

# OUT-OF-HOME CARE (Homelessness) POLICY

## **Rationale**

- Education makes a significant contribution to the development and wellbeing of all children and young people as well as their future access to employment and life opportunities.
- The Department of Education and Training (DET) is working in partnership with other government departments and community service organisations to strengthen educational support for children, young people and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Guidelines have been developed primarily for all primary and secondary schools across Victoria to improve the wellbeing, educational experiences and outcomes of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Specifically, the guidelines assist schools to:
  - understand more about homelessness, how and why it occurs and the impact it has on the lives of children, young people and their families
  - identify actions that schools can take to improve outcomes for children and young people affected by homelessness, and the principles that underpin these actions
  - learn about what others are doing to improve wellbeing, educational experiences and outcomes for children and young people affected by homelessness, especially where these activities involve good practices
  - identify key contacts and resources that will enable schools to more effectively identify, engage and support children, young people and their families who are affected by homelessness.

For a copy of the guidelines, see: Supporting Children, Young People and their Families Affected by Homelessness – Guidelines for Victorian Schools (pdf - 3.32mb)

- DET requires schools to appoint a Learning Mentor, develop an Individual Education Plan supported by a Support Group for every child in OOHC.

## **Purpose**

- To ensure Tarneit West Primary School (Interim Name) complies with DET policy in supporting children who are part of the Out-of-Home Care program or at risk of homelessness, in order to improve their learning outcomes.
- To ensure the school has strategies in place to support the Child Safe Standards 1 & 2.

## **Definitions**

Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) is a living arrangement for children and young people who cannot live in their family home. More than 8,500 Victorian children live in OOHC at any one time.

There are four types of OOHC:

**Foster Care:** a child is taken into care by a foster carer who has been trained and approved to look after children.

**Kinship Care:** a child is taken into care by a relative or family friend allowing them to remain within the family or local network.

**Permanent Care:** a child is placed into the permanent care of an existing foster carer or kinship carer through the Family Court.

**Residential Care:** a young person is placed into a home staffed by carers.

Children and young people come into OOHC through two main channels - after an investigation and removal from the family home by Child Protection or when a parent or parents cannot care for their

child and approach the Department of Health and Human Services or a community service organisation.

- A number of legal orders can be granted by the Children's Court to assist in the safe removal of a child from their family home. They include:
  - Interim Accommodation or Protection Order: granted pending further investigations.
  - Supervision Order: a child is monitored in the family home by Child Protection.
  - Custody or Third Party Order: a child is placed in the custody of another person without
  - Child Protection supervision.
  - Secretary Order: a child is placed in the care of the person arranging their placement.
  - Permanent Care Order: a child is placed in the permanent care of a guardian.

A Learning Mentor is appointed by the school to support all young people in out-of-home care. This person will focus on supporting the child or young person in their learning, academic achievement and wellbeing in the learning environment. The Learning Mentor plays a crucial role in assisting children and young people in out-of-home care. Being placed into care can be a traumatic and stressful experience. A child may require special support and assistance.

The learning mentor is not a counsellor or the person to send the child or young person to when they have behaved inappropriately.

Learning mentors, who may be supported by training, must remember that given the appropriate level of support and opportunities these young people can and will succeed in school and beyond.

### **Implementation**

- The safety and wellbeing of every child is the highest priority for this school.
- A Support Group will be established to provide a formal support network at school.
- The school will develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every child in OOHC. This plan will describe a set of strategies to address the particular educational needs of the child in care.
- The mentor will be appointed in a timely manner. This may be when a student first starts school, following school transitions, or when the student first enters out-of-home care.
- The mentor will be identified by the Leadership Team and the process should involve the student to ensure a good fit. Consideration of a staff member's skills, experience, gender, workload, willingness to fulfil the role and existing relationship with the student is critical.
- The class teacher or other staff member working directly with the student may not be the mentor.
- The role of the mentor includes:
  - getting to know the student and taking an interest in his/her life and learning
  - identifying any challenges that they may be facing and developing strategies that could assist
  - advocating for the student (e.g. ensuring that other teaching staff are made aware of their learning needs, interests, passions, or particular fears or struggles)
  - meeting with the student at a regular time. This would ideally occur as regularly as required
  - participating in SSG meetings and providing advice about additional supports that the student may require
  - facilitating the student's input into the Individual Learning Plan
- The school will:
  - ensure that an appropriate time and space is made available for the student to meet with the mentor
  - provide formal avenues for professional support to the mentor (e.g. access to the Wellbeing Coordinator, Student Support Services, EAP)

- provide access to professional development (training packages for mentors are available on the DET website)
- If there are significant concerns for the wellbeing of a child, the school will report the concerns DHHS Child Protection or Child FIRST.
- If there is concern that a child is experiencing family violence, the school will contact the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service on 9322-3555 or toll free 1800 015 188 – 24 hours.
- For additional information and resources the school will refer to the website below.
- Please refer also to the school’s Attendance Policy, the Mandatory Reporting (Child Protection) Policy and the Child Safe Standards.

**Evaluation**

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the school’s three-year review cycle or if guidelines change (latest DET updates early & mid July 2017).

<b><u>Ratification Date</u></b>	<b><u>Review Date</u></b>	<b><u>Policy Number</u></b>	<b><u>Version Number</u></b>	<b><u>Date Produced</u></b>
October 2017	2020	57	1	September 2017

Reference:

- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/whatoohc.aspx>
- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/oohcresources.aspx>
- <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/outofhomecare.aspx>