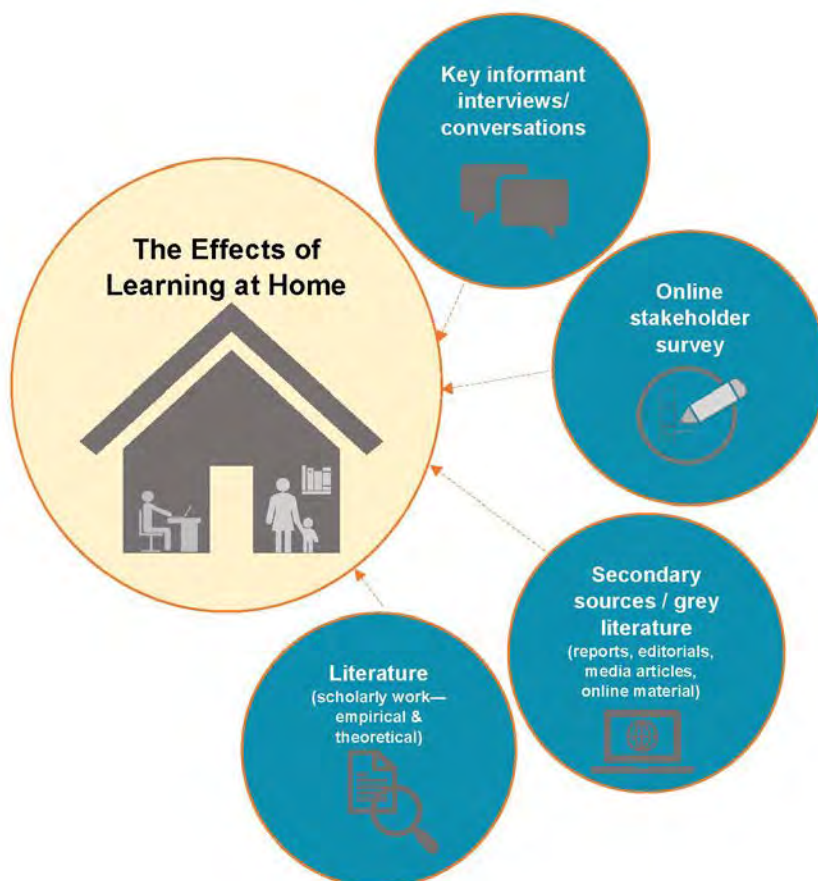

Figure 3: Research approach

Employing a pragmatic approach enabled prioritising the most fruitful mix of methods, in order to place the key question at the centre of research decisions (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2008). Figure 3 illustrates the key methods and sources of information we used to inform our inquiry.

The first set of primary data is from direct communication with key informants, either through conversation (n=35) or via email (n=16). In addition, an online survey was distributed directly to specific staff and through relevant organisations, with 70 responses received. All states and territories were represented in the primary data. Table 1 provides an overview of the primary data.

Table 1: Key informants and survey respondents, role/organisation

Nature of the role / organisation	Direct communication	Online survey
School-based staff and leaders (cross-sectoral)	20	29
Education system staff and leaders (cross-sectoral)	7	12
Other government department	1	0
Commissioner for Children and Young People staff	5	0
NGOs, Foundations and peak bodies focused on education	9	7
NGOs, Foundations and peak bodies focused on social support	7	13
NGOs, Foundations and peak bodies focused on specific groups	2	2
Other (researchers, parents/carers)	0	7

Key principles of ethical research have been adhered to, in particular by ensuring informed and voluntary consent to participate, and maintenance of confidentiality. Direct quotes in the report are attributed based on the roles / organisations in table 1 above.

The guiding questions for both key informants and the survey are in Appendix C. The nature of secondary sources used to inform the report is outlined in Appendix D.

Key findings:

There are a large number of Australian children and young people who are vulnerable to adverse effects on their educational outcomes, nutrition, physical movement, social, and emotional wellbeing by being physically disconnected from school. This number is estimated to be 46% of the student population.

There is an urgent need to reconnect students, especially early-years and vulnerable students, to the physical context of school-based learning to support learning and wellbeing outcomes.

Children and young people are experiencing learning loss over the period of learning at home. This delay in cognitive gain and achievement is more difficult to recover for some cohorts of students, and for others may result in them being lost to the education system.

Concurrently there is a need to invest rapidly in developing significant capability in schools to deliver education both online and on-site.

Readjustment on return to school will be challenging for many students, especially those who are impacted by trauma, or who have been newly exposed to trauma or impacts of poverty as a result of COVID-19.

2   Highly vulnerable children and young people

> ### Key Finding 2
>
> There is an urgent need to reconnect vulnerable students, to the physical context of school-based learning to support learning and wellbeing outcomes.

This chapter highlights the impacts of learning from home on the most vulnerable children and young people, identified as groups 1 and 2 in Chapter 1: those facing 'severe social and educational exclusion' or ' persistent disadvantage'.

As argued by UNESCO (2020b):

> confinement and school closures often have longer term consequences, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized, magnifying already-existing disparities within the education system. In addition to the missed opportunities for learning, many children and youth lose access to healthy meals, and are subjected to economic and social stress.

This view was also expressed by many key informants, who were acutely aware of the particularly deep impact on vulnerable students from not attending school.

> *Our young people who are already significantly marginalised and excluded from education, are being further disadvantaged. It is often a significant challenge to engage our young people in their education and as a result get them engaged positively in society. They are missing both the academic and socialising aspects of their education. (School-based staff in Education focused NGO; survey)*

Two issues are addressed below: (1) concerns around child safety and (2) provision of basic needs.

2.1 Child safety

The personal safety of some children and young people is a major concern. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) states:

> 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
>
> 2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* demonstrates a shared commitment of federal, state and territory governments to ensuring that "Australia's children and young people are safe and well" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 11). The Framework identifies seven principles to underpin action (2009: 12):

1. All children have a right to grow up in an environment free from neglect and abuse. Their best interests are paramount in all decisions affecting them.
2. Children and their families have a right to participate in decisions affecting them.
3. Improving the safety and wellbeing of children is a national priority.
4. The safety and wellbeing of children is primarily the responsibility of their families, who should be supported by their communities and governments.
5. Australian society values, supports and works in partnership with parents, families and others in fulfilling their caring responsibilities for children.
6. Children's rights are upheld by systems and institutions.
7. Policies and interventions are evidence based.

In the current context, a major concern identified by many of our key informants was for those Australian children and young people who are not safe at home.

> *Lack of safety due to factors including parental substance abuse, mental health issues, poverty and family violence. (School-based staff working with K-12 students; survey)*

Child protection

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (Department of Social Services 2009) recognises all governments as well as non-government agencies do important work at the level of universal preventative initiatives, early intervention, and targeted services for the most vulnerable families. In addition, government departments in each state and territory have responsibility for statutory child protection.

For some professional groups (such as teachers) it is mandatory to report concerns, but any community member is able to make a voluntary report.

In the period 2018-19, 170 200 Australian children received child protection services. This includes investigation of a notification and (for 42%) also a care and protection order and/or placement in out-of-home care. Substantiated notifications were most common for emotional abuse (54%) and neglect (21%) (AIHW 2020a).

For these students, not being able to attend school is of particular concern, both for their wellbeing and for their learning:

> *We have identified concerns for children and young people who may not be safe at home due to family violence issues. For this group, school becomes a safe place to report, or a place where trained educators, and trusted adults who know the students, can check in, or tune in to clues that there may be a risk to the wellbeing of the student. Without a physical connection to the school, the opportunities for these young people to report that they are feeling unsafe are restricted. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

Rise in child safety concerns

In the context of COVID-19, the risk to children's safety is increasing (Menzies 2020; Sistovaris et al. 2020; The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action 2019; Women's Safety NSW 2020; Woods 2020). Domestic violence workers are reporting additional and worsening violence in homes already known to agencies (Women's Safety NSW 2020). A report in *The Lancet* suggests that:

> Evidence shows that violence and vulnerability increase for children during periods of school closures associated with health emergencies. Rates of reported child abuse rise during school closures. Parents and children are living with increased stress, media hype, and fear, all challenging our capacity for tolerance and long-term thinking. For many, the economic impact of the crisis increases parenting stress, abuse, and violence against children. (Cluver et al. 2020: e64)

These risks to child safety extend to homes and families not previously subject to such reports, with "a sharp increase in violence being reported for the first time (47.5% up from 15.9% last week)" (Women's Safety NSW 2020). This additional concern was also recognised by key informants:

> *We know that there will be kids that come on our radar that have never been before, that is the reality of what we are dealing with as the social and economic effects and stress of the situation happen. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

At present, police in one jurisdiction report that they are not seeing evidence of an upward trend in the overall number of family violence reports (Other Government Department; direct communication). However, it is acknowledged that family violence is traditionally under-reported and there is an increased degree of difficulty in reporting in the current context. There is regular cross-jurisdictional monitoring of family violence issues, and close monitoring of areas where there is a high degree of self-isolation and/or quarantine being undertaken.

Not only has access to support at school become restricted, other agencies offering relevant services (such as for child protection, alcohol and other drug support, housing, and community correction orders) also are constrained in the way they work during the COVID-19 lockdown.

> *College Social Worker regularly sees vulnerable students. She connects them to outside support services (e.g. youth workers, housing, Relationships Australia, Centrelink, child protection, mental health services). She also works with and liaises with outside support services who students are already working with. She is concerned as many of these outside agencies have had their operations cut (e.g. no more home visits, face to face counselling) This means the students are losing points of contact that check in or account for their well-being. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

The likelihood of an increased risk to child safety, together with reduced identification in schools and reduced support by a range of services "places additional pressure on police" (government department; direct communication). This may also lead to escalation of responses into the criminal domain, compared to the early intervention approach adopted in schools and other agencies.

Lack of respite

When vulnerable children and young people are at school, this not only provides a safe space for these students but also respite for parents/carers. There are particular concerns for parents/carers of children with significant disabilities and for foster carers.

Her son [who has a disability] does attend school and is provided with significant support. School is the time when she has respite and works casually. She has lost her employment, and is now unable to afford some of the additional services she was receiving and her son too, such as from an occupational therapist and psychologist. (NGO – Disability sector; direct communication)

You've got to have families that can function together, that can deal with it – basically you get up 5 or 6 times a night to turn him [child with severe physical disability] … if you're on your own doing that…. you get really tired…. There is no respite. This is also an issue for kids in care – there is no respite for care workers anymore – weekend respite, holiday respite, to focus on their own families. (Education system staff; direct communication)

The vast majority of children in Out Of Home Care (OOHC) are looked after in foster families: 52% in relative/kinship care and 39% in foster care (AIHW 2020a). Key informants expressed concern about "Increased pressure on foster parents in already complex scenarios" (School-based staff; survey). With children and adults now all in the house and without access to respite, there is a risk that kinship and foster carers cannot cope and ask for child protection agencies to find an alternative placement.

What I am aware of, I don't know if this is official, a number of our foster families are saying, because they've got their own kids at home now, they don't want foster kids. And they're saying 'you have to take them, we don't want them, we've got our own three kids at home all the time now and that's enough, we can't manage two more'. So there are some young people who are being displaced. (Education system staff; direct communication).

Foster children and families are not coping with the extra stresses due to children being at home all the time. An example is a foster family who asked [agency] to remove a foster child because he had got so frustrated by lockdown that he took a kitchen knife and stabbed the family dog. (NGO – education-focused; direct communication)

Kinship care is especially important in Aboriginal communities. A carer commented:

Having been active in the kinship care community, I know that many kinship carers do not have the necessary resources, or education themselves, to adequately oversee their young person. Again, the fractured relationship potential is enormous. (Other – Parent/carer; survey)

2.2 Provision of basic needs

It is incontrovertible that the provision of the most basic needs – shelter, food – are critically important to children and young people's health and welfare. Childhood is an important time for healthy development and learning, and for establishing the foundation blocks of future wellbeing, but it is also a time of vulnerability (AIHW 2020d: 2). When parents/carers experience significant economic and social disadvantage, a child's healthy development and learning can be critically affected.

The Australian economy is experiencing significant disruption due to COVID-19. Two thirds (66%) of Australian businesses reported that their turnover or cash flow had reduced as a result of COVID-19, according to results from the second Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey on *Business Impacts of COVID-19*. Over half (60%) of those with a job who worked fewer hours in the last week because of COVID-19 said it was due to a reduction in the amount of work available, whilst 15% said it was because they were stood down by their employer (ABS 2020b).

For Indigenous families, poverty is by far the biggest negative impact on children's academic achievements (Langton et al. 2009). Indigenous scholars advocate a systemic, rather than 'bolt-on' approach to support Indigenous education (Ma Rhea 2014; Langton et al. 2009). This approach is especially important in the context of COVID-19. Each jurisdiction is encouraged to engage in the practice of a culturally safe process of engagement with and listening to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Atkinson 2002). A key informant observed that:

> *in Aboriginal communities where the Aunties are instrumental in making sure children attend school, and they are in quarantine, usual routines are potentially disrupted. Any interruptions to cultural identity can have a long term effect. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

'The Nest', is an evidence-based child and youth wellbeing framework (ARACY 2020). 'The Nest' framework identifies that basic needs and material resources are essential to support children's well-being, and in the context of this report, engagement in learning.

> A child's participation in education falls within the learning domain; but their ability to confidently engage with education will rely heavily on their having a supportive home environment (being loved and safe) and having access to educational materials (having material basics). (Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework 2018-2021, Tasmanian Government 2018)

Morrissey, Hutchinson and Winsler (2014) note that socio-economic disadvantage impacts engagement in and success in formal education, influencing both attendance and attainment. Due to COVID-19, a growing number of households will experience the effects of socio-economic disadvantage and the challenges it creates. During COVID-19, learning from home requires that households and parents'/carers' basic needs are being met, with secure food and shelter being critical.

> *It is well established that the background of our vulnerable and disadvantaged participant group is often associated with factors that compromise children's ability to learn in school at any time. (NGO – social service focused; survey)*

A recent report into 'Australia's Children' by the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2020d) reviewed data across seven people-centred domains (health, education, social support, household income and finance, parental employment, housing, and justice and safety) and suggests that the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- is increasing the number of vulnerable children and young people who are unable to have their basic needs met; and
- is creating new vulnerabilities and risk factors in households that have never been vulnerable or experienced multiple risk factors before.

Adequate food and nutrition

A key issue that emerged in our consultations is that existing and emerging vulnerable children are often experiencing material deprivations such as food security.

> *The impacts of these on all aspects of a child's life, including their ability to learn at home is severe. I believe many families will be struggling to put food on the table. Nutrition and adequate amount of food are very important for general health but also learning. (School based staff – primary; direct communication)*

A 2019 report from Foodbank revealed that around 21% (n=815 000) of people receiving food relief were less than 19 years old (n=171 150), and 11% or (n=89 650) were 14 or under (McCrindle 2019). School holidays contribute to food insecurity amongst children and young people (Stewart, Watson & Campbell 2018). Children lose access to free meals such as breakfast and lunches (as well as food provided by before and after school care), provided by schools that provide nutrition.

The majority of our survey respondents expressed concern about "lack of food". It was also a concern in many of the interviews.

> *Some (families) that are really struggling because they've got no work…They will be really, really under the pump to provide food for their children because they've got to still pay for the basics. And when you've got children under your feet and at home all day, they eat a lot more than when they're at school. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

Nationally, many schools provide 'breakfast programs', which form an important supplement to children and young people's nutritional needs.

> *Children we work with also receive their breakfast from school, as they don't receive this at home, although not an educational requirement, these support structures that traditional schooling provides equip a child's opportunity to learn. (NGO – social service focused: direct communication)*

These food programs act as protective factors for the health and wellbeing of school-aged children and young people. Several stakeholders including schools and community organisations are creating new ways to get material basics including food to children and young people, particularly in homes they know need it.

> *What we are doing now for those families we know that are quite vulnerable, we pack a box of things. Foodbank or Loaves and Fishes provide us with supplies at most of our sites. where we know, we might stick some toilet paper in or some deodorant or whatever. We're still moving into that space. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

However, a consistent concern amongst stakeholders was for children and young people who may not have been experiencing food insecurity prior to COVID-19 but who are now "newly vulnerable in families who are now struggling and under extreme stress" (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication).

Overcrowded homes

The 'Australia's Children' (AIHW 2020d) report indicates that more than one-fifth of children aged 0–14 lived in households experiencing housing stress, with one-parent households being under the most stress. The effects of housing insecurity and stress "may compromise parental mental health" (Robinson & Adams 2008; Taylor & Edwards 2012).

Importantly, insecure housing also contributes to:

- schooling disruptions, food insecurity and an increased risk of being homeless as adolescents and adults (Crawford et al. 2015; Fantuzzo et al. 2012; Flatau et al. 2012); and
- emotional and behavioural problems and reduced school performance as overcrowded living arrangements may disrupt their sleep, ability to concentrate, and reduce space for study (Shelter 2006; Skattebol et al. 2012; Solari & Mare 2012).

Solari and Mare (2012: 464) indicate the effects of housing crowding on children include "emotional and behavioural problems and reduced school performance, likely due to disrupted sleep, lack of space to study and the impact of noise levels on concentration".

Impact of overcrowded and bad housing on education

Lower attendance	Truancy rate		
	In acute bad housing:	In bad housing:	Other students:
	23%	17%	10%

More suspension and exclusion	Exclusion among students aged 11-15	
	In bad housing:	Other students:
	5%	2%

Less access to a quiet study space	No quiet space to do homework		
	In acute bad housing:	In bad housing:	Other students:
	18%	11%	2%

Lower achievement of valuable credentials	Leave school without any GCSE (key UK credential at age 16)	
	In bad housing:	Other students:
	25%	13%

Academic attainment	Held back a grade in primary or middle school (in France), for those in overcrowded housing:
	60%

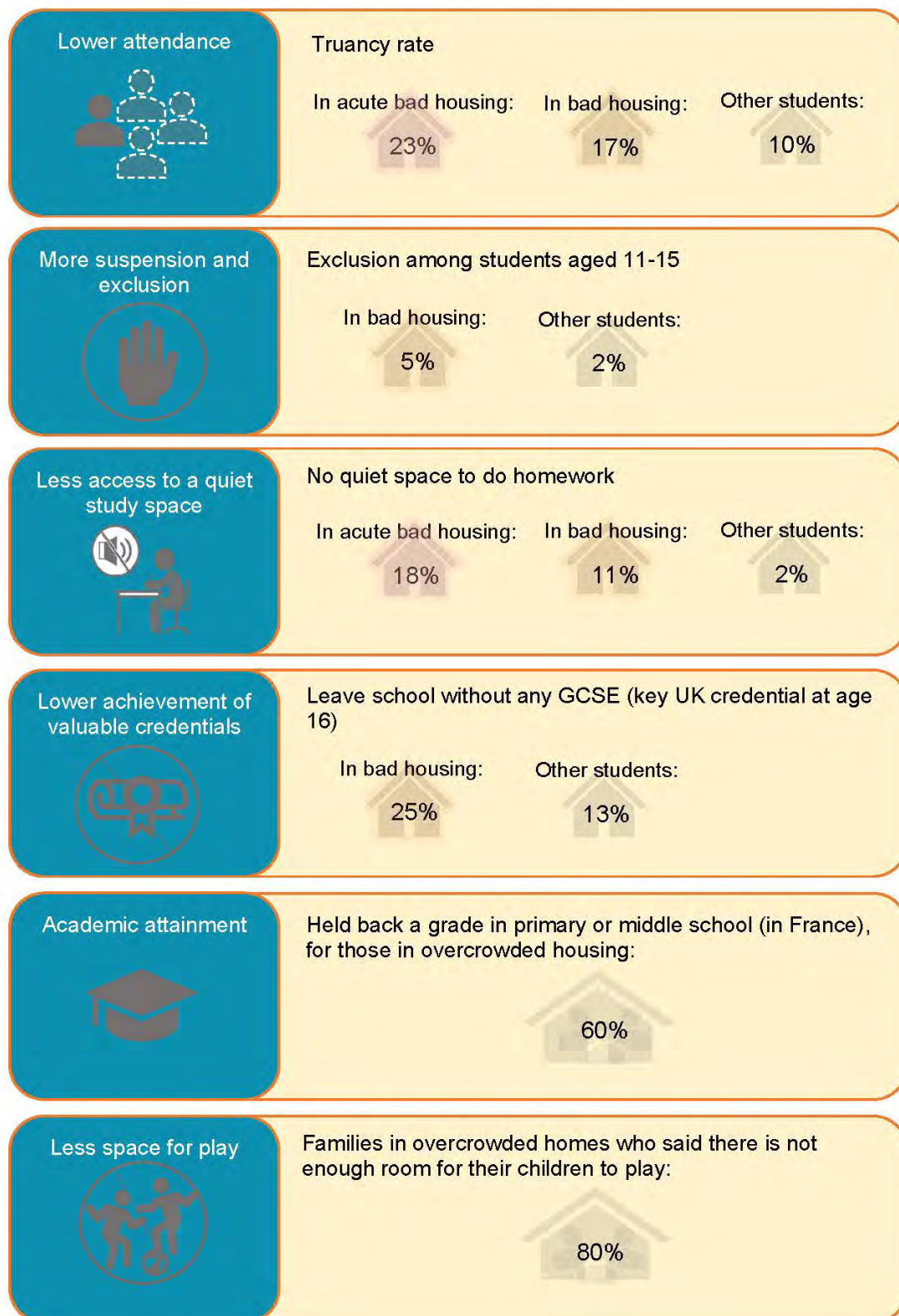| Less space for play	Families in overcrowded homes who said there is not enough room for their children to play:
	80%

Figure 4: Impact of overcrowded and bad housing on education

Highly vulnerable children and young people are more likely to live in homes that are overcrowded. Two UK reports highlight that while students living in bad and overcrowded housing tend to consider school as 'very important', their actual experiences of school are far more negative than for those not living in overcrowded homes (Shelter 2006a: 11-18; 2006b: 23-24). Specific findings are summarised in Figure 4.

Such negative impacts of overcrowded housing are likely to be exacerbated when children and adults are cooped up together at home for extended periods in the COVID-19 context. For example, Tessa (in Skattebol et al. 2011: 74) uses a homework centre in her school because, "It is too hard to do it in the house; too much kids here". Such extracurricular support has now largely ceased.

In the COVID-19 context, the significance of both housing security and housing *adequacy* is amplified when homes must also serve as the site in which learning occurs. Children living in low socioeconomic areas were 12 times as likely to be living in an overcrowded situation (AIHW 2020: 291). At increased risk of experiencing overcrowding are families with low household incomes due to the high cost of housing in many parts of Australia (Easthope et al. 2017).

Key informants also pointed to overcrowding as a factor making learning at home problematic.

> *The other thing is that there's often some pretty crowded living arrangements as well for lots of families. They live in small places, with lots of people. So actually being able to be in a place where's no other room that people can go to. There's generally bedrooms that are shared and then a living space. So I think that makes it really kind of tricky. (Commissioner for Children and Young people; direct communication)*

> *Some don't have stable homes and are sleeping on couches with many people in the house; can't get to sleep until adults leave lounge room. A number of siblings medicated and do not get on with each other so no opportunity sit and learn together… (School-based staff; survey)*

In such environments, it is impossible to follow recent advice about setting up a learning space for learning at home (see chapter 3.1).

Our informants expressed concerns amongst stakeholders around the adequacy of housing.

> *Some of the homes in which I have completed home visits in this area do not have beds for students but rather mattresses on the floor for multiple children to share. These home environments do not have basic furniture/equipment let alone desks for students, resources for them to use, good lighting (some don't have electricity) and therefore no ability to access online learning. (School-based staff; survey)*

Over 90% of our respondents in the survey referenced "adequate space" for learning as being a critical issue in homes that were already stretched and not equipped for learning.

> *Students will struggle to find space for study. No quiet places to work. This is a concern for students who are not close enough to access the school – and those living further out who use bus transport. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

3   Learning at home

Key Finding 3

Children and young people are experiencing learning loss over the period of learning at home. This delay in cognitive gain and achievement is more difficult to recover for some cohorts of students, and for others may result in them being lost to the education system.

Learning has always occurred within the home. Parents and caregivers are children's first teachers. In the COVID-19 context, supporting learning at home has dramatically increased in significance. Parents/carers are faced with fear and uncertainty about the future and how to keep their families safe, while managing a collision of roles, responsibilities and expectations (Coyne et al. 2020). A wide range of advice as well as resources for learning at home have been provided (see Appendix E).

Physical distancing has reduced access to broader familial and community supports. Additionally, the extracurricular, sporting and social endeavours that enrich family life suddenly ceased. During times of stress and crisis, it is common for children to seek more attachment and be more demanding on parents and caregivers. Parents and caregivers need time to help children find positive ways to express feelings such as fear and sadness.

Currently, parents and caregivers are confronted with difficult choices about many facets of their lives, work, and caregiving roles. The economic impact of the crisis increases the likelihood of parenting stress, abuse, and violence against children (Cluver et al. 2020). The broader context influences the effective facilitation of learning in the home across all socioeconomic groups. During COVID-19 inequities disproportionately affect women's wellbeing and economic resilience as child-care, elderly care, and housework typically fall on women (Lancet 2020).

Encouraging help-seeking behaviour and enhancing equity is critically important. Yet, there is confusion among parents and caregivers about *who* can still go to school and an unintended stigmatisation of cohorts for whom attendance at school is encouraged.

Drawing on the perspectives of young people themselves, in the most recent Mission Australia Youth Survey (2019: 23), young people reported three things that they most value: friendships (other than family), family relationships, and school or study satisfaction. In the learning at home phase, it could be argued that each of these is put under some stress.

3.1 The roles of parents and caregivers

The shift to learning at home has necessarily disaggregated domains that are important to learning. It has changed the balance of provision towards the home. Figure 5 denotes the four interdependent and inter-related domains that support children and young people's success in learning.

Schools are providing curriculum materials and learning activities for students (Domain 2). The materials are differentiated to individual student need. There are many examples of innovative curricula that have been developed to provide purposeful and engaging learning experiences. However, concerns about the variability in preconditions that support learning (Domain 1); capacities of the parent/caregiver to support learning (Domain 3); and the loss of access to the wraparound supports (Domain 4) was raised repeatedly in the data collection process.

The massive efforts being made by schools and teachers at all levels to create online courses, mail resources, and/or create social networking channels are valuable adjustments to support Domain 2. Teacher and school efforts have helped to alleviate many parents' concerns about their children's educational engagement. However, elements that are used by teachers to promote learning (instruction, questioning, differentiation, feedback, and peer to peer learning) must now be facilitated by parents in Domain 3.
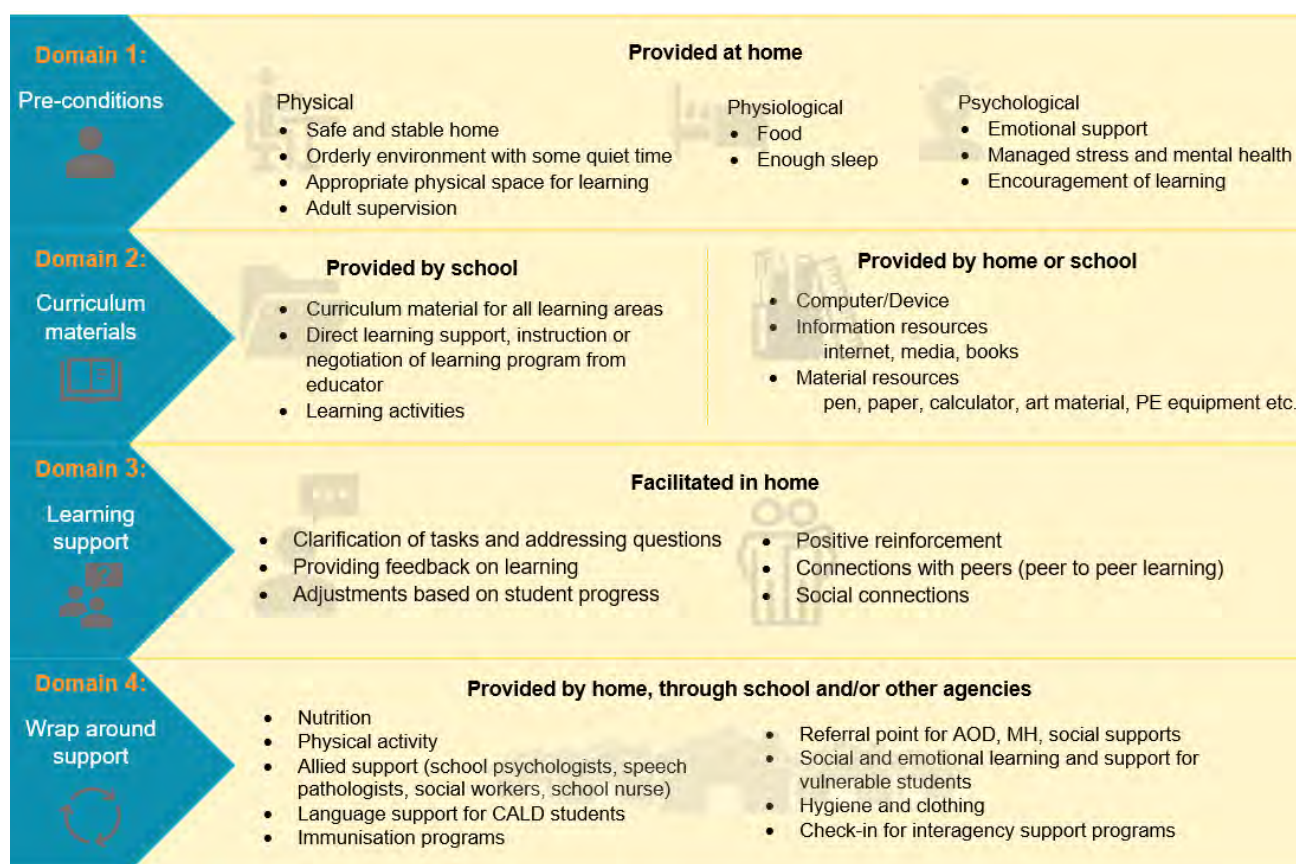

Figure 5: Domains that support learning across contexts

Insight into the areas in which parents are seeking information and support for learning at home has been provided through the data analytics of the Tasmanian Government "Learning at Home" website. These record almost 50 000 site visits between 25 March – 16 April (with some accessing more than one page). The most commonly accessed curriculum pages were for learning resources for 5-8 and 9-12 year olds (around 24 000 page views each). In contrast there were around 12 000 page views for resources for 16-18 year olds, and 10 000 for Birth to 4 years of age.

Teaching is an expert profession, with a range of specialisations within the profession. Although content may be intentionally designed to require minimal parental involvement, in fact, motivating learners, establishing a learning environment, troubleshooting, and providing feedback are necessary to sustain learning at home. Moreover, depending upon the age of the children in the household and the number of children, the capacities of parents and caregivers to provide the time, material resources, and appropriately supportive attitude will vary.

Our key informants indicated that families are confused about the appropriate and proportionate stance towards school-provided learning content, time spent on-line, and level of supervision and or facilitation required of them. The general feedback from the survey is that learning at home is very challenging for children and parents alike.

Time that parents spend with their children on productive or educational activities are important determinants of childhood development (Fiorini and Keane 2014, Del Bono et al. 2016, Attanasio et al. 2020). Yet, clearly, parents and caregivers cannot replicate the roles and functions of teachers or provide the infrastructure resources available in schools within the home. Education systems need to be mindful not to add yet another item to parent's already long list of things they "should" or "have" to be doing, while also encouraging potentially meaningful suggestions.

Coyne et al. (2020) argue that although structure and predictability may be helpful, suddenly implementing a high level of structure in a context that is not normally so structured (e.g. home), is likely to be experienced as adding to the stress of the situation and will be resisted and avoided by many.

> *Students may feel overwhelmed by this new way of learning and some will find it difficult to self-motivate and plan and organise their time. I think there will be a great deal of conflict between parents and their children during this time, particularly if parents are trying to work from home and support their child's learning. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

> *The biggest problem that parents are reporting is managing behaviour. Getting kids to settle and do work is very difficult. Some parents have been requesting support on how to help kids get on task. Parents report spending a lot of time on managing behaviour and disruptions in the home environment. A number of parents have very low levels of literacy themselves (40-50%), and this is compounding the challenge. (School-based staff - primary; direct communication)*

Capacity to provide material resources within the home

Schools are set up for learning, with material resources, computers and internet access, other information resources and physical spaces suited for learning. Schools have established routines and practices that provide stability and certainty for students, which is especially important for vulnerable students. Schools have established pastoral care, and individualised programs for students appropriate for their needs and learning pathway. Although they work in partnership with parents and caregivers, schools provide a locus of control over elements important to learning.

> *Parents need to be reassured they are not expected to be teachers/ replicate the classroom environment at home. (Disability sector; direct communication)*

A physical space in which to learn as well as material resources such as paper, pens/pencils, a computer, printer, and internet/data access support continued engagement in learning. Many families lack these resources. Moreover, some aspects of the curriculum require access to laboratories, work rooms or other resources that cannot be replicated within domestic contexts.

> *Many of our students are very much 'hands on' learners and they thrive on opportunities given to them in practical areas – Foods, MDT, Art, Music etc. I expect the current circumstance will severely impact access to these types of experiences in the home environment. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication).*

Suggestions across jurisdictions regarding supporting learning from home tend to assume (incorrectly) that material and physical resources can be sourced, see for example Figure 6.

Setting up a learning space

To support your children to continue their learning away from their classroom, establish routines and expectations and ensure they have access to equipment and stationery required for learning at home. This includes pens, paper, devices (including internet access), printers, etc.

While it is possible that reduced school days may apply, you can support your children's learning by setting up or following a timetable to give structure to their day.

School-provided timetable: This will include lesson times, and breaks.

Home-developed timetable: This can be similar to the hours and times of your children's typical school day. High school students can follow their school timetable. Primary school aged children may benefit from working in roughly one hour long blocks of time, so that they can concentrate and complete tasks.

Many virtual and remote learning resources, including livestreamed lessons, can be accessed by students at their own pace, because livestreamed sessions are recorded. Schools may offer interactive virtual classrooms during normal school hours.

Create a quiet and comfortable learning space. A space for extended learning should be a family space, rather than a bedroom. Your children may have a regular place for doing homework under normal circumstances, but this space may not be suitable for working in for an extended period of time. It should be a place that can be quiet at times and if possible have internet access.

https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning-at-home/wellbeing-of-students

Figure 6: Setting up a learning space

Encouraging help-seeking behaviour

There is a need for culturally appropriate, targeted communication with families with school aged children about the supports available to them. This communication needs to encourage help-seeking behaviour for children, parents and caregivers. Several international organisations are collaborating to collect open access online parenting resources during COVID-19. These resources focus on concrete tips to build positive relationships, divert and manage bad behaviour, and manage parenting stress. They are shared through social media, and they are accessible on non-smartphones through UNICEF's *Internet of Good Things*. A team of international volunteers is producing translations in 55 languages. Importantly, these parenting resources are based on robust evidence from randomised controlled trials in low-income and middle-income countries. (Cluver 2020).

Many parents are negotiating the increased demands of their children receiving their education within the home. A survey respondent observed:

> *Some are really enjoying the opportunity and there have been reports that parents are embracing the experience, having a greater appreciation of what their child is learning. The opposite is also true, with some parents saying they feel overwhelmed, unable to juggle both their own work at home and supporting their children. More concerning is the silent group, those who are struggling but not prepared to admit it, or in some instances, unable to even begin to support learning at home. (Other – Academic/researcher; survey)*

3.2 Young learners

Quality preschool to year 2 education improves outcomes over the life-course

Providing quality early years education is *particularly* difficult over an extended period within the home and is *critically* important to lifelong education, health and wellbeing outcomes. The evidence is clear. A well-designed preschool and early education environment, provided by educators with relevant skills and qualifications, improves outcomes for children.

Warren and Haisken-DeNew (2013) used data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children to examine the impact of attendance at preschool programs in the year prior to formal schooling on NAPLAN outcomes in Year 3. They found a significant positive association between preschool attendance and Year 3 NAPLAN test scores. Further, children who had a preschool teacher with a relevant degree or diploma qualification had significantly higher NAPLAN scores, on average, than those who had not attended preschool. In addition to impacts on learning outcomes, there are broader health outcomes for young children. These deficits in growth and child development are increasingly difficult to remedy beyond the early childhood years (Heckman and Mosso 2014).
At the outset it is critical to recognise that creating an appropriate learning environment for this cohort within the home is especially difficult for sole or double income households where they are simultaneously working from home with their young children.

In addition, parents are expressing concern on the impact on their productivity at home. A professional father, working at home, the husband of an essential worker (pharmacist) observed:

> *Due to the need to supervise the children and keep them entertained (no normal activities available) my work productivity is minimal….to get work done I have to get up early am before the children wake and work late into the night when the children are in bed. So, my days are now much longer, less work performance and concerned about the importance of learning for the 6 year old. After a few weeks of this I am already feeling tired and the pressure. (NGO – education focused; direct communication)*

Additionally, assisting to care for younger siblings impacts on older children's opportunities to learn.

> *So it's not just about physical space to learn or sharing a home, but that sibling care may be handed to older children etc- there may be a will but not a way to learning. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

Effective early learning employs play based learning, that necessarily incorporates interactivity and opportunity for feedback, as well as developing emotional regulation skills in communication with peer learners. A less than optimal early years environment, including limited movement opportunities, predisposes one to physiological disruptions and increased likelihood of precursors to chronic conditions including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, depression and overweight and obesity (Hills et al. 2020).

Quality early learning is especially critical for vulnerable children

Quality preschool to year 2 education is critical for all children, and especially important for children who live in families that have vulnerabilities across the domains. It is vital that supporting parents to re-engage their young children with education avoids stigmatising them, or requiring them to disclose that they are unable to meet their children's needs. Of particular importance, is an emphasis on interaction between the school and families to encourage a return to and/or engaging with preschool for the first time.

According to Warren et al. (2016) children living in more disadvantaged areas were less likely to attend preschool than children in less disadvantaged areas; children who spoke English as their main language at home were more likely to attend a preschool program; children in couple families were more likely to go to preschool than children in lone parent families; and in couple families, the likelihood of a child attending preschool increased with household income.

Informants commented on their particular concerns about the early years.

> *I'd say early childhood is a really big concern for me because these are the really formative years for them and if they miss a whole term of learning - for things like oral language, vocabulary development, understanding of letters, numbers, phonetic awareness, all that kind of stuff - take out a minimum term of that intensive explicit teaching. Particularly if they come from a low base to start with. That's going to have a huge flow-on effect right through their schooling that's going to take a while to catch back up. (School-based staff- primary; direct communication)*

> *…many of the kids at their school come with minimal early childhood engagement/reduced vocabulary anyway- losing months in a year like Prep* [age 6] *will never even be made up when we look at the foundational learning that takes place around things like phonetics, basic literacy and numeracy. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

Developing a safe and nurturing environment beyond the current situation

There is evidence of differences in the proportion of children attending a preschool program according to geolocation and household characteristics. The commencement age varies across jurisdictions but is generally 4 years. Of children aged in the state-specific year before full time schooling, 295 826 children (or 90.1 per cent) were enrolled in a preschool program. Of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged in the state-specific year before full time schooling, 94.8 per cent were enrolled in a preschool program (Productivity Commission 2020a).

All families of young children will benefit from a warm welcome back into the school, in a context that ensures parents do not experience feelings of guilt or shame if learning has not been sustained in the home environment. There is an opportunity to foster closer links between schools and families as they return to school. This is likely to be especially significant for families who are experiencing income and food insecurity for the first time. Positive relationships that have been built over many years with vulnerable students (and their families) may have weakened during this time and will take time to re-establish. One key informant observed that:

> *Potentially we my even lose some of our families during this time. They might disconnect from learning at home and then move to another school when schools reopen (unfortunately sometimes it is easier to move than be embarrassed about asking for help). (School-based staff – K-12; direct communication)*

Investment in tools to support education staff in trauma-informed practice is also important. It is possible that Australian young children may manifest some of the behavioural changes associated with COVID-19 experienced elsewhere. A preliminary study conducted in the Shaanxi province during the COVID-19 epidemic showed that children in the younger age group (3-6 years) were more likely than older children to manifest symptoms, such as clinginess and fear that family members could contract the infection. Clinging, inattention, and irritability were the most severe psychological conditions demonstrated by the children in all age groups (Jiao et al. 2020).

3.3 Loss of learning

To examine the risks for and evidence of loss of learning when learning at home, it is useful to first address the time that tends to be spent on learning areas during normal learning at school.

The three-dimensional design of the Foundation – Year 10 Australian curriculum recognises the importance of disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding alongside general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities (ACARA 2013, 2020). Disciplinary knowledge, skills and understandings are described in the eight learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies and Languages.

Schools and teachers design programs of learning to teach, assess and report on all eight disciplinary areas. Their programs are holistic and also take into account the general capabilities and the cross-curriculum priorities that contribute to the development of children and young people as "confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community" (Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, Education Council 2019).

Schools have flexibility in how they implement the Australian curriculum, however there are guidelines for curriculum writers (ACARA 2013) that enable indicative time allocations to assist with planning (e.g. Queensland Government 2020).

As an example, an indicative proportion of time spent on learning areas (Foundation – 2) in line with the Queensland Government guidelines is shown in Figure 7.
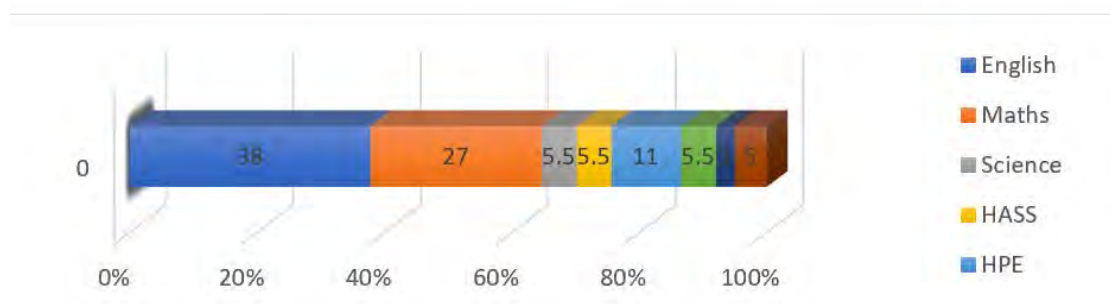
Figure 7: Indicative proportion of time spent on learning areas

In classroom practice, this is translated into a timetable, such as the representative one in Figure 8.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning block* (~ 100-120 mins)	Literacy Reading/Writing/ Spelling	Literacy	Literacy	Literacy	Literacy
	Recess				
Mid block (~ 60-90 mins)	Numeracy/Maths	Numeracy/Maths	Numeracy/Maths	Numeracy/Maths	Numeracy/Maths
	Lunch				
Afternoon block (~ 100-120 mins)	History and Social Sciences	Science/ Technology	Health and Physical Education	Language	Music
				Visual Arts/ Creative Arts	Library

*Some schools would include daily physical education in this block (or later in the day)

Figure 8: A representative Primary School timetable

The time allocation for curriculum has some flexibility and varies with year level. Indicative time allocations for a full week are 18-19 hours (F-2) and 20-21 hours (3-6). There is some flexibility in secondary schooling to allow for student choice, however time allocated to English, Mathematics, Science and Humanities and Social Sciences ranges from 12-16 hours each week depending on year level.

Education programs are designed to support progressive development of knowledge, skills and understandings, and absence of a student from a program of work can be detrimental to student progress.

If the learning from home program compromises the planned educational program for a student, either through reduction of volume of learning, or a prioritisation of some curriculum areas over others, then some learning loss will occur.

There is a body of research around so called 'summer learning loss' when students are on holidays. In essence, although there is evidence of a low-level effect, this has been shown to be made up by the majority of students (but not all) on return to school (Hattie 2020; Shinwell & Defeyter 2017).

It is important to note that the discussion of learning loss here is not in the context of school holidays and will occur during the planned program of learning. Furthermore, with the expectation that learning will occur at home, there is a compounding factor that students who are not able to complete the program of work will fall even further behind.

Evidence of learning loss

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that schools have not closed, and learning programs continue to be delivered to students in online or distance formats. Indeed, there are accounts of students who have adapted well, and are thriving in the online learning environment, relishing independent learning with fewer distractions, or where they no longer have to spend up to two hours a day travelling to and from school. There was also evidence from some respondents that a small number of high-risk students were actually completing more through tailor-made home learning packs and online provision than was usual when they attended school.

Overall, informants have cautioned:

> *Loss of learning and disruption to learning will be significant, even the brightest and high achieving students need the structure of school and the 'safety to learn' because there are disruptions, multiple things demanding their attention or taking away their attention at home. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

There is a body of evidence that identifies many students are demonstrating a lack of engagement, reduced engagement or partial/sporadic engagement with these learning programs. The literature suggests this creates the potential for learning loss. How much this learning loss impacts on future achievement will vary. For students from well-resourced families, although there is certainly evidence of reduced engagement, this is unlikely to affect long term progress (Hattie 2020).

Survey respondents have indicated that time being spent on learning at home is variable, although 2-3 hours a day was a common estimate. There was also evidence that formal learning was being supplemented by an increase in informal/life skill learning such as cooking, gardening, and craft activities facilitated by families.

I have four children and it varies enormously depending on the individual child's ability to self-motivate and engage. For example: My 14 year old is reasonably self-motivated but frustrated that he is not learning new concepts, the teachers are mainly setting revision … This compares to my 5 year-old who is not the least bit interested in online learning and likes to sit on my lap while I try to work. (Other – Parent; survey)

Time spent on learning for those attending school sites is likely to vary. Some school systems are advising that students will be supervised to undertake the same online learning as students are doing at home (for example Education Directorate ACT 2020). One school advised parents that students on-site:

… will be undertaking their home-based learning on campus, under the supervision of school staff members (who might not necessarily be teachers). The supervising staff members will be responsible for taking attendance, monitoring behaviour and ensuring boys undertake the necessary hygiene practices and observe the social distancing requirements. (School-based staff; direct communication)

Even with the best motivations, students who have not developed independent learning skills, or need additional digital capability do need support. Familiarity with new platforms, without having the chance to try them at school is also an issue for some cohorts, especially the younger children. Their parents are not always familiar with the type of platform that is used for learning.

At this primary school the platforms that are now being used were not previously used and there was little opportunity to train the students in how to use them. If there was 3-4 weeks to get this up and running this would have been less of an issue, as students would be familiar. These are also not the platforms that are used by the parents – the majority of parents are unfamiliar with them and find it difficult to assist the students. There is a longer transition period because of this. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)

Interestingly, in Singapore, schools had already prepared students in the case of the need to stay at home and engage in online learning through having practice twice a year when they physically stayed at home (Smith 2020).

If the work is perceived as too challenging or uninteresting is also a potential cause of partial or sporadic engagement. Children and young people may lose any interest in learning, when the provision of learning at home is difficult, not engaging or they are disconnected from their peers.

A significant concern is that learning loss will have a greater impact on particular groups of students, in particular those who are already experiencing educational disadvantage (see Figure 9). From the informants for this report there are a number of groups of students who have been identified as at a high risk of learning loss:

- Students who are already partially or fully disengaged from school education.
- Students who need 1:1 support.
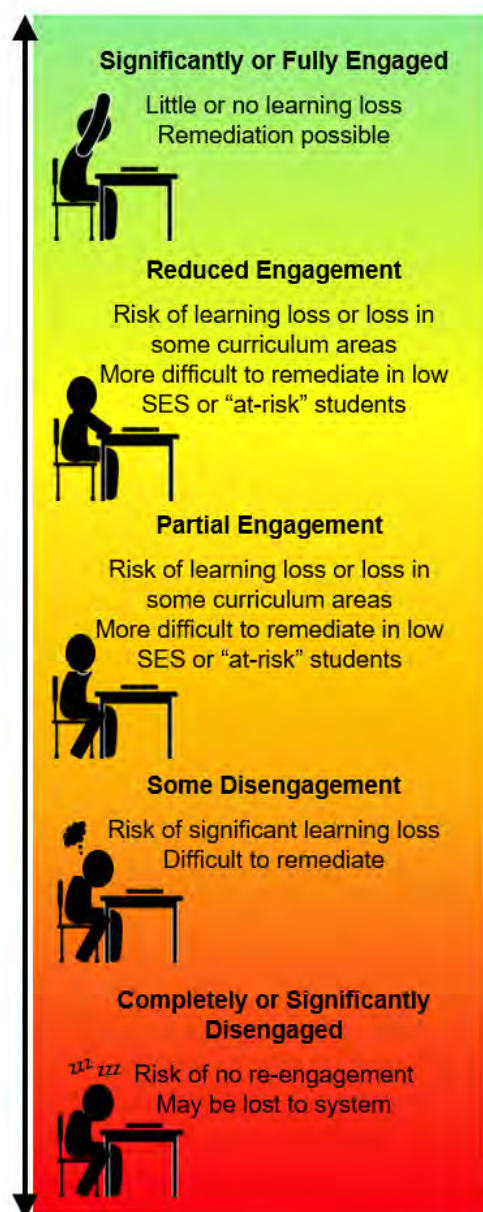- Students who are already struggling with literacy and numeracy.

Significantly or Fully Engaged

Little or no learning loss
Remediation possible

Reduced Engagement

Risk of learning loss or loss in some curriculum areas
More difficult to remediate in low SES or "at-risk" students

Partial Engagement

Risk of learning loss or loss in some curriculum areas
More difficult to remediate in low SES or "at-risk" students

Some Disengagement

Risk of significant learning loss
Difficult to remediate

Completely or Significantly Disengaged

Risk of no re-engagement
May be lost to system

Figure 9: Levels of impact on engagement with learning

What is particularly concerning about these groups is that they already tend to perform more poorly at school than their peers (e.g. ABS 2014) and evidence from the literature suggests that it is more difficult to make up learning loss (Van Lacker & Parolin 2020).

In relation to research on 'summer learning loss' there is a body of evidence that for some children from low income families, those with learning difficulties and with English as a second language, that the accumulative effect of long holiday periods may, at least partially, account for lower educational attainment of these groups of students (Stewart, Watson & Campbell 2018; van Lancker & Parolin 2020).

Summer learning loss is considered a major factor explaining the gap in academic achievement between the richest and poorest students. Such losses are likely to be exacerbated in the context of COVID-19.

Schooling provides essential learning and when schools close, children and youth are deprived opportunities for growth and development. The disadvantages are disproportionate for under-privileged learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities beyond school (UNESCO 2020).

Children and young people who are already disengaged from education

For children and young people already at risk of disengagement from school, learning loss is likely to be especially substantial. For some students, learning loss may extend well beyond the current period of learning at home and limited access to attend school on-site. There is a risk some will be turned off learning for the long term and may not re-engage at all.

> *We know that 1 in 5 children in [state] claim they are disengaged from school, so they are already disconnected from their schooling. If that doubles during this lockdown period then education as we know it will have a major problem just making themselves relevant to almost half the population. The longer this goes on the more I can see students and some parents in these environments when they think they can get a better deal not doing it. We know that large numbers of children claim they are being bullied at school and we are hearing anecdotally that many are more relaxed now by not being at school. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

Remarkably, a small number of highly vulnerable students may be doing more work at home:

> *One of our sites we had a 90% return for two weeks, for each pickup, 90% of the kids responding and having completed all the work. But it was very personalised to the students. ... We are talking about those young people who have been disengaged from learning for a long time so we're pretty impressed with those stats. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

Overall, however, responses to the survey question about the amount of learning that children and young people are doing at home reveal significant learning loss.

> *6 are completing no work at all (as admitted by parents and students); several are completing only the final activities and not the teaching activities that are leading up to it; 3 are focusing on topics the student wants to learn about (not curriculum-linked, just topics of interest). (School-based staff – primary; survey)*

> *Generally speaking, very little work is being completed and the work that is done, is very poor quality. (NGO – education focused; survey)*

In relation to Indigenous students in residential care, one key informant gave the example that "two out of seven teenage indigenous girls will be going to school" (Education system; direct communication) to engage with learning, and the other five will do very little learning.

For students with poor literacy skills learning through online platforms will be complex, and their current literacy skills may deteriorate further.

> *Literacy, that would be my biggest worry, that we'll lose ground here ... We have to make sure we have the literacy things in place because that's one of the things I'm concerned about. If literacy is the only thing we keep progressing that is number one, because we know that is the number one predictor of success. It is critical that we can get on top of how we can support ongoing literacy development and that's pretty hard when they're at a distance. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

For students already disengaged from learning the concerns are especially deep. The intense work undertaken in many schools to reach out to these children and young people and keep them connected with school may be undone now that they tend not to see them in person.

> *Our really complex cases, where there is a whole lot of interagency, and they were really difficult to engage initially even when they were on site and we had the relationship. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

> *Content becomes a bit meaningless unless it is differentiated well enough to fit with them, and having the relational capacity to deliver it in a way that is respectful of the individual's ability and then scaffold that for them. One of the concerns that I see for this cohort is that problem of trying to keep content in front of this group of largely disengaged kids is that it could be the very thing that turns them away from learning altogether. The content doesn't fit them, it's just too hard. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

Some groups who have not traditionally been identified as being at risk of learning loss are potentially affected by the current situation. These include:

- Early childhood students.
- Students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- Students in their final year of school.
- Students undertaking courses with practical components (e.g. VET).

Early childhood learning has been addressed earlier in this chapter.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds may experience significant loss of learning when they are still learning English, and when their families are unable to offer much support for learning at home. A survey responded highlighted that many migrant families consider "education is so important and in turn are placing a lot of pressure on children" (NGO – CALD sector; survey). A 14-year old student explained in a *Sydney Morning Herald* story:

> because English is my mum's second language, when my younger sister needs help with her work, she comes to me, often when I'm on a call, and whilst I'm explaining to her what to do, I would miss what I have to do. (Sienna; in Chrysanthos 2020: n.p.)

Key informants agreed with her:

> *For at least half of the students, they are the significant language support person in their home, helping their parents and siblings translate documents, for example official government communications. ... Students report difficulty separating time for housework, chores, and other family commitments, from time set aside for schooling. These students are vulnerable to falling behind in school work because they often require additional clarification of tasks, due to the language barriers. (School-based staff – secondary; survey)*

When schools re-open for attendance on-site, this survey respondent added that these students: "will need even more support for English language learning, as it is doubtless their language abilities will suffer from a period of isolation from other native English speakers".

3.4 VET students

In 2018, there were 230 700 VET students also enrolled in senior secondary education in Australia. Of these, almost 8% or around 18 200 are school-based apprentices and trainees, with the remainder being VET in School students enrolled in VET courses or subjects as part of their school curriculum (NCVER 2019). VET develops workplace skills and technical knowledge to equip people to enter the workforce and is nationally accredited.

By its nature, most VET study has a practical, hands-on or workplace component to the learning. The ability to complete the practical component of VET units/awards has been impacted by COVID-19 and associated requirements for social distancing. One organisation delivering practical vocational learning for Years 5-10 in (mostly disadvantaged) schools has developed a resource so students can continue vocational learning from home:

> *featuring multiple, varied practical hands on projects to keep students learning and practicing their skills safely at home and it was delivered electronically to partner schools just before Easter. (NGO – education focus; survey)*

Australian school-based apprenticeships (ASbA)

The story for ASBA appears to be quite positive to date, although it is acknowledged that broad consultation has not been possible. From the Tasmanian experience, the information from Skills Tasmania is that no ASBA students have had their contracts cancelled. At least at this stage, the Job Keeper package and government funding of apprenticeships appears to have had a positive effect. The contract for work is being respected if it is safe to do so, and apprentices are continuing to be employed with the support of their employers, apprentice network providers and the school based apprenticeship team in the Tasmanian Department of Education which is triaging students on a case by case basis. There is significant work going on to ensure that employers are kept engaged, and the young people are fully informed.

Given the potential importance of many of these jobs for the economy, both short and long term, this is a positive story. Also pleasing are reports that new apprentices have been signed on in regional areas since the COVID-19 situation has arisen.

VET in Schools students

The story is more challenging for VET in Schools students. Drawing from Tasmanian data, there are some schools where 75% of students have at least half their subjects in the VET area. If a student cannot complete a unit due to being unable to undertake the practical component, they could potentially be adversely affected in both their senior secondary certificate of education, and in achieving their VET qualification.

The number and type of practical component varies from qualification to qualification (and unit to unit), with a greater amount required in a Certificate III. ASQA have recommend where possible to use simulated workplaces, however this is not always possible for assessing the practical components of some units. Although there is the possibility of articulating to TAFE in 2021, this delays credentialing of young people. Substitution of units in a qualification, although possible to some extent, is not practicable if it compromises the integrity of a qualification and affects employment options.

3.5 Students in their final year

The immediacy of outcomes of school education for senior secondary students requires a consideration of this cohort. Given the high stakes assessment and accreditation that occurs, year 12 students in particular could be adversely affected by any prolonged learning loss during 2020. Although not as immediate, year 11 students are also potentially affected. Jurisdictions are working through courses, on a case by case basis, to determine any adjustments to individual courses that are necessary, taking account of the credentialing requirements.

For some of these students, there will be practical, and other requirements that may require a return to the school site to be prioritised.

Where students commence senior secondary studies in a new school, a consequence of the onset of COVID-19 arrangements so early in the school year has meant that a number of schools have only started building relationships with their students. If schools or teachers do not know their students well, there is an increased risk that some of the more vulnerable students will slip through the net of support.

Students on track to higher education

For students with aspirations for higher education, any possible impact of learning loss on their ATAR is of considerable concern. To date, there has been significant support given by schools to this cohort, with a rapid shift to online learning. Indeed, informants spoke positively about many students who have quickly adapted to a more intense use of learning management systems. This is assisted by the familiarity of these students with the use of online materials as a component of many subject areas.

Once again, all students in this cohort are not impacted in equal measure. Many students in low income areas do not have access to appropriate digital devices at home, having previously accessed school machines. Informants have reported that there has been prioritisation of senior students in provision of digital devices, and in some cases provision of dongles for internet access. There remain some issues of access for rural or remote students who are unable to access reliable internet and require hard copy resource packs.

As well as physical resources, many schools have programs to support students from non-traditional cohorts to achieve University entrance. Prolonged disconnection from these supports and encouragement could cause a loss of momentum. This may be further exacerbated if there is not encouragement for this pathway from the home environment. Encouragingly, informants have noted some examples of the provision of 'wraparound' support in the online environment and the activation of personal follow-up through pastoral care teams.

University entrance

In response to this situation, there has also been timely consideration of how these students can be given clarity around ATAR and University entrance. ACTAC (Australasian Conference of Tertiary Admissions Centres) released a statement on April 3, 2020 to outline National collaboration to support Year 12 students through the COVID-19 disruptions (Universities Admissions Centre 2020). There have also been statements from Australian universities about alternative or complementary admissions schemes, such as those announced by ANU (Year 11 results) and the Schools Recommendation Program implemented at the University of Tasmania. Early announcement of these schemes aims to allay fears for students on a tertiary pathway. Indications from Universities, Schools and students are that these measures are warmly welcomed.

3.6 Loss of the broader benefits of school

The informal curriculum

There is widespread focus on the importance of formal schooling in delivering the Australian curriculum and in providing foundations and skills for learning and educational attainment. However, responses from informants support evidence about the major role schools play in socialising children and young people, and in building and supporting their social and emotional wellbeing which extends beyond the formal curriculum (Tucker et al. 2015; AIHW 2020d; De Jong et al. 2005; Skovdal and Campbell 2015; Kidgar et al. 2015; Mahoney and Carins 1997).

> *With vulnerable students in particular, the hidden or informal curriculum is needed as much as the formal one. It builds social skills, teamwork, confidence, resilience and hope. These are essential for successful progress through school and for transition to further employment. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

These supports have not always been emphasised in educational policy initiatives (Kidgar et al. 2015) perhaps because they are not easily measured. As evident in the above quote, those working in education refer to this as a 'hidden' or 'informal' curriculum.

The role of schools in supporting particularly vulnerable children and young people is critical and include social and emotional support, connection to services, meals and food, showers/hygiene items, protection, interagency support and social relationships.

> *Impacts of non-school attendance extend beyond learning alone. For example, home learning necessarily excludes the numerous protective factors for vulnerable children provided by schools, including school breakfast programs and access to non-family relationship including* peers. *(NGO – social service focused; survey)*

A survey respondent who works with children in regional Australia with a large Aboriginal population pointed to the connections that were provided through the school, which now are not happening:

> *Support networks outside of the school such as: Aboriginal health clinics/ support services Aboriginal Liaison Welfare Officers AIEOs within school communities. (NGO – Indigenous; survey)*

The policy response for Aboriginal communities during COVID-19 has focused to a large degree on their health, especially for older people. In addition, a Federal Government announcement noted:

> Up to $5 million will be made available to expand the school nutrition program in the Northern Territory so that meals can continue to be delivered during school closures and holiday periods and also to extend the program to vulnerable families and the elderly where required. (Wyatt 2020: n.p.)

Beyond 'formal learning', there is a diverse range of supports and an increasing demand on schools and their staff in providing a range of supports that contribute to the social, emotional, mental and physical health and wellbeing of Australian children.

> *If any good could come from this situation and these reflections – it would be the amount of responsibility our schools take for supporting our most vulnerable. Some of this is official - "social workers, psychs, attendance officers" – but much is provided in-kind or as "something good teachers/schools just do". (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

The closures of on-site schools raise diverse concerns amongst stakeholders in this enquiry as to the impacts of "shutting down" or "moving online" elements of physical schooling and the social connections it involves, that exist beyond delivering the curriculum. These include mitigating the effects of adversity and stress (Tucker et al. 2015), providing resources and support, as well as socialisation and social skills such as friendship-building, teamwork, communication and healthy self-esteem (AIHW 2020d).

School as a key place of safety

There was widespread agreement among our key informants that for children and young people for whom there are child safety concerns, school is a sanctuary.

> *School is many of our kids' SAFE PLACE, it's not their home, but it's the safest place they have. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

[School provides] access to non-family supportive adults, a 'break' from home where life may be very difficult for some children and young people and where some children can 'forget' about some of the challenges they're facing. (NGO staff – social service focused; survey)

Schools are not only integral to the provisioning of interagency support for students for whom child safety concerns have been raised – they also are vital to early detection and identification of such concerns.

For children and young people who may not be safe at home due to family violence issues, school becomes a safe place to report, or a place where trained educators, and trusted adults who know the students, can check in, or tune in to clues that there may be a risk to the wellbeing of the student.

Teachers and their daily interactions make up one of the key connections for students (particularly vulnerable students). They may only identify with one teacher and that teacher is a key point of connection for them. It is often their demeanour, appearance or absence from class that will trigger a teacher checking up on them. Teachers therefore play a key role in supporting vulnerable students. Where they identify or feel safe with a teacher they will often seek them out, sometimes disclosing. Teachers also refer students who would otherwise be off the radar to the Social Worker. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)

In particular, many staff emphasised the importance of actually *seeing* students, but the opportunities for doing so have been drastically reduced due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Schools have eyes on kids. This is essential for identifying kids who may need child protection, and then for collaborating with other agencies to provide child safety support. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)

Often "sighting" the child allows us to get some evidence or judgement, emerging cases of children who are very vulnerable but too scared to say over the phone or video what is happening. (Education system staff; direct communication)

When students are not physically attending school this essential function of schools is at risk of disappearing. Mitigating this risk has been at the forefront of immediate action for some of our key informants.

We touch base every second day, if not every day, in one form or another. Those young people we're very worried about we touch base every day and we try to get a visual either on Facetime or do a site visit to their home. We don't go into the house, but they come out and chat with us in the driveway. So we try to eyeball them. (Education system staff; direct communication)

The 'safety' that schools provide can be considered across a range of domains including being safe from witnessing or experiencing physical and emotional abuse and violence, providing *"their only access to safe adults"* (School-based staff; survey); being able to access supportive adults and peers; being able to access social support and services; being able to learn in a less disruptive or "tough home situation" (School-based staff; survey); accessing warmth, showers, food and hygiene items; and being able to access formal support systems and services.

Schools as a source of social and emotional support/connection

A significant theme arising from this inquiry relates to the importance of the social and emotional support provided face-to-face by schools that act as protective factors for health and wellbeing.

> *I think the importance of being social with other humans cannot be underestimated. Not only are children not being given the opportunity to build their social skills by attending face-to-face school, they are also missing out on the human need of being social. I feel this would impact mental health and therefore, school performance. (Education system staff; survey)*

There is general consensus that social support is a dynamic concept and can occur in very different ways, however it mainly refers to "support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community" (Lin 1979 cited in AIHW 2020d; 227). During COVID-19 restrictions, students in some remote Aboriginal communities have more opportunities to maintain social connection than children and young people elsewhere in Australia:

> *They miss out less in the Aboriginal communities because they are locked down in their communities so they have the freedom to interact within them. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

While children and young people are increasingly using "social media and other digital technologies to facilitate the development of their social networks" (Allen et al. 2014; Office of the eSafety Commissioner 2018), as children get older the school environment – teachers, peers and friends – play a progressively important role in social support, social networks and in establishing a sense of belonging outside the home environment (Korkiamaki & Ellonen 2008; Zubrick et al. 2008).

For vulnerable children and young people, attending school may be the only source of positive social and emotional support or connection they have:

> *The lack of social interaction is probably the biggest challenge I foresee for students during this time. Some have very difficult home lives and for them, school is a constant in their lives, it does not change, and they know what to expect each day. Some students will not contact their friends for the entire time at home and I think this is a problem. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

While schools reported providing more formal supports for social and emotional wellbeing of students through phone and video connections, the 'human connection is very powerful' (NGO – education focused; survey).

> *I'm a great fan of online communication and environment but I think there's something about peer to peer relationships, physical relationships are important. They'll miss that. Some kids, vulnerable kids in particular, I think it'll be having an adult who cares. A significant adult who might actually be kind. It might be that they're not having any of those other interactions in their life. (School based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

> *We target welfare first with our students and it is difficult to offer this support in a learning from home environment. (NGO – education focused; survey)*

Informants' responses support Tucker et al's (2014: 301) research that found increasingly "schools are attempting to understand how life outside school impacts on life inside".

Stable routines, structures and predictability

For students experiencing trauma, stable routines, structures and predictability are important foundations for learning (CEDA 2020; National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health 2019; Skinner 2009). Many routines have been disrupted by not being at school, and for many parents and carers these are difficult to re-establish even when schools say they are still 'open' at a distance and "do everything in our power to retain students in some routine" (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication).

> *Parents are finding it difficult to keep children on task without a routine that looks like school. (School-based staff – primary; survey)*

Many survey respondents pointed to the importance not only of routines while learning from home, but especially when students return to attend school on-site. The latter will take some time and patience, and requires support for school staff both with workload and to implement trauma-informed practices.

> *Support for re-adjusting to the routines of school - they are likely to have less flexibility than they have become used to. … There could be various forms of stress associated with the circumstances they were in during the shutdown and additional counselling and social work support may be required. (Education system staff; survey)*

Physical and extracurricular activity

Schools are often the main place that children and young people engage in physical activity. This may be in structured classes but also in playtime, school sport and other activities which encourage this element of health and wellbeing.

> *Another impact I'm thinking our children are going to find, is physical activity. They're going to miss out on that ... without having mandated play time so they get outside and move, without having that structured daily PE, that weekly PE lesson where they learn physical skills, some kids will just be sitting. They're not moving. So that will have a really big impact on a lot of their physical development. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

These findings support existing research which suggests that during school terms when there are consistent times and adequate spaces for physical movement and activity "improvements can be made can be made to weight status and obesogenic behaviours (i.e., physical activity, sedentary/screen time, diet, and sleep) during the school year" (Brazendale 2017: 1).

School holiday periods have been associated with unhealthy behaviours and "accelerated weight gain compared to the weight gained occurring during the school year" (Brazendale 2017). This evidence is likely to apply to the extended periods of COVID-19 social isolating and closure of school campuses to on-site attendance.

Both physical and mental health of children and young people is promoted through physical activity, organised sport, social connections and extra-curricular activity that happen outside of school. There is little current data on the extent of participation in these activities, however it is contended that with extended closure of these options, there will be impacts. Some of these impacts may relate to future engagement and attendance at school, with some US research linking lack of participation in extra-curricular activities with school dropout rates, especially for 'at risk' students (Mahoney & Cairns 1997).

Providing meals

As noted in Chapter 2, many vulnerable households do not have secure access to food. There is widespread recognition in schools that hungry children cannot learn effectively (MacDonald 2019). Schools commonly step in to provide food and eating programs that support health and wellbeing:

> *Also not having dinner the evening before, nor breakfast in the morning. We provide breakfast programs, emergency lunches and fruit or vegetables (when available) for crunch 'n sip programs. (School-based staff; survey)*

Concerns over children and young people not being able to access meal programs and supports was a consistent finding across all the survey responses and many of the interviews. In response, schools have been increasingly providing food packages and resources to students in place of programs such as breakfast and lunch programs. However, some informants conceded this will not be as easily accessible to those students who may not be "prioritised" or "on any existing list" and who may now find themselves hungry and vulnerable because of many households being crowded and under economic strain.

4   New ways of learning in the COVID-19 era

> ## Key Finding 4
>
> There is a need to invest rapidly in developing significant capability in schools to deliver education both online and on-site.

The Australian education system has developed a sophisticated and holistic program to meet the needs of a range of children and young people. Schools are funded to provide for the learning needs of the students in their care, through provision of resources, learning and wellbeing programs delivered by education professionals. Working in partnership with parents and caregivers, teachers and allied staff use data to inform purposeful programs for children and young people in a supported and structured environment.

> *Schools are now responsible for delivering so much more than an education … (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

The COVID-19 situation has seen the elements of this holistic program shift away from a locus of the school, towards being facilitated at home. Regardless of any disaggregation or shift, it is in the best interest of the children and young people that the comprehensive program continues to be delivered as far as practicable. Anything less will potentially result in learning loss, detrimental health and wellbeing outcomes and reduced productivity of school leavers in the short term.

For many children and young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, their educational outcomes, nutrition, physical movement, social, and emotional wellbeing are affected by being disconnected from school. It is imperative these aspects of the education program are continued.

4.1 Opening schools for learning on-site

Systematic reviews of school closures (non-COVID-19) suggest that local context is important in making such decisions (Brooks et.al 2020; Usher-pines et al. 2018).

While it is acknowledged that in the current situation schools are not closed, it is also the case that, with the exception of the Northern Territory, schools are not offering their usual education program. Indeed, there is evidence that where schools are open, students are completing the learning from home packages under a supervisory arrangement.

It may be possible, based on public health advice, to broaden what is available at schools to cater for specific cohorts of students, and increasingly a greater number of students. To achieve this would require ensuring:

- the advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) published 16 April 2020 on reducing the relatively low potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools is followed;
- each jurisdiction considers their local epidemiology and context; and
- the AHPPC advice that, with appropriate safety measures there is a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools is correct.

Expanding what is being offered by schools, would enable a transition back to school education in the medium term, and the possibility of a blended program of face to face and online learning in the shorter term.

To enable this, however there would need to be a set of conditions in place. This would encompass a consideration of:

- practising social distancing through decreasing students in attendance at any one time (e.g. roster system for students; extending the school day; staggered breaks);
- providing resources and time for hand washing and temperature checks;
- rigorous and more frequent cleaning by dedicated contractors, including of play equipment between staggered breaks;
- restricting teacher and student movement between classes;
- staff and students in high risk health categories working off site through a fully online program;
- allied professional staff (social workers, psychologists, speech pathologists, and school nurses) providing services on site where possible; and
- the workload of teachers and other school staff.

Provision of on-site learning for selected students

Australian state, territory and federal governments have recognised the reliance of highly vulnerable children and young people on access to high quality education on-site, communicating that while most students are encouraged to learn at home, vulnerable children and young people are able to continue to attend school (for example see Tehan 2020).

At present, accurate attendance data is not available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that significant numbers of students on low income and/or in regional areas opted for learning at home in the early stages of transition. A principal of a low ICSEA secondary school reported an 85% drop in attendance in the first week when anyone who was more vulnerable to the virus was advised to stay home. This figure then stabilised to 4.2% of students regularly attending. From these figures it does appear there is a case for building public confidence in the safety of attending school, and the low risk to both students and staff with appropriate health and hygiene measures in place.

There are well developed and extensive programs, such as the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy, that have proven successful in increasing attendance of Indigenous students at school (Commonwealth of Australia 2018). If these students are disconnected from schools for an extended period of time, the advantage of such programs in promoting conditions for learning could be at risk.

Reducing confusion and stigma

The overall message to the community since late March has been that the default policy position in most jurisdictions and non-government systems is that students are expected to learn from home. The exception for children of essential workers has been quite clear. However, the exception for those who are vulnerable is less straightforward. Parents/carers are unsure whether they are allowed to send their child to school.

> *CONFUSION caused by mixed messages about whether children can go or not go. Parents confused – what do they do if they parents self-determine that they can't teach at home but are not an essential worker - can they send their kids? (NGO – social service focused; direct communication)*

Another key informant asked "who is going to identify the kids?" (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication). The potential for confusion has been recognised across jurisdictions, with the key advice to parents/carers to talk with the school if they are unsure whether their child is eligible to physically attend school. However, parents/carers may not want to explain to the school why they would like their child to attend on-site.

> *Parents who are known to services (police, family violence, child protection services) do NOT want to disclose to schools that they are struggling – what do they need to say/indicate in order to be able to send their kids back? (NGO – social service focused; direct communication)*

Key informants were concerned about vulnerable students who would benefit from attending school but whose parents/carers will not send them – either because parents need the child at home, or because they worry about potential intervention by child protection services.

> *I think that young carers are going to really struggle. They're already under-identified in our school population. There's not really an incentive for the family to identify and send their kids so those kids won't get picked up. … What's the incentive for parents to do this? We know parents are really wary of identification as being vulnerable so what does that mean if you end up sending your child to school, do you go on some list and then you're going to get all sorts of other intrusions in your life. That's a pretty real and present threat for many people that they believe that there will be a child protection response which is why they don't come forward with their true level of vulnerability. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

Labelling some children and young people as vulnerable may imply blame or deficits in themselves, or in their parents/carers. Therefore students and their parents/carers may resist identifying as vulnerable (Te Riele 2015).

> *One key tension is who is vulnerable and can come to school? There are issues with this, I think parents and households that have found themselves newly vulnerable or experiencing risks factors that were not as prevalent, will be reluctant to see themselves in the same category of those we may have seen as vulnerable before COVID. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

Destigmatised universal supports could include a national hotline that can respond to questions (about curriculum, expectations of parents) and communicate robust evidence informed resources to parents and carers (see example in Queensland: ABC 2020). This may reduce the burden on individual schools and provide a valuable referral and support service.

Broadening the groups of students who are invited back into the school environment would have a two-fold effect. The first is that it could reduce stigma for certain student groups.

> *Essential that schools are kept open for our most vulnerable … this is something we need to do to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

The second is that it could provide an enhanced learning experience for additional students.

> *I have also spoken with children who are very keen to return to school; and parents who are finding it a desperate struggle to supervise the learning of their children while continuing to work from home. There are also clearly issues for families living in blocks of flats. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

Some of these require the specialist facilities of the school:

> *An on-site program could be offered to VET students to enable them to complete the practical requirements of their units while adhering to social distancing (through smaller classes for example). (Education system staff; direct communication)*

Ensuring attending school on-site is attractive and feasible

Even if parents/carers would like children and young people to physically attend school, key informants were concerned that this is not attractive for some students. School may not have been a positive experience previously. Aspects of school they usually enjoy may not be present now – especially in contexts where the class-based offering is simply the online learning program with school supervision.

> *I think that for young people who have a tenuous connection to school in the first place, the thing that gets them there in the first place – friends, sporting activity probably isn't there so they're not going to turn up. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

> *Young people sitting on the autistic spectrum for whom routine and going to school is complicated anyway. Some will retreat into that safe world of gaming and maybe online learning at home ok – but they're going to get so safe in that little space that reengaging with school is going to be very complicated. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

In some jurisdictions there may be a limit to which sites are open for physical attendance. In the ACT "supervision will be provided at a small number of school sites" in Term 2, with these chosen on the basis of data collected on a form families were asked to complete by 17 April to register their interest (Education Directorate ACT 2020). A key informant advised that in Victoria some multi-campus schools have closed all except one campus. They suggested:

> *[a reduction in sites available for attendance] can create barriers for children needing to attend, either in access/transport (i.e. now expected to attend a setting a distance from home) or through lack of familiarity and comfort. (NGO – social service focused; survey)*

Overall, there is strong recommendation that enabling vulnerable children and young people to physically attend school as soon as possible will require targeted support.

The urgency was emphasised by many who agree with Hattie (2020; see chapter 1) that the move to learning at home poses a profound risk of widening educational inequality, with long-term negative impacts both for individual children and young people, and for society.

> *One of the issues around education is that it is a signpost for likely future success or failure. The more this [lockdown] goes on the more those kids who would do well will succeed and grow and develop their educational standing. There is a chance that the vulnerable group who are already vulnerable will do nothing, so that gap will get wider. Equality in terms of learning will play out in terms of quality of life because we know generally that education can dictate future success or failure and will determine lifestyle. If this is a prolonged thing we may have to look at how we redress those who were not fortunate to have the support or the infrastructure. How do you support them to re-establish their learning so they aren't disadvantaged significantly? (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

4.2 Quality online learning

While there continues to be a health risk to particular groups of the population, there will be a need for at least some students to engage in a program of education at home. Additionally, a continuation of social distancing practices will necessitate that schools limit attendance on site in some ways.

With most jurisdictions indicating that families can choose to have their students learning from home, there are large numbers taking up that option. A survey of Tasmanian Principals indicated that the majority of families indicated that they are planning to keep their children at home. This varied from school to school, but no Principal found more than 50% of families planned to attend school.

At least in the immediate future, there will be a need to provide a learning program for students that can be undertaken away from the school environment. For some schools this program is also being delivered to students who are attending school under the supervision of school staff (who are not necessarily teachers). The experience of Interactive Distance e-Learning highlights that this kind of online learning can work particularly well for Indigenous students (Crump 2009).

The online learning environment can provide an excellent platform for learning and the engagement of students. It can draw on excellent resources of the world wide web, facilitate communication and collaboration, be personalised and individualised and complement off-screen activities. A well-developed online (or blended) learning program is more sustainable than provision and delivery of hard copy learning packs, notwithstanding there are families who will still require these. Providing physical connection to the school environment could be achieved through a blend of online/remote learning and some on-site experiences.

Not all students can be taught through online learning

Many students and families will adopt online learning, however there are some for whom this is inaccessible. Any learning at home (or remote learning) will need to take account of these families and provide a program that includes hard copy materials or use of other media or non-computer mediated communication.

> Overwhelmingly the families want hard copy materials because they do not have reliable data or consistent access to laptops for all household members. We created a data wall of the student faces showing what type of learning provision is suited to them. Very few want anything internet-based due to the cost and lack of reliability of access to this along with limited device access – The vast majority want hard copy packages (95%). (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)

For some families this is due to limited, unreliable or no access to the internet. For others it is a lack of material resources to complete activities. The story of a Principal from a remote school summarises this:

> So all our students received a pack and the pack was sent out. It took staff a week to get it going … it was personalised learning
>
> It included things like for PE, we put a skipping rope and a ball and a list of activities. We did visual art, we sent paint home. So we put in a little container like a soy sauce container, some paint, paint brushes. We actually had coloured pencils, textas, crayons, scissors, rulers, pens, pencils, everything we bought.

> *We put [the packs] together so when we sent activities we knew that they had what they needed, [for example] dice, chalk to go out play outside and draw on the cement. Because it is 2 hours away for parents to go to a stationery shop or to go to Kmart to find materials we provided everything. It was an investment that we thought was worth it for our children.*
>
> *Because if they are going to be at home, they need to have the basic materials. So every pack for every child had the basic stationery to start with. And then each of the folders that went through was individualised for where that child was.*
>
> *We also included celebrations like Easter eggs, Easter baskets they could create, also ANZAC day because we are going to miss that celebration…, and it's also making sure children have things like a wellbeing pack.… it was a booklet to go through, think about, write some good things, write a little diary about what's happening. Things that back on to heath and PE… it was more about remembering, everyone's OK.*

As well as providing learning packs, schools are utilising text messaging and phone calls to keep in contact with families. Follow-up for some groups of students is occurring through systematic processes in many schools.

> *In the case of Pastoral Care priority students (this may include rural, SLN, health issue or low SES students), the House Head or Counsellor will make individual contact based on a priority list. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

> *Special Learning Needs students are monitored and managed by the SLN co-ordinator who makes individual contact regularly by Skype or phone. (School-based staff – secondary; direct communication)*

Designing online learning that is effective for many learners

A well-designed online learning environment can provide a high quality and personalised learning experience for students. At the outset it is critical to recognise that such an environment is not simply translating what happens in a face-to-face environment online, nor does it primarily provide content for which the learner can engage with minimal support.

Effective online learning employs a student-centred approach to learning, that necessarily incorporates interactivity and opportunity for feedback, not only with the material presented online, but with the teacher, and where possible with peer learners (see Figure 10). Such a design is informed by social constructivist and connectivism theories and extends what is known about learning in the classroom into an online environment (e.g. Parker, Major & Herrington 2013).

Models of online learning in the post-compulsory education sectors and for professional development are well advanced in providing for adult learners with independent learning skills (e.g. Dahlstrom 2012). These models incorporate multimedia, simulations, synchronous and asynchronous interaction and utilise learning analytics and machine learning to personalise experiences for students (e.g. Brown, Kregor & Williams 2013). Nevertheless, the road towards online and blended learning in the higher education sector has been long and contested, and elements of learning that include social presence, authentic tasks and collaboration continue to be the subject of action research projects for improvement.
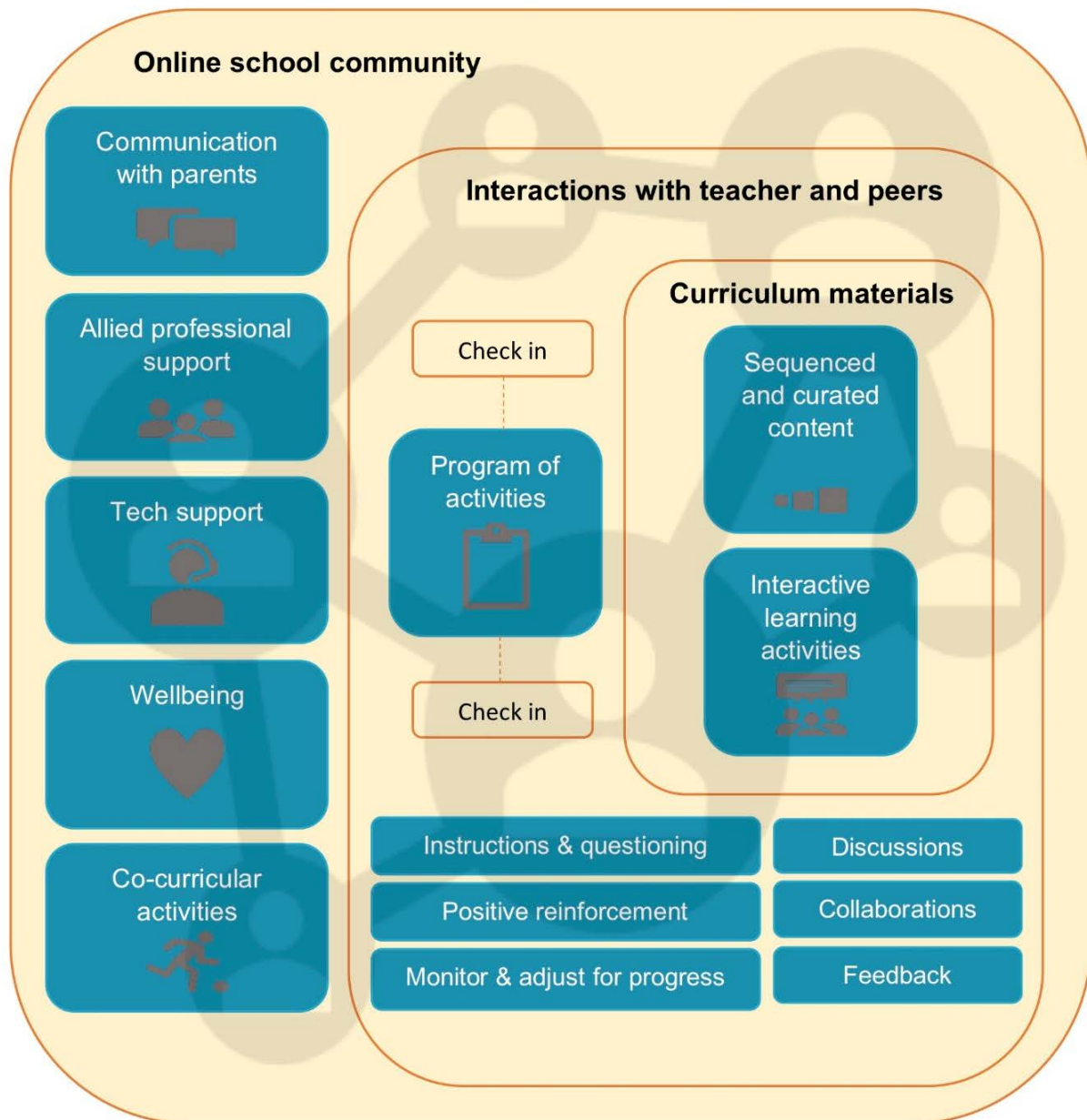
Figure 10: Student centred online learning

Online learning for primary and secondary students

Online learning in the compulsory schooling years is at its best when it adopts a nuanced model to reflect the stage of development of the students engaging with the material. In particular, this should include an emphasis on curated and scaffolded content supplemented with resources and activities aligned with curriculum goals and level of learning. Importantly, this needs to be coordinated at the school level to provide structure for learning at home that provides for coverage of curriculum and indicative allocations of time.

For school-aged children and young people, socio-emotional connections (to teachers and peers) have been shown to be linked to better performance at school (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020) so building a sense of community needs to be an important component of any online environment. Interaction between student and teacher and peer-to-peer can, and should, occur in a combination of real time, and asynchronous modes. This needs to occur within a secure environment such as a learning management system or an enterprise communication system.

Some schools, particularly in the senior secondary environment, have reported successful deployment of 'real time' lessons following the usual school timetable. The use of 'check-ins' at the beginning and end of a session or a day have been successfully implemented by many schools. There are also examples of wrap-around supports being incorporated into the online learning environment that connect students with support services and facilitate communication with parents.

Benefits beyond the current situation

The potential long term benefits of adopting online learning as a component of school education was noted by key informants. This includes reaching out to students who are not engaging at school.

> *The upskilling of teachers to teach 100% online will be of great benefit. There is a hidden group of young people who do not attend school because of their mental health conditions like anxiety, physical disabilities or their anti-social behaviours. These young people can continue to engage in education by provision of online learning with only weekly (or rare) visits to school. (School-based staff – secondary; survey)*

Informants highlighted the potential of online material to 'bridge' between the school and home, and to cater for students who may have missed school due to illness or other reasons, provide flexibility for different learners or those who benefit from extension or additional support outside of school.

Need for time, expertise and resourcing

Teachers are well versed in designing purposeful learning experiences that align to clear curriculum goals and assessment. However, it does take time, and specific expertise to move curriculum to an online mode. While there are many examples of teachers and schools who have been able to quickly adapt and provide engaging online learning for students, the speed of the change has been challenging, and will continue to be so if more curriculum content needs to be moved online.

> *We had a lot of work to do to bring the majority of our teaching staff up to speed with CANVAS. We have had a steep learning curve and have risen to the occasion. (School based staff – senior secondary; direct communication)*

If online delivery is to become a long-term learning mode, it is vital that the additional elements that are known to influence learning engagement and the learning process are incorporated.

> *We are engaging them in various zoom meetings on a daily basis. Still trying to incorporate PDHPE throughout the week to keep them active. Daily check-ins, art therapy packs sent home, wellbeing packs, counselling sessions, wind trainer cycling sessions, yoga, school holiday activities e.g. cake baking competitions, art skills, scavenger hunts and online games. (NGO – education focused; survey)*

If the higher education sector can be used as a guide, redesigning curriculum for the online environment for primary and secondary students will require upskilling of teachers, time for planning of a new approach to pedagogy, and technical help such as that afforded by educational developers and educational technologists.

Reports from educators about collaboration across schools and sectors in developing online curriculum and sharing practice are positive indicators of likely success.

> *We have seen more collaboration of our staff in this process than ever before and it has been amazing! Teachers and support networks are banding together to focus on the children. (School-based staff; survey)*

If online learning is adopted as the dominant form of education provision for an extended period, it will be necessary to provide time for this greater collaboration and team planning by teachers. This is especially true in secondary schools, to ensure that individual students are able to balance the demands of individual subjects if the usual structures of timetabling are varied.

Notwithstanding the use of 'pupil-fee' planning time in some jurisdictions and increased collaboration, it needs to be noted that in the current situation teachers are being called upon to (re)develop subjects to deliver online, while at the same time teach classes (which may include classes split between learning at home, and being at school), and in some sectors provide additional online tutorials. This is underpinned by the context of uncertainty and stress that affects all members of the community. It is not too hard a stretch to suggest this is unsustainable and the question of additional resourcing for schools needs to be considered.

> *We will revisit our tutorial program to determine how best to support students who are learning at home and have the need or the motivation to engage with additional tutorial support. Some of this may be provided by our staff and due to the increase in their workload and screen time, we may also contract required, relief staff to provide some assistance to students via additional "out of hours" tutorials. (School based staff – senior secondary; direct communication)*

Figures reported in the OECD Rapid Response report placed Australia below the OECD average (57 from 78) in response to the survey question 'Teachers have sufficient time to prepare lessons integrating digital devices'. Although faring better against the question 'The school has sufficiently qualified technical assistant staff' (14/78), there was a significant gap between disadvantaged and advantaged schools (Reimers & Schleicher 2020).

It is also important to note that utilising online learning brings with it a new set of requirements around privacy and cyber-security. These issues are best dealt with at school, or even system, level to provide systems and guidelines for teaching practice. Attention to this important aspect requires resourcing to introduce and implement and necessarily involves school, teachers, students and parents/caregivers (see Laskowski 2020).

Accessing online learning

Access to online learning is predicated by the requirements to have a digital device and internet access as well as having the confidence and capability for use of technology. However, despite the prevalence of technology and the use of the internet for services across the board, these foundational requirements are not uniformly met at home for Australian school students.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index is published regularly to assist in understanding the state of Australia's online participation. The Index measures three dimensions; access; affordability and digital ability. The latest report outlined some recent improvements in inclusion across the board but noted a 'digital divide' remained evident for those with lower income, education and employment. Although there was improvement in digital inclusion of Australians with a disability and of Indigenous Australians, these groups remained below the national average. Noting some variability in effect, Australians who live in capital cities have greater digital inclusion than those in country areas. The inclusion index score further reduces for remote communities which disproportionally affects Indigenous Australians (Thomas et al. 2019).

Affordability is a prohibiting factor for digital device ownership. The lack of digital devices in some families was recognised early in response to the learning from home initiative. For some families there was no device available for learning at home, while others had inappropriate devices (e.g. only a smartphone, or low cost tablet) or a single device shared amongst multiple siblings (as well as parents/carers working from home).

There has been a tremendous response of Schools, Government, Not-For-Profit organisations, businesses and private citizens to provide these to children and young people in recent weeks.

> *ICT access may have been a problem for a number of students, however, the Department has prioritised Year 11 and 12 students who required devices being able to borrow these. In addition, access to internet will be supported by WiFi dongles. (School based staff – senior secondary; direct communication)*

Nevertheless, informants continue to report this as a barrier in many families, particularly where there are multiple children learning at home in a family, where the family has not been identified as having a need, or in some cases where there is funding available, but no stock in local retail outlets.

> *Low SES families may not own the required technologies, or enough of the technologies to share between family members. The family might not have stable, reliable, fast internet to access online materials… (Other – Academic/researcher; survey)*

Access to the internet, for most families, is a function of affordability, although there are geographical considerations that also contribute, especially in remote Indigenous communities.

> *Most communities have satellite delivery, but if not there is a range of service provision. There are mobile phones and devices but the reliability due to severe storms for example in the far north can disrupt it quite dramatically. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

A 2019 report from the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) found that 28 SA2s in Tasmania had over 20% of households without connection to the internet (TasCOSS 2019). Of these, all but three were in areas of high IRD. This was consistent with the finding of the ABS survey onhousehold use of the internet that the most common reasons for households with children under the age of 15 not to have the internet was cost (ABS 2016). These findings are also reflected in the Digital Inclusion Index report (Thomas et al. 2019).

According to Thomas et al, "Indigenous Australians spend a greater portion of their household income on internet connectivity than other Australians … and receive less data for each dollar of expenditure" (2019: 17). This is at least partially due to the prevalent use of mobile data for access, which is more expense per gigabyte than broadband. In remote areas, there is a compounding effect of reduced internet availability and higher cost. This also provides a significant barrier to internet access for Indigenous families who live in remote locations (Radoll & Hunter 2017).

It was commonly reported that low income families relied on a mobile connection to the internet.

> *Although the majority of families do have an internet connection, this is predominantly through the use of their phones as the connection to the internet. Very few have the NBN or another internet provider. The data is burnt through quickly if there is more than one child who is connecting a device. As a large majority of phones are PAYG, this is a significant financial burden. (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

The Digital Inclusion Index recognises mobile-only users as being less digitally included through impacting both affordability and digital ability. The data collected linked mobile-only use with lower SES, education level and employment (Thomas et al. 2019).

For some families, especially those with additional disadvantage, internet is needed for other supports, and may not be available for learning:

> *Poverty and disability go hand in hand, having internet or using internet for learning may actually very well take away from other resources they need. (NGO - Disability sector; direct communication)*

Access to internet in rural and remote Australia has received significant attention and funding. However, there remain a number of yet to be resolved issues that affect reliable internet. Factors that impede internet access for rural Australians include dropouts and outages (for mobile and satellite), power outages (for NBN connections), and difficulties in accessing technicians or repairs (Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia Group 2018). Even households in urban areas, with previously adequate internet are reporting slower internet speeds with an increase in the number of people working from home (Kang, & Haskell-Dowland 2020).

Computers and internet are not enough

Importantly the Digital Inclusion Index also contains a third component, digital ability. Particularly for younger children learning at home, parental capability is an important factor.

> *Parents are very grateful for the support whether it is the loan of devices and/or data cards. However, they are finding this a very difficult time because they feel obliged to help the students and they are unable to do so. (School-based staff – secondary; survey)*

There are key groups who are challenged in terms of digital capability. These include people with low literacy skills, or where they have had little or no opportunity to develop skills in using technology. There is also evidence from research, that when mothers are struggling to cope with challenges of family life, the cognitive load of this leaves limited capacity to learn new skills, such as those needed to use technology. The inability to assist their children with technology has also been found to be a source of anxiety (Goedhart et al. 2019). Tasmania is the poorest performing of all states and territories in terms of digital ability, and this was reflected in reports from those who work with vulnerable children and young people that many of these families have a very limited understanding of technology.

It is also important to note that attitudes can also affect internet use. The Goedhart study uncovered a commonly held belief of mothers that "children below the age of five should not have access to ICT, explaining that it is 'Bad for their eyes' and 'Bad for their brains'" (2019: 2355). Studies on the effects of screen time on young people can affect attitudes and behaviour in families towards the use of technology.

Students have different states of readiness to adopt online learning

Although there are clear benefits to online or blended learning, it is important to acknowledge that not all students are ready to adopt this new way of working. Some Principals and teachers of primary and lower secondary grades have reported that students are not familiar with this type of learning and the swiftness of the move to learning at home provided little or no time for preparation of the students. It has also been noted that in some families, parents who will be called upon to help have not had experience with the type of platforms that are being used.

As well as familiarity with the digital environment, online learning does require some skills in independent learning. One survey respondent expressed concern for their student cohort:

> *Not many of these young people are able to work independently. (School-based staff; survey)*

While it might be assumed that young people today are 'digital natives' and therefore comfortable and effective with the online environment, this does not necessarily translate to adoption of effective learning for all students. A Finnish study of high school students found that attitudes and beliefs can have an effect on readiness for, and preparedness to engage in, online learning (Valtonen et al. 2009).

Early reports from across Australian schools have painted a mixed picture. Some schools have moved seamlessly to an online platform with students engaged meaningfully in the work. Others have reported extremely low rates of 'log-ons' by students on a daily basis.

> *There is some anecdotal evidence that among some of the students who engaged remotely during the week beginning March 30 that work output was high as was the desire to connect with their teachers and each other through [the online learning system]. (School based staff, senior secondary, direct communication)*

Use of more traditional technologies for supporting learning

Prior to the ubiquity of the internet, other media have been successfully used to deliver education programs into homes. In the OECD Rapid Response report, Reimers & Schleicher (2020) surveyed 330 respondents across 98 countries about their educational responses to COVID-19. An interesting finding was the number of countries who reported using radio and television media to supplement and support online learning or learning at home.

The World Bank (2020) has also provided a summary of these initiatives. These included Finland, Argentina, Russia (Radio and Television); Austria, Belgium, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Indonesia, Israel, Latvia, Malaysia, Romania, and Saudi Arabia (Television).

There are other instances of special education scheduling of television programs in specific jurisdictions (for example in California through KQED – see KQED 2020). A program in Argentina includes 14 hours of television and 7 hours a day of radio content. This program is supplemented with hard copy learning resources for students without access to technology.

In one remote Aboriginal community:

> *The local store is coordinating the schooling for the kids during the holiday break because the teachers have left their community. They are offering a range of options for them to do including a radio station which they broadcast education for an hour in the morning for all the kids to the community. (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)*

The use of national radio and television, or local media is certainly worthy of consideration in Australia. Although comprehensive coverage of curriculum would be too challenging for a short to medium term response, a focus on early years and/or on literacy and numeracy could be valuable.

5 Moving forward from COVID-19

> **Key Finding 5**
>
> Readjustment on return to school will be challenging for many students, especially those who are impacted by trauma, or who have been newly exposed to trauma or impacts of poverty as a result of COVID-19.

Participants in this study and reports from the literature point to a series of short and medium term effects of COVID-19 after schools are able to return to normal operation. For educators, a key concern was for students as the re-engagement occurs. It was clear from the evidence that some groups of students would be more affected than others, although a readjustment would be felt by many:

> *The whole social skills focus is going to be across everyone, because they are all going to have to relearn how to be part of a team, to cooperate, to focus after not having that intense focus … but yeah trauma kids will find that difficult and their behaviour will impact on the rest of the class (School-based staff – primary; direct communication)*

5.1 (Re) engaging with a 'normal' school program

When asked about what would be needed on return to normal school operations, the participants in this study recognised two key areas of focus. The first was to diagnose and remediate any learning loss (noting that this would be very individual to the student). The second was to pay due attention to students' health and wellbeing, particularly their mental health, during this readjustment phase.

Re-engagement with school after a significant absence has been recognised as a time for readjustment for many students. Although for all students "teachers need to give students time to ease back into school" (Anderson 2016), this period can be particularly difficult for vulnerable children.

> *Children with psycho-social disorders will take significant time to settle back in. Extended periods could undo learning and significantly disrupt routines and supports that have taken years to put into place. (NGO - Disability sector; direct communication)*

Principals and teachers have significant concerns for the return to school of many students who are emotionally dysregulated. Where this is a result of trauma from something that has occurred within the home environment, this may exacerbate the stress and resultant behaviours of these students on return to school. There is also research that points to high levels of post-traumatic stress in parents and children who have experienced quarantine (Brooks et al. 2020).

What has also been flagged is the potential for "emerging and previously unknown" vulnerable children and young people who have been affected by COVID-19 as households and conditions change.

Research from the US that followed low income students returning from extended holiday breaks, reported that some students presented with an inability to stay focussed (which may have been exacerbated by poor nutrition), lack of hygiene, aggressive or clingy behaviour, or not wanting to return home at the end of the day. (Anderson 2016).

> *We won't be teaching, we will be focussed on discipline, hygiene and supervision.*
> *(School based staff – early childhood; direct communication)*

The concern about an increase in the number of students who would be experiencing some type of trauma, has prompted suggestions of a focus on trauma-informed practice and allied professional support. This may involve some professional learning for teachers, as well as increased resourcing in classrooms to allow teachers to manage students experiencing difficulties without adversely affecting the learning of other students.

> *[There will be a need for] trauma-informed teachers, managing routine and understanding children's behaviour after this major change. (NGO – social service focused; survey)*

The extent of the potential challenge in some schools may also mean an increase in deployment of allied professionals to these school settings.

> *Youth workers and caseworkers would help. School student support workers of any kind.*
> *(NGO – social service focused; survey)*

For those students who are already disengaged, the challenge is even harder. The recent Watterson report (2019) identified up to 50 000 students who were 'lost' to education, and unlikely to complete year 12. There is an established literature around the lost benefits to both the young person, to the community and to the economy.

Elements to arise from the COVID-19 situation, including cross-sectoral collaboration, online and remote learning provision and closer community connection to education, may provide the groundwork for some effective strategies to re-engage these students.

In any discussion of readjustment it is also important to recognise that teachers, and school staff more broadly, have also been coping with an uncertain and stressful period. This may include illness (affecting themselves or others), quarantine or isolation, increased caring responsibilities, and changed economic circumstances. The health and wellbeing of the school staff also requires attention that may include additional staffing in the short term.

5.2 Adapting to the 'new normal'

When schools resume full functionality, it is widely agreed that they will look a little different. Beyond the challenges of re-engagement for some students, there will also be other factors impacting on the programs offered by schools. These are not all negative but carry some degree of risk if not considered in forward planning.

As a very positive underpinning, there are multiple accounts of collaboration at an unprecedented level. This has occurred across the full spectrum of education stakeholders – from National Cabinet, Directorates / Departments of Education across jurisdictions, and management of all education sectors to professional organisations and professional and personal networks of staff within and across schools and education sectors.

Prioritisation of the wellbeing of particularly vulnerable students has also sharpened inter-agency collaboration and ways of working. Furthermore, there is a level of information sharing and flow that has been, according to many informants, equally unprecedented. These interactions have occurred organically and rapidly in response to COVID-19. If the power of this collaborative effort can be maintained there will continue to be enhancements for all students in schools, and the possibilities of collectively solving challenges that arise.

Much policy work is being done across jurisdictions and across sectors, to look at communication to parents, what "recovery" will look like and what cross-sectoral work will need to occur, including capacity-building in schools. Ways of working also have changed, with enhanced information-sharing across agencies. It seems COVID-19 has prompted greater collaboration. These are valuable changes, worth maintaining for the 'new normal'.

Capitalising on new forms of pedagogy

There is a sense of optimism about the promise of pedagogies employed in remote and online learning to cater for students in new and different ways. Use of online platforms and technology solutions can enable flexibility for students to learn in a more personalised way, at their own pace. It provides possibilities for extension and enrichment of learning as well as support or remediation and for enhancing creativity in the learning process.

> *Online teaching - if successful, introduces new ways of teaching children and young people. These should not be dismissed when schools return to face-to-face teaching, but investigated for how they can be integrated to enhance teaching and learning in the future. (Other – Academic/researcher; survey)*

There is also some evidence that online or remote learning practices have been well received by students who had previously disengaged from attending school:

> *I think online learning is something that all schools should embrace as part of their Tier 3 programs to re-engage children that may have disengaged from education for other reasons. (School-based staff – K-12; survey)*

Economic challenges for families

> Beyond the educational challenges, however, low income families face an additional threat: the ongoing pandemic is expected to lead to a severe economic recession. Previous recessions have exacerbated levels of child poverty with long-lasting consequences for children's health, wellbeing and learning outcomes. (Van Lacker & Parolin 2020: 1)

There already is much evidence of schools responding to the economic challenges being faced by families with fee relief or waiving of levies. The increase in the number of affected students and families is unlikely to turn around in the short to medium term.

There are clear links between poverty and educational achievement. This affects food and nutrition, having a warm and safe place to sleep as well the ability to afford material needs for schooling. Many schools have reported their programs that support low income families (e.g. breakfast clubs and food packs). These methods of connection with families can be utilised to offer support, through schools, allied professionals and other community support agencies. Early identification of families that are newly experiencing financial hardship will work to ensure children are supported in their learning.

Recovery from trauma

Research on student engagement with school following a disaster highlights that "the routine and familiarity of school and teachers can help provide a stable environment for students struggling to return to normality" (Skinner 2009: 52). Trauma-informed practices will be important because:

> Ongoing traumatic stress on the brain in childhood may create difficulties with learning and memory, sense of self, focus and concentration, physiological responses, self-regulation and coping, and the ability to form positive relationships. … In the classroom, trauma can affect a student's ability to learn, form relationships, and regulate their behaviour. (CESA 2020: 2, 3)

If school practices are too rigid or generic – that is, not differentiated to different students' needs – being back at school may intensify trauma. A key informant with extensive expertise in Early Childhood Education and Care warned "children will be unsettled going back to a structured environment" (Education system staff; survey). On the other hand, schools can be the prime place where students' trauma is addressed and ameliorated.

> Due to the lack of family, community, or systemic resources in vulnerable or trauma-affected communities, the classroom may be the only consistent and stable environment the student experiences; and teachers could be responsible for the only social, emotional and academic interventions in which a student participates. (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters 2018: 117)

The usefulness of trauma-informed practice was also emphasised by key informants.

> *All of the trauma-informed strategies. Focus on maintenance and establishment of relationships, with the sense that we've all been through a level of trauma, so a recognition of that. It's unknown, it is a significant change, it's kind of scary. ... From a trauma perspective, we don't learn unless we're in our executive function kind of space. (Education system staff; direct communication)*

Maintaining a sense of hope for our students

The recently released Grattan Institute report has predicted a very high level of unemployment as a result of COVID-19 (Coates et al. 2020). Although there are caveats in the report, the headline numbers can cause shockwaves especially to young people who are looking to move from school into employment. According to the latest Mission Australia report, this applies to 1 in 3 young Australians (2019: 10).

> *Some students will need a 'sense of hope' for the future with the prospect of higher youth unemployment rates. (NGO – education focused; direct communication)*

Again, from the Mission Australia report, it is low income families who are likely to be more affected, and therefore this will almost certainly impact the young people we have identified as vulnerable in this report. There are no easy answers to this challenge, however some key informants have emphasised the role of the community beyond the school.

> *So I do think schools are going to have to really rethink how they are going to engage kids who are struggling, what is transition out of school going to look like, and really importantly I would want schools to say, "maybe we are part of the community. We're not just this institution that can do our own thing".* (Commissioner for Children and Young People; direct communication)

In practical terms this may mean setting up links between community employers to provide work experience and mentoring to young people in schools on a transition to employment pathway. In a broader sense, it may be identifying key roles that will be needed in local communities and working to incentivise employment of young people.

It is evident that work is already being done to prepare for the 'recovery' phase. There is a need to continue the important cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral collaboration that is occurring in current educational policy and practice in Australia through the recovery effort to build the capacity of schools to support students on and beyond their return.

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Appendix A: COVID-19 National Principles for School Education

On 16 April 2020, the National Cabinet agreed to a set of National Principles for School Education to support the ongoing delivery of high quality education for all students during COVID-19, enable students to progress through their year level, and support a successful transition to 2021.

1. Our schools are critical to the delivery of high quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus.
2. It is accepted that during the COVID-19 crisis, alternative flexible, remote delivery of education services may be needed.
3. Our schools must be healthy and safe environments for students, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of education to students.
4. State and Territory Governments and non-government sector authorities are responsible for managing and making operational decisions for their school systems respectively, subject to compliance with relevant funding agreements with the Commonwealth.
5. Decisions regarding the response to COVID-19 in the schooling sector must continue to be informed by expert, official, national and state-based public health and education advice, consistent with these national principles.
6. All students must continue to be supported by their school to ensure participation in quality education during the COVID-19 crisis.
7. The health advice consistently provided by the AHPPC is that attendance at a school campus for education represents a very low health risk to students. The advice also notes that appropriate practices must be employed at schools, like at other workplaces, to provide a safe working environment for school staff, including teachers, and that the specific AHPPC advice regarding school campuses should be followed.

https://www.dese.gov.au/COVID-19/schools/national-principles-for-school-education
Last modified on Thursday, 16 April 2020 - 9:14pm

Appendix B: Estimating number of vulnerable students

1: Severe social and educational exclusion

250 000   **Total Estimate**

- 170 200 Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care) (2018–19; AIHW 2020a, b)
- 949 children and young people in youth detention (on an average night, June quarter 2019; AIHW 2020c).
- 43 000 young people aged 15-25 present alone to homelessness services (annual, 2018-19; AIHW 2019). If equally distributed across age groups, this translates to about 11 700 15-17 year old (school age) young people
- 50 000+ school-age children and young people are estimated to be 'detached' from any educational program in Australia at any given time (Watterston and O'Connell 2019)
- 70 000+ young people are estimated to be enrolled in alternative / flexible learning programs every year, due to their educational and social marginalisation (Te Riele 2014)

Some overlap between these groups has been assumed.

2: Facing persistent disadvantage

550 000   **Total Estimate**

- 774 000 children under the age of 15 are living below the poverty line (Davidson et al. 2020). If equally distributed across age groups, this translates to 567 600 5-15 year old (school age) children.
- 46 300 young people under the age of 15 are carers (ABS 2019).

Persistent disadvantage is most likely when children and young people not only belong to a demographic group which tends to face disadvantage but also live in poverty. In addition, children with carer responsibilities face specific educational disadvantages. Some overlap between these groups has been assumed.

3: Newly disadvantaged due to COVID-19 context

200 000   **Total Estimate**

- 700 000 Australians could lose their job by mid-2020 (Treasury modelling; Wright 2020).
  - 175 000 students are estimated to be newly affected by household unemployment and resulting financial distress, based on a conservative estimate that a quarter of these newly unemployed people have one school aged child.
- 292 600 children with a disability attended school (in 2009; ABS 2009)
  - 158 900 of those children "received additional assistance regardless of the school setting, such as special tuition, and access to counsellors or disability support workers" (ABS 2013).

Some overlap with other groups has been assumed.

4: Working families in COVID-19 context

750 000   **Total Estimate**

- 1 505 868 dependent children live in a "Couple family: Both employed, worked full-time" or "One parent family: Employed, worked full-time" (ABS 2018). Assuming the 0-15 age range is equally distributed, then that leads to 1 035 284 children age 5-15 (school age).

Some overlap with groups above has been assumed (especially group 3), leading to a more conservative estimate of 750 000.

5: Families supporting learning in the early years

300 000   **Total Estimate**

- 296 932 children were enrolled in a preschool program in 2018 in the state-specific year before commencing full time schooling (Productivity Commission 2020a)

Appendix C: Guiding questions for primary data collection

1) **Tell us a bit about the children and young people you work with, or know about, and who you'll think about for our other questions?**

2) **Home environment**

a) What are some elements in home environments that have a negative effect on children's and young people's ability to learn at home, instead of on-site at school?

b) What examples do you know about of useful support to overcome those concerns / barriers?

3) **Learning**

a) What is the nature and quality of learning that children and young people are doing at home?

b) What is the quantity / amount of learning that children and young people are doing at home?

c) What feedback are you getting from parents about supporting learning at home?

4) **By not being able to go to school …**

a) What are the most important things these children and young people are missing out on?

b) What examples do you know about of ways in which children and young people are being supported to fill those gaps?

5) **When schools re-open …**

a) What are the key supports that will need to be in place for students?

b) What are the key supports that will need to be in place for school staff?

c) What are some innovations to support student learning developed now, that should be kept?

Appendix D: Overview of secondary sources

The report draws on many secondary sources and grey literature. Some are directly cited (and included in the References). All have informed the report. The range of sources is indicated below.

Organisation	Nature of source
Federal, state and territory governments	Websites and media releases relevant to: • responses for schools and early childhood setting in COVID-19 context; and • COVID-19 generally. Reports relevant to education for vulnerable children and young people. Australian Early Development Census.
Commonwealth of Australia agencies and departments	Reports relevant to education and (vulnerable) children and young people (separate from COVID-19): • Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. • Australian Early Development Census. • Closing the Gap. • Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children. • Productivity Commission. • Department of Social Services & predecessors.
Council of Australian Governments	Reports relevant to education and (vulnerable) children and young people (separate from COVID-19).
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Reports, online snapshots and data relevant to: • Australian children and young people generally; • specific demographic groups (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people); • specific vulnerable groups (such as Indigenous children and young people, those in child protection, in youth detention); and • specific issues (such as alcohol and other drugs use, homelessness, family violence).
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Online snapshots and data relevant to: • COVID-19; • Australian children and young people generally; • Schools and early childhood settings; • Labour force; and • Disability and carers.

Not for profit organisations	Reports relevant to education and (vulnerable) children and young people from: • Food Bank; • Mission Australia; and • Save the Children Australia.
Guardian and Commissioners for Children and Young People	Websites and media releases relevant to: • impact of COVID-19 on education and on children and young people; and • education and wellbeing of children and young people generally.
Education peak bodies	Websites and media releases relevant to: • responses for school sand early childhood setting in COVID-19 context; and • COVID-19 generally. Reports relevant to education for vulnerable children and young people.
Unions	Websites and media releases relevant to: • responses for schools and early childhood setting in COVID-19 context; and • workplace and employee concerns during COVID-19 generally.
Academic research reports	Reports relevant to education and (vulnerable) children and young people (separate from COVID-19).
International organisations	Rapid response reports and websites relevant to impact of COVID-19 on education and on children and young people – and to education for vulnerable students generally, from: • OECD; • UNESCO; • UN; • World Bank; • Education Endowment Foundation, and • ARC Education Project (Ottawa).

Appendix E: Advice for parents

Federal, State and Territory Departments of Education

Australian federal government	https://www.education.gov.au/parent-engagement-children-s-learning
Australian Capital Territory	https://sites.google.com/ed.act.edu.au/act-home-learning/resources-to-support-home-learning
New South Wales	https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/learning-from-home/advice-to-parents-and-carers
Northern Territory	https://nt.gov.au/learning/learning-together
Queensland	https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning-at-home
South Australia	https://www.education.sa.gov.au/our-learning-sa/advice-students-and-families
Tasmania	https://www.education.tas.gov.au/learning-at-home/
Victoria	https://education.vic.gov.au/parents/learning/Pages/home-learning.aspx
Western Australia	https://www.education.wa.edu.au/learning-at-home

Other sources

Australian Broadcasting Commission	https://education.abc.net.au/home#!/resources https://www.abc.net.au/radio/brisbane/online-resources-for-home-schooling/12094136
Australia Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)	https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/parent-information/ https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Information_for_parents_years_3_-_4.pdf
Australian Institute of Family Studies	https://aifs.gov.au/media-releases/coronavirus-response-resources-families
Australian Parents Council	https://austparents.edu.au/information-and-advice/coronavirus-advice-support-and-resources-for-parents/
eSafety Commissioner	https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/blog/COVID-19-online-safety-kit-parents-and-carers
Raising Children	https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-COVID-19-guide
Social Ventures Australia	https://www.evidenceforlearning.org.au/COVID-19-home-supported-learning/advice-for-parents/home-learning-concepts/
University of Sydney Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences	https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/schools/sydney-school-of-education-and-social-work/resources-for-parents-working-at-home-with-kids.html

learning is the stepping stone to the future

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