

**Linking Schools and Early Years Project  
Evaluation: Data collection Round 2**

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## **Abbreviations**

CALD	Cultural and Linguistic Diverse
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute at the Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
LSEY	Linking Schools and Early Years Project
MEYA	Maribyrnong Early Years Alliance
PLG	Practitioner Leaders Group
SALTEY	Speech and Language in the Early Years
SEHQ	School Entrant Health Questionnaire

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## **Executive Summary**

This is the second of two evaluation reports on the Linking Schools and Early Years Project (LSEY), which is being led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Childrens Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital. The project is being funded by the R. E. Ross Trust, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).

The aim of LSEY is to ensure that all children enter the formal education system ready to engage and be successful in school. The project also aims to ensure that schools are prepared for children of all abilities and backgrounds when they first attend, and that families, services and communities are ready to support the development of children.

The methodology for the first evaluation was the use of questionnaires completed by parents, schools, early childhood education and care services, and child and family services. For this report, qualitative data was collected to enhance the process component of the evaluation.

### **Data sources for the evaluation**

There are four questionnaire instruments being used for the evaluation: a parent questionnaire, a schools questionnaire, an early childhood education and care (ECEC) services questionnaire, and a child and family services questionnaire.

The parent questionnaire asks parents/carers about their child's experience in the years before school and in starting school, and about their relationship with teachers and other staff at the school. This questionnaire is being used as a repeated cross-sectional measure of children starting school in the years 2008, 2010 and 2012.

The schools questionnaire, ECEC services questionnaire and child and family services questionnaire are being used to conduct longitudinal analysis and will be administered in 2008, 2010 and 2012. These questionnaires ask about services' transition to school activities, their perception of the importance of transition programs, and the extent of their interaction with external services to assist in this process.

Interviews with early years educators, teachers, practitioners, principals and regional stakeholders were designed to capture the process of establishing and developing the LSEY project in each site, identifying any challenges participants have faced in implementing the project, and to provide information about project outcomes to date.

### **Summary of LSEY activities**

The project goals are:

- Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school
- Early years services and schools actively connect with families

- 
- Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children

Each of the sites are conducting a number of activities towards achieving the project goals. This section describes these activities. Later sections describe their effectiveness in achieving the project goals.

- **A partnership approach to the DEECD Transition Learning and Development Statements.** As part of the Victorian government's Early Years Learning and Development Framework, a Transition Statement is completed for each child starting their first year of formal schooling. These Statements are completed by early years educators within a funded four-year-old kindergarten program. The LSEY project communities took a partnership approach to implementing the Transition Statements by coming together to start a local dialogue about the importance of the information being shared and specifically what information would be useful to share.
- **Transition to school activities.** LSEY Partnerships across all project communities have developed a number of activities to support a positive transition to school. These include developing a single calendar of transition activities for all schools in the area and jointly planning transition programs.
- **Engaging with parents.** Early years services and schools in each of the sites have implemented a range of new measures to improve their relationships with parents and make the school and ECEC environments more accessible. It is hoped that strengthening these relationships will lead to greater engagement by parents with the school, and with their children's education.
- **Network groups.** One of the main strategies for building relationships between service providers in all three of the LSEY sites has been the establishment of Partnership and Practitioner Network groups. Each site holds a range of group meetings for local service providers to meet and engage in conversation about a clear topic; and local actions and goals. Participants in these groups are schools, ECEC services, child and family services, local government, and other practice and policy stakeholders. The network groups collaboratively plan and implement activities relevant to the LSEY project goals.
- **Peer swaps.** Prep teachers spend time in selected early years services, while early years educators spend time in schools. The peer swaps provide prep teachers with the opportunity to get to know children before they begin their prep year. Shared visits have supported a mutual understanding of each other's programs and the role that each play in children's early years learning and development. It has also facilitated information sharing to support schools to be aware of the individual learning needs of children before they enter school.

## **Findings: Impact evaluation questions**

### **1. Has the experience of transition to school for children and families improved?**

Compared to Round One questionnaire results, there were two statistically significant changes over time:

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- More children participated in orientation activities. In 2008 just under half attended schools over a period of weeks for half days or longer. In 2010 this figure was up to 68 per cent. Fewer children in 2010 visited the school once (15 per cent) compared with 2008 (48 per cent). This is unsurprising, as it suggests that as more children participate in extended orientation programs, fewer will participate in one-off school visits.
  - Larger proportions of ECEC services have children visit the school and conduct information sessions compared to 2008.

Schools and early years services conducted transition activities prior to LSEY and the project has fostered a greater awareness from both early years educators and prep teachers of the importance of these activities. The greater awareness has resulted in increased orientation activities and opportunities for children and families to familiarise themselves with the school environment, with school staff and with the school systems and structures. LSEY activities have also extended existing transition programs to include opportunities for educators to develop relationships with each other to support the transition to school for children and families.

Participation in LSEY has been reported to result in both schools and early years educators moving away from 'school readiness' to reviewing the needs of each child and being prepared to meet those needs.

The evaluation questionnaires do not contain items about the Transition Statement because they were a state government initiative introduced in 2009. However, in interviews, the Statement was cited consistently as the one of the most important tools that assisted in the settling process of children into schools. Educators specifically referred to the elements of the local partnership approaches to implementing the Statements, such as the personal handover and opportunities to discuss the Statement Outcomes and information that could be shared.

## **2. Has the capacity to work in partnership strengthened?**

Compared to Round One questionnaire results, there were two statistically significant changes:

- More child and family services responded that they had referred a child to an early childhood education and care service.
- More ECEC services had attended a planning, training or information day managed by schools or local education authorities in the six months prior to the survey

In addition, questionnaire data shows changes in school reported collaborations with ECEC services. Although the sample is too small for tests of statistical significance to be useful, these changes do seem meaningful.

Interview data also reveals changes to relationships that should bring about changes to practices and, over time, increase the capacity of schools and services to work in partnership.

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In interviews, participants reported a number of LSEY activities have increased the capacity of schools and services to work in partnership. These partnership activities have probably driven the changes in questionnaire data, and also represent changes to the network not covered by questionnaires. For example, the local network groups are supporting the LSEY communities to implement the project using a partnership approach.

Across the three project sites, practitioners and educators have had the opportunity to develop awareness about other organisations, and to develop relationships with others. This has improved the capacity of schools and services to meet the needs of children and families.

### **3. Have schools improved their ability to meet the specific needs of children in their first year?**

Compared to Round One questionnaire results, more schools had cultural/community specific programs in 2010 (8/11) compared with 2008 (3/7).

We asked parents whether they spend any time at their children's school, other than drop-off and pick-up. Just under half of the parents (46 per cent) indicated that they spend time at their children's school, about the same as 2008.

Parents were asked questions about their relationship with and the communication between themselves and the school. The majority of parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with these aspects of school in 2010, as they did in 2008.

All schools reported that they provided assessment and classroom tasks to meet individual learning needs. All but one school provided classroom-based health services for individual children, and three schools reported having these for groups of children. These results are very similar to 2008. Schools also rated themselves on average as being very effective in responding to children's individual learning needs

In interviews, participants reported that the partnerships have improved awareness of services available to children and families, which in turn improves the capacity of schools.

Strong relationships between schools and child and family services may show that schools have the capacity to respond to the needs of children and families. Questionnaire and interview data indicate that schools have active connections with service agencies, and are engaged in the provision of services. For example, seven of the 11 schools responded that they were involved in an early intervention or health program. These results show no significant changes from 2008, but interview data shows that stakeholders report the quality of relationships has improved, which should bring future benefits.

As a result of participating in LSEY, schools have looked critically at how they work with children in prep, and have modified their scheduling to include 'learning through play' activities, with which children are familiar from ECEC services.

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#### **4. In addition to LSEY, what other factors were involved in changes?**

A number of other interventions and activities in the sites, in addition to LSEY, are likely to have caused changes to the experiences of children, families, schools and services. These include:

- The introduction of the Victorian State Transition Learning and Development Statements
- New services and resources to the sites as part of community regeneration and other initiatives
- Improvements to transition programs through the efforts of education authorities and schools, and new programs for children with additional needs.

#### **Findings: Process evaluation questions**

#### **5. Have schools and services changed their operations to better facilitate the achievement of the project goals?**

Schools have made changes to their transition programs. Since the introduction of the LSEY program the Hastings site have made significant changes to their transition program to make it more accommodating for families and early years services.

Corio/Norlane and Hastings areas are combating traditional practices of competing for enrolment numbers through joint advertising of upcoming events and transition sessions. Corio/Norlane and Hastings distribute a transition calendar; an activity that Footscray is also exploring.

One school in Footscray, as a direct result of information from the LSEY project and examples provided by other Footscray schools, have changed their transition program. Instead of one morning tea for children and families there is now a series of orientation days that include a range of opportunities for children and families within the school environment. Another school in Footscray have dedicated time and resources specifically to the transition to school by time-releasing their lead prep teacher one day per week for the whole school year to focus on the transition to school. Although this initiative is not funded by the LSEY project, their involvement in LSEY contributed to the awareness of the importance of the transition to school and the subsequent redirection of time and resources to facilitate better transition.

#### **6. What were effective strategies in meeting the project goals?**

The network groups have provided teachers and practitioners with the opportunity to build relationships with others. These relationships enable an understanding of the different roles played by schools and services, and are the basis of new partnerships.

In all the project areas, local service providers participating in LSEY attend working group meetings where all involved brainstorm to formulate strategies and actions to implement the aims and objectives of the project.

In all three sites the feedback about the effectiveness of peer swaps to develop relationships with other professionals and gain a better understanding of transition for children, has been overwhelmingly positive.

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The introduction of compulsory Transition Statements was successfully used as an opportunity to build networks.

Interview participants reported that LSEY has improved the capacity of schools to meet the learning needs of children from CALD backgrounds, through the opportunity to learn how child and family services and early years services have changed their ways of doing business, such as producing brochures in community languages. LSEY has also assisted schools in building capacity to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

### **7. What strategies were not effective?**

Difficulties with the partnership model as a whole are described elsewhere in the report. A small number of attempted activities were less successful than the others described so far, mostly due to competing priorities and time commitments.

### **8. To what extent has the project been implemented as intended?**

In all three sites partners and practitioners are actively planning and implementing activities to engage families, meet the learning needs of all children, and ensure that children and families make a smooth transition to school. The planning and implementation of these actions align with project goals and objectives, suggesting that at this stage, LSEY is progressing in a way that reflects the intent of the project.

Overall the project is being implemented as intended for the Hastings site; partnerships have been developed and are being maintained locally, though there is still active input from the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH).

In Corio/Norlane, schools and early years services have focussed on implementing a co-ordinated approach by jointly planning transition programs, and the development of a Transition Calendar is a tool within this approach.

The Practitioner Group for the Footscray area was established after the appointment of a links worker to develop sustainable relationships and coordinate meetings between the schools and early years educators. This group is continuing to meet to discuss practices as well as plan and implement activities.

### **9. What are the core elements that assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved?**

Leadership from CCCH has been very important.

The partnerships have provided schools and services with an opportunity to use evidence-based research to develop their practices which early years educators, prep teachers and service providers would not have the time to research on their own.

The partnership activities have enhanced the standing of early educators in the eyes of the schools. Through the peer swaps schools now understand the rigour that is involved in early childhood education and care. Schools in particular now have a better understanding of the range of early years services available, as well as the other child and family service supports available and their role.

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## **10. What are the strengths and difficulties of the project model?**

The strengths of the project model are described throughout this report. They include:

- Partnerships build on existing relationships and practices
- The model recognises the expertise of all participants, and the efforts currently in place to improve transition to school and children's capacity to engage in school
- Local knowledge and other initiatives in place are used to complement LSEY activities.

The primary difficulties with the project model are:

- Challenges in putting ideas into practice
- Reliance on volunteerism and goodwill
- Differences in capacity, resources and priorities among stakeholders
- Gaining and maintaining participation

Each of the sites are responding to these challenges, which are not unusual for projects such as LSEY.

## **11. What are the functions and characteristics of local leadership in schools, local government, ECEC and community services?**

Leadership has been critical to the successes of the project. Specific positions, that have ensured that staff have responsibility for partnership engagement as part of their core role, have been critical. These have been Links workers, in two sites, and the CCCH project workers, in all sites. Schools and ECEC services have advocated for LSEY in communities and have taken key leadership tasks within the partnerships. In addition, local government plays a critical role.

## **12. What characteristics of the local service network in each site assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved? What enabled and hindered the capacity of partnerships to work with local initiatives?**

As each of the sites were identified for the LSEY due to their relative disadvantage, it is unsurprising that a number of initiatives other than LSEY are in place in these sites. LSEY has complemented these initiatives and has also been strengthened by them. Particular efforts have been made by the LSEY partnerships to ensure that all local initiatives are working in collaboration. This is particularly true of Corio/Norlane, which has a lot of early years networks and programs.

## **13 To what extent was the project adopted and championed by the partnership groups?**

The Hastings Partnership Group has demonstrated an ongoing motivation and commitment to the LSEY project and achievement of the project goals.

In Corio/Norlane, attendance at the Working Groups was initially mostly from schools and early education and care services as the group discussions were not as



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relevant to child and family services. In common with other initiatives, attendance at meetings has sometimes been patchy. Overall, participants of the working groups are keen to formulate strategies and actions to achieve the LSEY project goals. While members are committed and consistently participate in LSEY activities, the partnership is still building leadership capacity and is strongly guided and facilitated by CCCH staff.

In Footscray, a small number of participants consistently attend LSEY meetings and a larger number of stakeholders demonstrate their ongoing support for the project through engaging in LSEY activities. However, Footscray has struggled to consistently engage all stakeholders in the partnership meetings and this has so far made it difficult to identify and allocate leadership roles. While the project remains strongly directed by the CCCH, engagement of stakeholders is reportedly improving since the collection of data.

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## **1 The Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project**

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project (LSEY) is being led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Childrens Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. The project is being funded by the R. E. Ross Trust, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).

The aim of LSEY is to ensure that all children enter the formal education system ready to engage and be successful in school. The project also aims to ensure that schools are prepared for children of all abilities and backgrounds when they first attend, and that families, services and communities are ready to support the development of children.

LSEY is being implemented in three sites: Corio/Norlane in the Greater Geelong City Council, Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong and in Hastings in Mornington Peninsula Shire. In each site the project works with selected schools; feeder early education and care services for these schools; local government; and child and family services to develop new models of working collaboratively in order to address barriers to learning and development. The project is running over a six year period from 2007 to 2012.

This is the second of two evaluation reports. The third and final round of data collection will take place in 2012.

### **1.1 Summary of Round One (2008) findings**

This section summarises the findings from the report on the first round of data collection (valentine and Dinning, 2009). The findings from this report were based on the analysis of questionnaire data. School principals, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, and child and family services were asked to complete a questionnaire about current transition to school activities, their perception of the importance of transition programs, and the extent of their interaction with external services to assist in this process. Parents of children in their prep year were also approached to complete a similar questionnaire, providing information about their child and family's experience of transitioning into primary school, their involvement in the primary school environment and their thoughts of the school's responsiveness to their child's individual learning needs.

The findings of the first round of data collection were:

- Overall, parents reported being happy with their child's school or ECEC service and were satisfied with the information they received regarding transition and orientation programs and activities.
- All schools reported implementing individualised learning programs, and the majority of parents commented that they were happy with their school or ECEC service's capability of catering to the individual learning needs of their children.
- All schools ran orientation programs and activities to assist children and families in their transition to school. Likewise all school teachers visit ECEC services during this transition period.
- Both schools and ECEC services acknowledged the important of ECEC services in assisting children in smooth transition to school.

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- There was strong potential to develop productive and ongoing relationships between schools, ECEC services, and child and family services. Most existing partnerships focused on information sharing rather than collaborative planning or initiatives. For instance, all schools reported that they refer families to child and family services and exchange information regarding these families with the relevant services; however, this finding was not reciprocated by child and family services.
  - Ongoing relationships between different service types are crucial to the success of the LSEY project. However, barriers to achieving effective collaborative partnerships include competing priorities, differing organisation size and access to resources, and pre existing perceptions and biases in regards to other professional groups.
  - Process findings, as indicated by the LSEY project team and partnerships, include a successful first year of the project due to the implementation of LSEY initiatives, and recognition of considerable opportunity to enhance local community networks to develop relationships and work collaboratively towards project goals.

## 2 Methodology and Sample

### 2.1 Outcomes framework

The methodology for the evaluation is derived from the LSEY outcomes framework (Centre for Community Child Health, 2007).

### 2.2 Evaluation questions

The methodology for the first evaluation (valentine and Dinning, 2009) was the use of questionnaires completed by parents, schools, early childhood education and care services, and child and family services. For this report, primary data collection has been used to enhance the methodologies used for the process component of the evaluation. The evaluation questions, relationship to evaluation aims, data sources and interview schedules are detailed in the evaluation framework (valentine and Katz, 2010).

The evaluation aims and questions are summarised in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Evaluation aims and evaluation questions**

Evaluation aim	Evaluation question	
Determine the overall impact of the project towards achieving each of the project goals	Has the experience of transition to school improved for children and their families over the life of the project?	
	Have the connections between schools and families strengthened over the life of the project?	
	Have the connections between early education and care services and families strengthened over the life of the project?	
	Has the capacity to work in partnerships between early education and care services, schools and child and family services strengthened over the life of the project?	
	Have schools improved their ability to meet the specific needs of children in their first year?	
	In addition to LSEY, what other factors were involved in achievement of outcomes?	
	Have there been unanticipated outcomes, positive and negative?	
	Identify the effectiveness of strategies and activities implemented towards achieving the project goals across and within the project sites	Have schools, early education and care services and child and family services changed their operations to better facilitate the achievement of the project goals?
		Over the life of the project what strategies were found to support strengthened connections between early education and care services, schools and child and family services and to support them to work in partnership?
		What strategies were found to contribute to children and families transitioning smoothly between early years services and schools?
What strategies were found to contribute to connections between schools and families strengthening over the life of the project?		
	What strategies were found to contribute to schools meeting the individual learning needs of all children in the first year of school?	
	What strategies were found to be unsuccessful in contributing to the achievement of the project goals?	

Identify barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the project	To what extent has the project been implemented as intended?
	What are the core elements that assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved?
	What are the strengths and difficulties of the project model?
	What are the characteristics and effective elements of the project partnership groups?
	What are the functions and characteristics of local leadership in schools, local government, ECEC and community services?
	What characteristics of the local service network in each site assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved? (e.g. history of collaboration and existing relationships)
	To what extent was the project adopted and championed by the partnership groups?
	What enabled and hindered the capacity of the partnerships to work with existing local initiatives? (e.g. Best Start)

## 2.3 Data sources and analysis

### Questionnaires

There are four questionnaire instruments being used for the evaluation: a parent questionnaire, a schools questionnaire, an early education and care services questionnaire, and a child and family services questionnaire.

The parent questionnaire asks parents/carers about their child's experience in the years before school and at the start of school, and about their relationship with teachers and other staff at the school. It is being used as a repeated cross-sectional measure of children starting school in the years 2008, 2010 and 2012. At each of these three time points, the parent questionnaire is being disseminated in conjunction with the Victorian School Entry Health Questionnaire in each of the participating schools in the three LSEY project sites.

The schools questionnaire, early education and care services questionnaire and child and family services questionnaire are being used to conduct longitudinal analysis and will be administered in 2008, 2010 and 2012.

- The schools questionnaire asks LSEY schools about their relationship with early childhood education and care services and child and family services in their area, and collects information to identify school level practice in relation to the three project goals.
- The early education and care services questionnaire asks services about their relationship with schools and other early childhood education and care services in their area.
- The child and family services questionnaire asks about the relationships these services have with schools, early childhood education and care services and other child and family services in their area.

### Schools surveys

Eleven schools were provided with a questionnaire to complete in the 2010 round of data collection. This is an increase of three schools compared to round one (2008) data collection;

the additional schools were located in the Footscray area. The additional schools joined the project in response to a locally identified need to take a whole of community/suburb approach. The LSEY project now involves all except one school in the Footscray community.

All of the 11 schools participating in the study returned a survey. As both the population and sample is small, the analysis will provide a descriptive overview and provide no estimates of statistical significance.

### **Early childhood education and care services**

Thirty-five ECEC services participated in the study during 2010. One service in Hastings was added for this data collection round. Of the 35 services, 23 returned a questionnaire, which represents a return rate of 65.7 per cent. Regionally, 11 of the 15 services in Corio/Norlane returned a survey; 7 of 13 returned a survey in Footscray and 5 of 7 services in Hastings returned a survey.

### **Child and family services**

Twenty-six of the 61 child and family services returned a questionnaire in this round of data collection. This represents an overall return rate of 43 per cent. Six of 21 services in Corio/Norlane; eight of 22 in Footscray and 12 of 18 in Hastings returned questionnaires in this round of data collection. In 2008, 59 services participated and another two services were added for this round of data collection.

As shown below in Table 2.2, the majority of respondent child and family services were playgroups or parent-child groups, followed by family support services (excluding the 'other' category).

**Table 2.2: Child and family service types across regions**

	<b>Corio/ Norlane</b>	<b>Footscray</b>	<b>Hastings</b>	<b>Total</b>
Playgroups or parent-child groups	3	5	3	11
Family support services	1	-	4	5
Maternal and child health services	1	2	1	4
Parent education courses or programs	1	1	2	4
Library/toy library/mobile library	-	2	1	3
Family/domestic violence services	-	2	1	3
Health (and allied health) services for children	-	1	2	3
Counselling and or mental health services	1	-	1	2
Alcohol and other drug services	1	-	-	1
Migrant or ethnic resources	-	1	-	1
Disability services	-	-	-	-
Health (and allied health) services for adults	-	-	-	-
Health (and allied health) services for adults and children	-	-	-	-
Housing	-	-	-	-
Other	1	3	5	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>

### *Parents and SEHQ*

The parents return rate comprises two data sources that have been merged together: the parents questionnaire and the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ). In a partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the LSEY parent questionnaire has been coupled and distributed with the School Entrant

Health Questionnaire (SEHQ). The SEHQ is completed by all parents of children in their first year of formal schooling. This enables the LSEY parent questionnaire data to be linked to the SEHQ data to include parent/child demographic data that is not asked in the LSEY parent questionnaire. The total number of prep students reported to LSEY in 2010 is 473, and of these 306 surveys have been used in this sample, representing a return rate of 64.7 per cent. The margin of error associated with this survey is  $\pm 3\%$ . This means that if 50 per cent of the sample display a certain characteristic, we can be 95 per cent confident that the true result in the population of interest lies between 47 per cent and 53 per cent. A margin of error of this magnitude is very low (generally anything less than  $\pm 5\%$  is quite acceptable).

**Table 2.3: Sample details for LSEY surveys, 2010**

Parents survey	
Number of prep students in 2010	473
Total number returned	327
SEHQ survey	
Number complete	334
Number SEHQ not matched to parent survey	20
Combined parents and SEHQ information	
Number parent completed survey not matched to SEHQ survey	19
Number excluded due to duplicate Ids	2
<b>Both Parent and SEHQ information available</b>	<b>306</b>
Percent of total (final sample)	64.7%
Margin of error at 95%	$\pm 3\%$
Schools Survey	
Number issued	11
Number returned	11
Early Childhood Survey	
Number issued	35
Number returned	23
Percent returned	65.7%
Child and Family Services Survey	
Number issued	61
Number returned	25
Percent returned	41.0%

**Table 2.4: Regional breakdowns, return rate in each region**

Region	Early Childhood (%)	Child and Family Services (%)	Parent/SEHQ Combined (%)	Schools (%)
Corio/Norlane	73.3	28.6	64.1	100.0
Footscray	53.8	36.4	67.8	100.0
Hastings	71.4	61.1	56.6	100.0
All	65.7	41.0	64.7	100.0

## 2.4 Missing data and item non-response

Although there were some typographical errors relating to routing questions, these do not appear to have made a noticeable difference to the responses, as the questions affected have similar non-response rates to other questions.

## 2.5 Interviews

Interviews with practitioners, managers and regional stakeholders were designed to capture the process of establishing and developing the LSEY project in each site, identifying any

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challenges participants have faced in implementing the project, and to provide information about project outcomes to date.

A total of 32 participants were interviewed from across the three LSEY sites in June 2010, including three participants that were affiliated with the project but were not associated with a particular area. The majority of interviews were conducted in person, some of these in a group interview format. A small number of interviews were conducted over the phone for logistical reasons.

The table below outlines the number and types of service providers who participated in the qualitative component of this research.

**Table 2.5: Interview participants**

	Footscray	Hastings	Corio/Norlane	All	Total
Schools <sup>a</sup>	2	6	5	-	13
Early childhood education and care services <sup>b</sup>	4	2	1	-	7
Child and family services <sup>c</sup>	-	3	1	-	4
Other practice/policy stakeholders <sup>d</sup>	2	2	1	3	8
Total	8	13	8	3	32

a. Principals and teachers

b. Early years educators and service managers

c. Maternal and child health workers, Best Start workers, school nurses and child/family-specific organisations

d. Other community service providers, LSEY project staff, education authorities and local government workers

Interview schedules were tailored according to the specific professional group of service providers, their role as a direct practitioner or manager, and the extent to which they were directly or indirectly involved in the project.

Interview questions asked of participants included the following:

- What has been their specific involvement in LSEY activities and partnerships?
- What changes have been made to the service since the introduction of LSEY?
- How has LSEY improved transition to school for children and families?
- What impact has LSEY had on the way schools and services in the community work together to meet the needs of children and families?
- What have been the challenges or barriers to implementing LSEY activities or to the partnerships?

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Identifying information was removed and aliases applied to all interviews. Transcripts were analysed using NVivo qualitative software, using open and axial coding, based on the research questions and emergent themes. The coding frame included the following primary codes:

- Broader context
- Contextual information
- Effectiveness



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- Barriers
  - Facilitators (To implement activities; To partnerships; Other barriers)
  - Strengths of LSEY
  - Areas for improvement/difficulties with the LSEY model
  - Networks and partnerships
  - Outcomes
  - Outputs
  - Planned activities for the future (including sustainability)
  - Parents

Analysis involved the ongoing development and revision of codes to capture the themes as the process of analysing the interviews proceeded. Three researchers coded the interviews, commencing by double coding, then when coding became consistent between researchers, by single coding and intermittent checking to ensure that coding remained consistent.

Interview quotes are presented throughout the findings section of this report, to illustrate the primary themes and ensure that the language used by participants informs the evaluation.

#### *Limitations*

In common with other studies of this type, the evaluation design has limitations, which are described in detail elsewhere (valentine and Katz, 2010).

In addition, our attempts to include parents as informants in the interviews were not successful. With the help of school teachers and principals we attempted to recruit parents to be interviewed in regards to the LSEY project through distributing flyers about the research to parents via the schools, but we were not able to make contact with any parents. The parent questionnaire is therefore the only source of data for parent perspectives.

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### **3 Summary of LSEY activities**

This section provides an overview of the main activities undertaken in each of the three sites. It provides context for the analysis of the data in relation to the evaluation questions, which are described in the sections that follow.

#### **3.1 A partnership approach to the DEECD Transition Learning and Development Statements**

In 2009 the Victorian government released its Early Years Learning and Development Framework which set the framework for early years learning from 0 to 8 years (DEECD, 2009). As part of this framework a Transition Statement is completed for each child starting their first year of formal schooling. These Statements are completed by early years educators within a funded four-year-old kindergarten program. The Statement provides a snapshot of children's strengths, interests and learning styles under five key outcome areas.<sup>1</sup> It also provides an opportunity to include the health profile of the child and their vaccination record and a section for parents to complete about their children. The information contributed by parents includes background information that might support children to settle into school and information regarding their ongoing learning and development. The Transition Statement is specific to each child and is shared with the child's school with permission from parents.

The LSEY project communities took a partnership approach to implementing the Transition Statements by coming together to start a local dialogue about the importance of the information being shared and specifically what information would be useful to share. These conversations were followed-up by a Transition Exchange where the schools and early years services had the opportunity to personally hand over the Statements and have further discussion about the information contained within the Statements.

Furthermore, prior to the Transition Statements becoming mandatory in Victoria, two of three project partnerships had developed their own locally relevant templates for sharing information about children and families between early years services and schools. It was felt that this experience supported them in a more collaborative approach to implementing the DEECD Transition Statements.

#### **3.2 Transition to school activities**

LSEY Partnerships across all project communities have developed a number of activities to support a positive transition to school. These include developing a single calendar of transition activities for all schools in the area and collaboratively planning transition programs. The transition activities include prep teachers visiting kindergartens to familiarise themselves with the children who are due to enrol in school, and regular visits to the school to ensure the children and families are comfortable and familiar with the school, its layout and staff. Transition programs also include information sessions and individual meetings with parents if a child has additional support needs.

#### **3.3 Engaging with parents**

Schools in each of the sites have implemented a range of new measures to improve their relationships with parents and make the school environment more accessible. These include:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionstatement.htm>

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- The development of a parent area, so parents can meet other parents and then become comfortable to start interacting in the kindergarten program.
  - A gardening club, in which both parents and teachers participate. This supported interactions between families, school teachers and staff.
  - On-site supported playgroups, as a way of engaging with families already at the school and those who will be in the future. The playgroups can support children and families to become comfortable in the school environment and start engaging with the school teachers and staff as well.
  - Providing an open and approachable environment for parents to continue their relationship with teachers once their child begins school; one school ensures that their teachers have a presence in the school grounds after school.
  - Various events held during the year to build relationships with families of children in prep, for example, an evening where families were invited into the school library to play literacy games and drink hot chocolate. Children and their families were invited to come in their pyjamas and 90 per cent of the prep year families attended. This led to the library being open to families and other community members to spend time in the library and to borrow books on a regular basis.
  - A feedback and continuous review process on orientation programs and information sessions
  - A range of professional development activities have taken place across the project communities around developing meaningful relationships and partnership with families. Each area has taken a different approach. One LSEY Partnership has commissioned the Speech and Language in the Early Years (SALTEY) research, which actively engaged families in research around their child's language and literacy development. Another Partnership developed a 'Family Friendly' Review tool that enabled them to consider key elements of engaging families such as: communication with families, family friendliness of school/early years service environments and opportunities for families to be involved in these environments. The information collected from reviews enabled the partnership to consider their strengths and areas to improve in terms of engaging families

### **3.4 Network groups**

One of the main strategies for building relationships between service providers in all three of the LSEY sites has been the establishment of Partnership and Practitioner Network groups. Each site holds a range of group meetings for local service providers to meet and engage in conversation about a clear topic; and plan local actions and goals.

In Hastings, LSEY participants established a Practitioner Network Group which consists of all ECEC services and primary schools in the area. This group meets once a month to discuss the aims and objectives of the LSEY project and to monitor the progress of actions that have been implemented. To develop the sustainability of the Practitioner Network the Hastings site has established a Practitioner Leaders Group (PLG). At the time of data collection, two school teachers and an ECEC service manager made up membership of the PLG. The PLG is aimed at building capacity for professionals to self-sustain the local network. The role of the PLG is to formulate ideas to meet LSEY goals and objectives, to facilitate the Practitioner Network and to drive the planning, implementation and evaluation of local actions. The PLG then reports back to the Practitioner Network and the Partnership Group about the progress

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and outcomes of actions. This group meet for a full day once a fortnight in the Hastings Council building and enlists the help of a Best Start facilitator to assist in liaising with services or the provision of resources.

The Corio/Norlane community developed two formal LSEY project groups, the Working Group, which consisted of school and early years management and practitioners, and the Partnership Forums, which included a wider range of service providers at all level of service delivery. The Partnership Forums were themed by the focus of the Working Group.

In Footscray, with the support of the local links worker (employed as an LSEY project activity), prep teachers and early years educators identified that there was a need for a Practitioner Group to involve educators working on the ground with children and families. The Practitioner Group focuses on actions that they can undertake in collaboration to support children and families.

In its second year the Footscray LSEY project was adopted as a formal project group of the Maribyrnong Early Years Alliance (MEYA), an initiative run by the Maribyrnong local council. This aims to strengthen partnerships between LSEY and the local council, and communicate LSEY project findings to the MEYA and across the municipality.

### **3.5 Peer swaps**

Peer swaps between prep and ECEC services have been a key activity. Prep teachers spend time in selected ECEC services, while early years educators spend time in schools. The peer swaps provide prep teachers with the opportunity to get to know children before they begin their prep year. This can be important for the child's transition to school because when they start school they will already have developed a relationship with the prep teacher, making it easier for them to settle into the new environment. Additionally, shared visits have supported a mutual understanding of each other's programs and the role that each program plays in children's early years learning and development. It has also facilitated information sharing to support schools to be aware of the individual learning needs of children before they enter school.

In some cases teachers from the prep class spend a day in ECEC services in term four getting to know the children who will be enrolling in their school, and observing how those children learn. The aim of this part of the process is to familiarise the children with their new teacher and vice versa. Parents are encouraged to come in during that day to have informal discussions with the teacher.

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## **4 Overall impact towards achieving project goals**

### **4.1 Has the experience of transition to school for children and families improved?**

This section reports on findings from the parent, ECEC and child and family service questionnaires, and from interviews on the experience of transition to school. Compared to Round One questionnaire results, there were two statistically significant changes over time:

- More children participated in orientation activities. In 2008 just under half attended schools over a period of weeks for half days or longer. In 2010 this figure was up to 68 per cent. Fewer children in 2010 visited the school once (15 per cent) compared with 2008 (48 per cent). This is unsurprising, as it suggests that as more children participate in extended orientation programs, fewer will participate in one-off school visits.
- Larger proportions of ECEC services have children visit the school and conduct information sessions compared to 2008.

As the Round One report showed a high level of satisfaction with parents' experience of ECEC, school and the transition experience, it is not surprising that no other significant changes were found. Moreover, schools and ECEC services were very engaged in transition activities in 2008, so changes in the occurrence of transition to school activities were not expected. However, interview data shows that there have been changes to the format and priorities of transition to school activities, including the expansion of one school's transition program from one morning tea for children and families to a series of orientation days. These changes are thought to benefit parents and children transitioning to school.

#### **Children's and parents' experience of transition to school**

Detailed information on ECEC experience is reported in Appendix C.

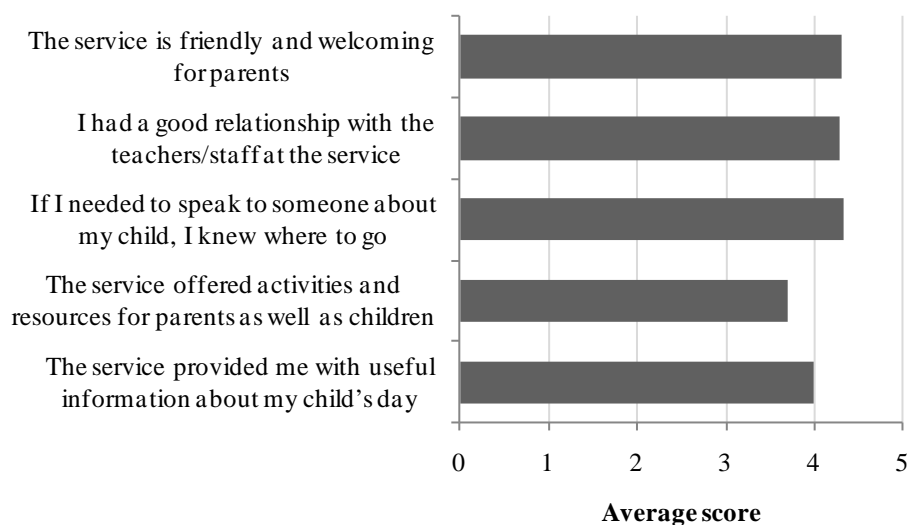
The majority of children participated in at least one orientation program; most attended school for part days over a number of weeks (68 per cent). Other options included the child visiting the school (23 per cent) or participating in other orientation activities (15 per cent). Most parents also participated in at least one orientation activity, either by visiting the school personally (76 per cent), attending an information session at another service (29 per cent), or participating in other orientation activities (8 per cent).

Ninety per cent of the parents completing the questionnaire responded that they received information on starting school from their child's ECEC service. This is a similar proportion to 2008, when 88 per cent received information. They rated this information with a mean score of 7 on a scale of 1 (not at all useful) to 10 (extremely useful), a similar score to 2008 (mean of 7.5).

Parents were also asked about their satisfaction with ECEC services prior to starting school. They were asked to indicate their agreement with five questions (shown below, Figure 4.11) related to factors about their relationship and communication with the service. The majority of parents had high satisfaction levels with the services provided, and all five questions rated an overall average score of 4 out of 5. This is a very similar result to 2008.

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**Figure 4.1: Parental satisfaction with communication and relationship with early childhood education and care services**



Although these scores were all very high, further analysis was conducted on these responses, to determine the characteristics of parents who reported lower than the median level of satisfaction. This analysis showed no significant differences between regions and available demographic information<sup>2</sup>.

Around seven per cent of parents responded that during the time their child started school there was some information or support that they needed but did not get. This is a similar result to 2008, when around eight per cent of parents didn't get all the information they needed.

Using the demographic information provided as part of the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (summarised in Appendix B) no demographic differences can be seen between those respondents that required more information and those that did not. Fewer respondents from Corio/Norlane needed information or support but did not get it, however this was not statistically significant.

The majority of parents responded that their child's school asked them for information about their child, and also attended an interview with their child's teacher in the first term of school to discuss questions and concerns. Parents were satisfied with these interviews, with only nine per cent of parents responding that they were 'moderately' or not happy with their interview. No significant regional differences can be seen for any of these responses.

Parents were generally very satisfied with the usefulness of information received by the school, giving the usefulness of information an average of 8 out of 10. Only 8 per cent of

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<sup>2</sup> Mother's age, language spoken, years in Australia, child on health care card, region, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and child having special needs did not make any statistically significant difference to the score. Mothers that did not finish high school were slightly more likely to respond with a lower score, however this was not significant.

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parents rated the usefulness as being 5 out of 10 or below. There was no difference in rating of the information received between the 2008 and 2010 data collection rounds.

Parents also gave an 8 out of 10 rating to their satisfaction with the opportunities to give information to their school about their child. The scores for the opportunity to give information were more dispersed than the ratings for information received. Although only 8 per cent of parents responded with a score of five or below, fewer parents responded with a score of 10 than they did to their rating of the information received from their school. In addition, the average score for 2010 was lower than the score in 2008 by three percentage points (i.e. 8.1 compared to 8.4) which is a statistically significant change. This is most likely because the scores for 2008 were more concentrated at the higher end of the range, whereas the scores for 2010 were more dispersed across the range. When examining the ratings of parent satisfaction with opportunities to share information about their children across regions, it appears that Corio/Norlane has significantly higher scores in both 2008 and 2010 compared to the other two regions (average 9 compared to 8) but these scores did not change between waves. Scores for Footscray were slightly lower than other regions, and scores for Hastings slightly increased between waves.

### **Schools and ECEC services: Transition Statements**

The evaluation questionnaires do not contain items about the Transition Statement because they were a state government initiative introduced in 2009. However, in interviews, the Statement was cited consistently as the one of the most important tools that assisted in the settling process of children into schools. Educators specifically referred to the elements of the local partnership approaches to implementing the Statements, such as the personal handover and opportunities to discuss the Statement Outcomes and information that could be shared. Participants reported that the partnership approach to the Transition Statements in LSEY sites helped children become comfortable and engaged with school by providing schools with key information from parents and ECEC services. This enabled schools to build on children's early learning experiences and respond to their individual learning needs.

Participation in LSEY has resulted in both schools and early years educators moving away from 'school readiness' to reviewing the needs for each child and being prepared to meet those needs.

In the early childhood field, there's lots of discussions about school readiness ... In the Linking Schools site, in the Hastings area, it's not even talked about anymore, because [transition] is about planning for individual children. So what can we do to make that transition or that experience best for that child? There's no talk about whether they're ready or not, it's about how they can cater for the individual needs and I think that's been a quantum shift (Ellie, policy/practice stakeholder).

The Transition Statement is seen as a basis for communication between the school, the family and the early years educators. For example, if a teacher is having a particular concern about a child, the teacher can communicate with the early years educators to see how they approached that concern. This is reported as something that differentiates LSEY schools from schools that are not part of the project.

Teachers [from within the LSEY networks] will follow up and ring and say you know I've got the transition statement for Billy Bloggs [whereas] the

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schools outside LSEY when I've distributed Transition Statements ... the principals have just looked at us again as like oh you're just a babysitter and what would you know? And haven't been terribly interested in taking the Transition Statements from us and haven't wanted to discuss the child with us or tap into our knowledge about what we know about that child, they've just dismissed us. So that the two different reactions have been really quite amazing (Ruby, early years educator).

There are a number of positive indicators of improved transition for children. For example, interview participants reported that Hastings participation rates in transition programs have more than doubled. The transition program is co-ordinated and consistent across three schools.

On the parent questionnaires, three parents commented that due to the transition activities their child was not stressed entering school, whereas all had previously had stressful transitions with an older child.

As the Transition Statement is supplied to the school prior to the child arriving, the school is able to prepare for that individual child if they have special needs. One early years educator described the benefits of this in terms of opportunities to conduct assessments of children at the early years service, without the need to impose additional tasks on parents, such as making appointments and travelling to keep appointments.

Participating in the LSEY project has been an asset for early years educators and prep teachers. Training was provided through DEECD about how to complete these Transition Statements and the Hastings project community educators agreed to all attend the same professional development so they could further their local conversations about the Statements and continue to strengthen their relationships. This collaboration has improved the experience of the introduction of Transition Statements for early years educators and prep teachers, and also reportedly made the Statements more meaningful than in non-LSEY areas.

In Victoria when they introduced the Transition Statements last year that was a major stress for all of us kinder teachers. I felt much more comfortable doing it than friends of mine in other areas, and a lot of that had come from the fact that I had spoken to the prep teachers around here and we had a meeting to discuss what sort of stuff they wanted to know. So I felt more comfortable doing it than colleagues I know in other areas and I also knew through that that they would actually read it, a lot of people say that they won't even read it, well these people I'm pretty sure they are going to be reading it and they are going to be taking notice. (Lesley, early years educator)

### **Schools and ECEC services: transition to school activities**

Eighteen of the 23 early education and care services that responded to the survey reported that they run transition to school programs or activities. Of those services that did provide activities, most provided a service where children visit the school, and just under half held information sessions for parents. Five services held a range of other activities.

All 11 schools responded that they run transition to school programs. These included Orientation days, information sessions for parents and children visits to the school. All but



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one school responded that their teachers visit local early education and care services, and seven schools provided a range of other types of activities.

The schools responded that they felt that transition to school programs were very useful. On a scale between 1 (not at all useful) and 10 (extremely useful), they reported that these programs were most useful for both disadvantaged/vulnerable families and all families (both scoring 9); and also extremely useful for teachers and schools (scoring 10 out of 10).

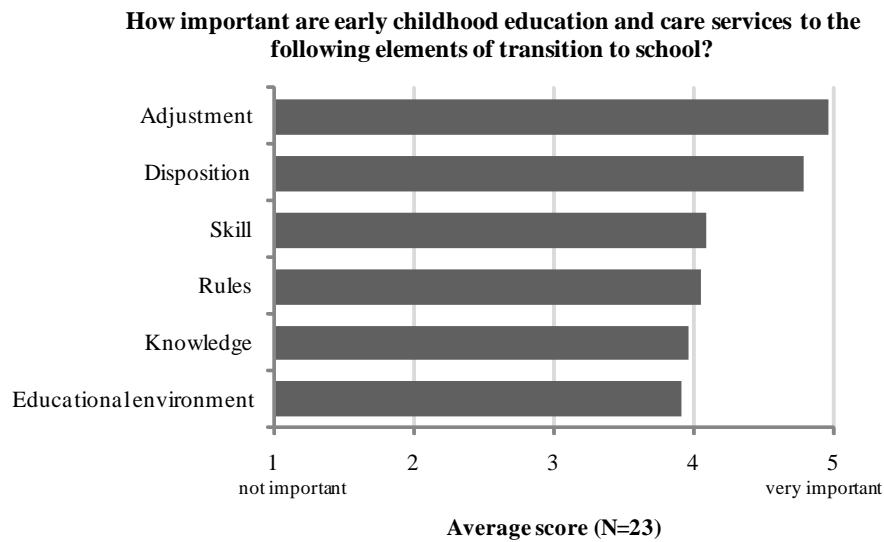
Schools and early years services conducted transition activities prior to LSEY. The project has fostered a greater awareness from both early years educators and teachers of importance of these activities, and of providing meaningful information to parents.

Interview participants also commented on the importance of demonstrating to parents that there are positive relationships between schools and ECEC services to make the transition process more comfortable for families:

Because they know each other it makes it that much easier for the families as well. The teacher can say, “oh I’ve met with the kinder teacher, and this is what the kinder teacher says, is this okay with you?” It makes that process a lot easier’ (Corinne, practice/policy stakeholder).

The mutual respect between schools and ECEC services is evidenced by items in the questionnaires. ECEC services were asked to rate how important their services are in elements of preparing for school, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is ‘very important’. Overall, the services rated themselves as being very important to all elements listed. Figure 4.2 below shows that services rated themselves as having the most influence upon adjustment with an average rating of just under 5, meaning that ECEC services felt that their services were very important in preparing these children in these elements of school transition. Examples of adjustment are that a child separates confidently from parent/guardian and is confident with large groups of children. Second-highest ranking was disposition (is happy about school, is interested in learning), also with an average rating of ‘very important’. Skill (can tie shoelaces, can toilet themselves) and rules (knows and can conform with school regulations) were both rated just over 4 out of 5. Finally, knowledge (can count, can recognise letters) and educational environment (what happens at school, including curriculum and the nature of the school environment) are also elements of transition in which ECEC services see themselves playing an important role.

**Figure 4.2: Rating of importance of early childhood education and care services to elements of a child’s transition to school (early childhood education and care services responses)**

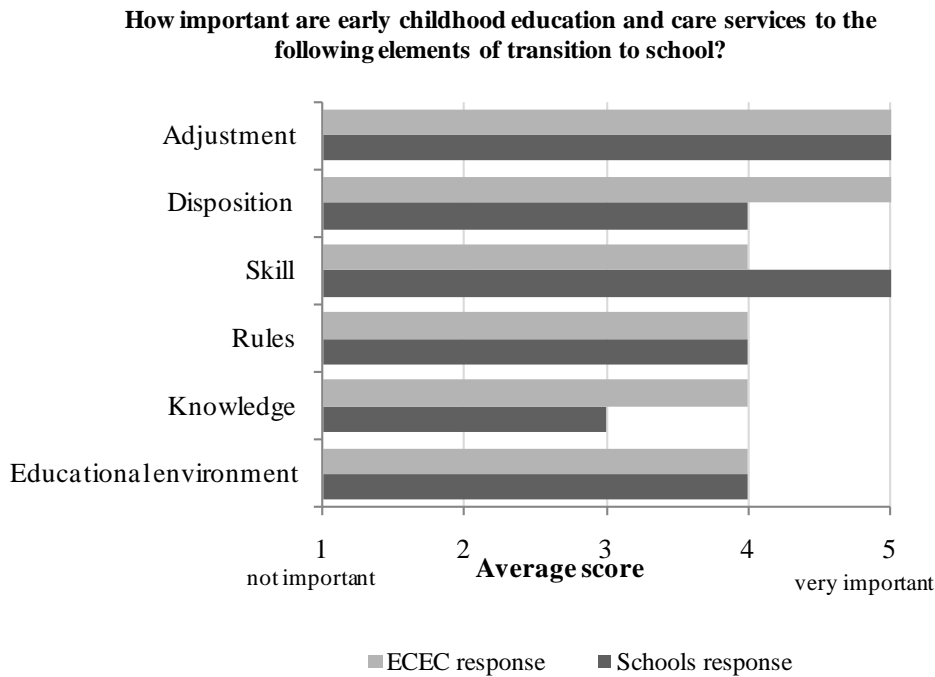


Schools were also asked to rate how important ECEC services are in elements of preparing for school, and also rated ECEC services as playing an important role in each of the specified domains. Schools responded that the most important influence ECEC services have in the school transition process is adjustment, all scoring 5 out of 5. Schools then rated skill, rules, disposition, and educational environment equally important (4 out of 5), followed by knowledge (3 out of 5). The school responses are shown below in Figure 4.3, and have been combined with the ECEC responses (shown in Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.3 indicates that both school and ECEC services agree on the importance of ECEC services to adjustment and educational environment, however ECEC services believed that they play a very important role in the domains of disposition and knowledge, which is a higher rating than schools gave. Schools believed that ECEC services played a very important role in skill and rules, which is higher than the ECEC services perception.

These findings are very similar to those of the Starting School research project. Dockett and Perry (2004) studied the perceptions, experiences and expectations of educators, parents and children around transition to school. They found that adjustment to school was the major concern of each of the groups of adults who were interviewed. The study also found that children and adults rated disposition as very important in starting school. It is encouraging that schools and ECEC services have similar views on the role played by ECEC services in each of these domains, as both adults and children rate them as very important to starting school.

**Figure 4.3: Rating of importance of early childhood education and care services to elements of a child’s transition to school (school and ECEC combined responses)**



During interviews, one school reported that prior to the LSEY transition preparation, children would be enrolled at the school but not attending on a regular basis. Since LSEY, attendance has improved considerably for children in the prep year, and this is attributed to improvements in transition.

The transition program is effective, and I know that because the children who don’t go through it we can identify, they don’t seem as settled, they don’t know the school as well. It doesn’t take a huge amount of time, but they certainly don’t seem as confident when they come into the school as the others who have been through the process (Mikayla, principal).

The transition calendar, which has been developed in two of the three sites, provides parents with timely information of when orientation and transition sessions will be run at each school.

**4.2 Has the capacity to work in partnership strengthened?**

This section reports on findings from the parent, ECEC and child and family service questionnaires, and from interviews, on the capacity for schools and services to work in partnership with each other. The data provides information on the activities and relationships between child and family services, ECEC services, and schools. It also shows where there are differences in perspectives.

Compared to Round One questionnaire results, there were two statistically significant changes:

- More child and family services responded that they had referred a child to an early childhood education and care service.

- 
- More ECEC services had attended a planning, training or information day managed by schools or local education authorities in the six months prior to the survey

As with the previous section, interview data reveals changes to relationships that should bring about changes to practices and, over time, increase the capacity of schools and services to work in partnership. In addition, as described below, questionnaire data shows changes in school reported collaborations with ECEC services. Although the sample is too small for tests of statistical significance to be useful, these changes do seem meaningful.

Changes to the nature and strength of links between services may indicate changes to the capacity of the service network to meet children and family's needs. For example, increased referrals between child and family services and ECEC services may indicate that when ECEC services identify that particular families could benefit from child and family services, they also know the local agencies that can deliver them and how best to refer families to them. Individual items in questionnaires are not, therefore, meaningful in isolation. The descriptive data presented in this section gives a picture of the service system at the time of data collection. Individual sites may choose to prioritise particular indicators or areas for future planning, depending on area priorities.

### **Child and family services reported relationships with early education and care services and schools**

Child and family services were asked about their relationship with ECEC services and schools. The most common activity related to these relationships during the six months prior to the survey was communication with families about ECEC services. This is the same result as in 2008.

Around half of the services had received referrals from an ECEC service, which represents an increase compared with the one quarter of services that had received referrals in 2008. Just over a half (58 per cent) responded that they had referred a child to an ECEC service. This is a significant increase compared with 2008, when only a quarter (24 per cent) of services had made a referral.

Communication with or about local schools were lower on the list of activities; only a third of services had received a referral from a school in the area (8/22). This is most likely to be because a large number of respondents (11/26) were playgroups or parent-child groups (as shown in Table 2.2). Only 10 of the 26 services (38 per cent) did not provide early learning opportunities for young children and families.

**Table 4.1: Child and family services communication with services and schools in six months prior to survey**

Activity	2008 (%) <sup>a</sup>	2010 (%) <sup>b</sup>
Communicated with families about early childhood education and care services	64	86.4
Referred a child to an early childhood education and care service in the area	24	63.6*
Communicated with families about schools	44	59.1
Communicated with a school about a particular family	24	54.5
Received a referral from an early childhood education and care service in the area	24	50.0
Received a referral from a school in the area	12	36.4

- a. N=25, multiple choice
- b. N=22, multiple choice

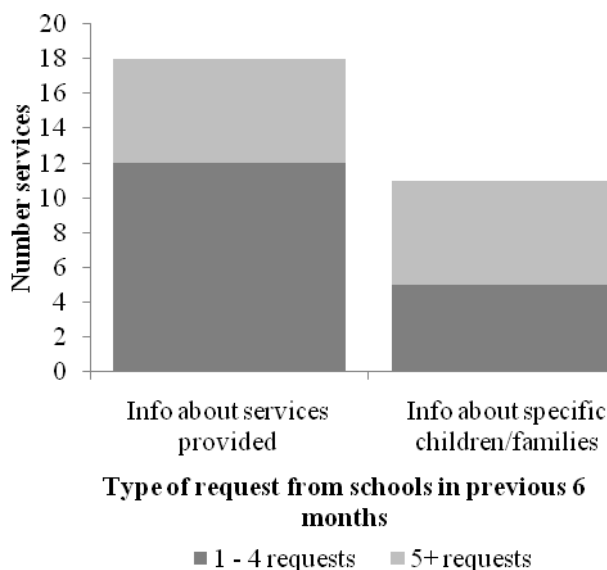
Most child and family services found out about local ECEC services through information brochures and websites, with around half of the services reporting that they found out about these services through other services, interagency meetings or training seminars.

Sixteen child and family services (61.5 per cent) reported that they provide information or resources to local schools.

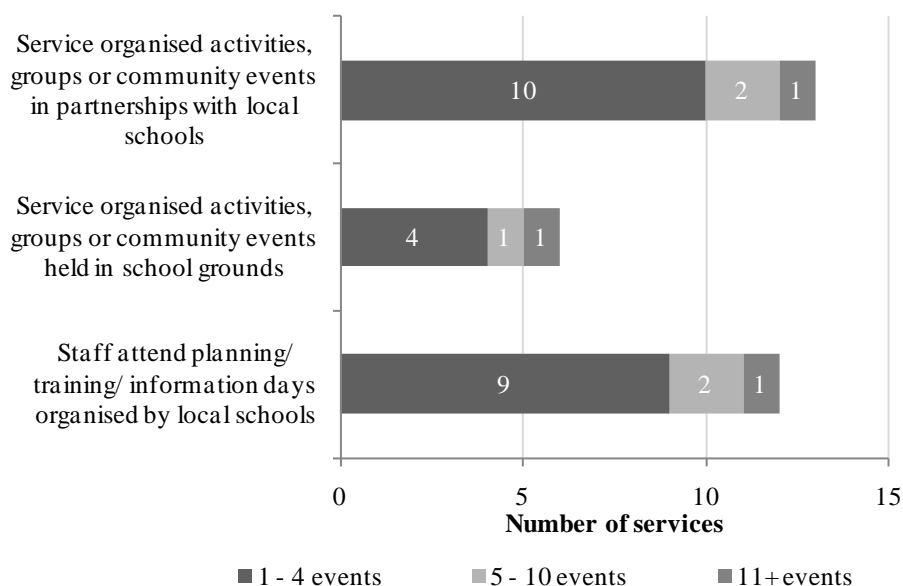
Nineteen services reported that they had received at least one request from schools about the services they provide in the six months prior to the survey. Of these, 12 reported receiving between one and four requests, and a further seven received five or more requests during that period; these are summarised in Figure 4.4.

Twelve services responded that they had received requests for information about particular children or families in the six months prior to the survey. Five services reported receiving between one and four requests, and seven services reported receiving more than five requests.

**Figure 4.4: Child and family services: Type and number of requests received from schools**



**Figure 4.5: Child and family services, number and type of activities organised with local schools in six months prior to the survey**



Just under half of the child and family services responded that staff attend planning, training or information days organised by local schools or education authorities. This is an increase from around a third in 2008, but it is not statistically significant. Staff from these services had generally attended between one and four activities of this type in the six months prior to the survey. This is shown above in Figure 4.5.

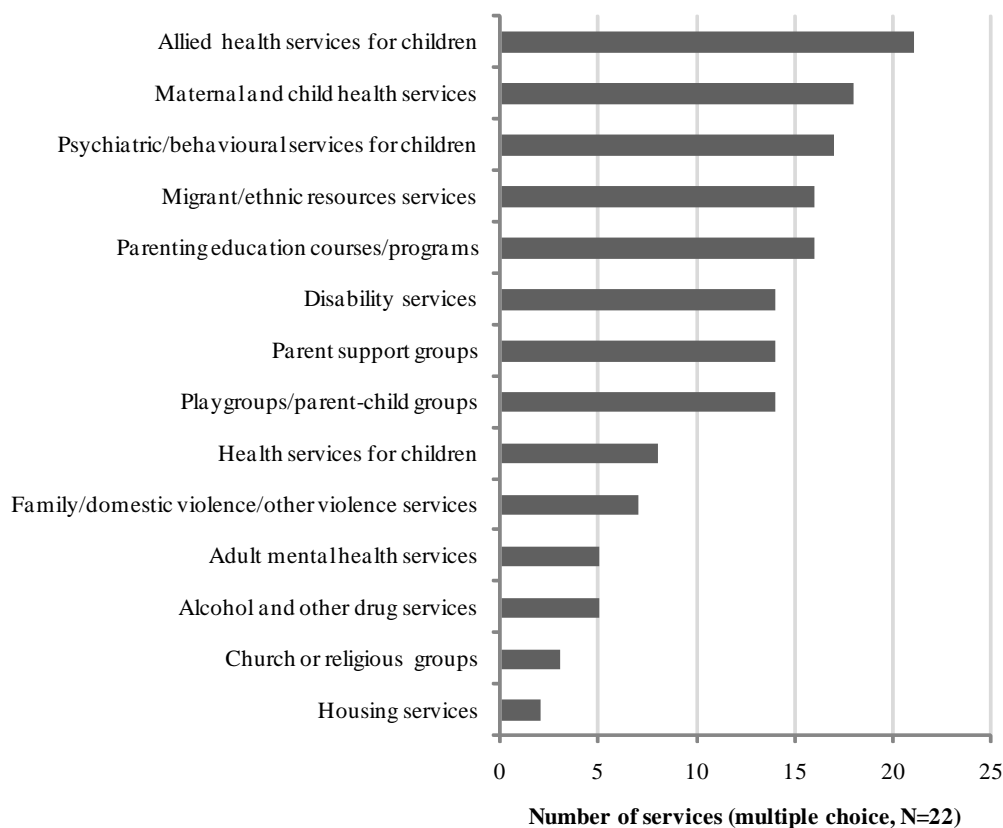
Eight services (31 per cent) organised activities, groups or community events that are held in school grounds, the same number as 2008. Of these events in the six months prior to the survey, four had held fewer than five events. However, one organisation had held between 5 and 10, and another organisation reported that more than 11 events had been held in the six months prior to the survey.

Half of the child and family services (13) organise activities, groups or community events in partnership with local schools, again this is the same number as the first wave of data collection in 2008. Of these, most had participated in fewer than five events, with another two organisations participating in between 5 and 10. One service reported that they had participated in more than 11 events in the six months prior to the survey.

**Early education and care services reported relationships with child and family services and schools**

ECEC services were asked about their contact with child and family services in their area. As Figure 4.6 shows, all but one early childhood education and care services were in contact with allied health and care services for children (for example GPs or hospitals). The most common types of services with which ECEC had contact were family health-related, while maternal and child health services and psychiatric/behavioural services had also been in contact with ECEC services. Less common was contact with adult mental health, alcohol and other drug services, church or religious groups and housing services with only around one in five ECEC services reporting contact with these types of service. These results are the same as in 2008.

**Figure 4.6: Numbers of early childhood education and care services in contact with other services in area**



As shown below in Table 4.2, all services that responded they had contact with other child and family services in the area reported that they referred families to these services (a slight increase from 2008, when 94 per cent indicated they did this). Three quarters received general information about the services or exchanged information about particular families (a slight decrease from 2008). More than half (63.6 per cent) provided general information about their service to the services they were in contact with, which is also a slight decrease from 2008.

**Table 4.2: Early childhood education and care services, type of contact with local child and family services**

Type of contact	N	% services
Refer families to these services	22	100.0
Receive general information about these services	17	77.3
Exchange information about particular families with these services	17	77.3
Provide general information about our service to these services	14	63.6

Note: N=22, multiple choice

**Figure 4.7: Early childhood education and care services, number of referrals made and received in six months prior to survey**

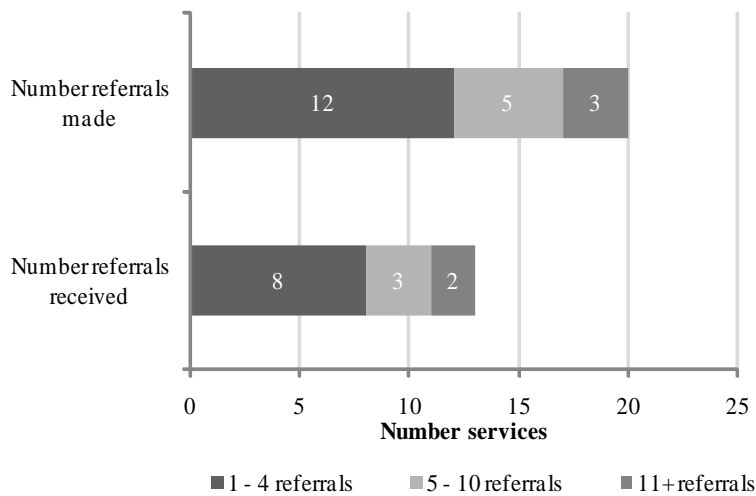


Figure 4.7 above shows that 20 ECEC services made referrals to local child and family services in the six months prior to the survey. Most of these ECEC services (12) made fewer than five referrals during this period, however five services made between five and 10 referrals and three services reported making more than 11 referrals over this time. These figures represent a slight decrease from 2008, when five services made between one and four referrals, two services between five and 10, and six more than 11.

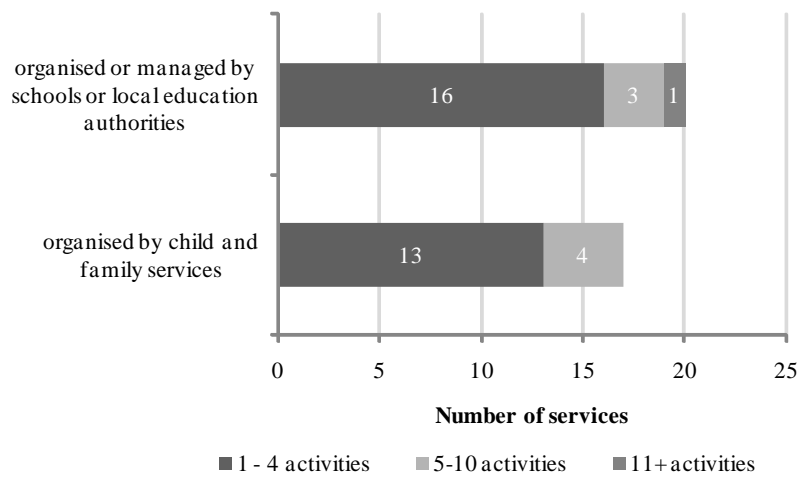
Thirteen ECEC services reported receiving referrals from child and family services during the same time period. Most of these received between one and four referrals; three services received between five and 10 referrals and two services received more than 11 referrals in the six months leading up to the survey. These figures are similar to 2008: 15 services reported receiving referrals, of which 10 received between one and four, five between five and 10.

As Figure 4.8 illustrates, about three quarters of the ECEC services (17) had staff attend at least one planning, training or information day organised by local child and family services within the six months prior to the survey. Of these, most of the services (13) attended between one and five days, and four services attended between five and 10 days. Again, these results are similar to 2008, when most ECEC services had participated in these events and most had attended between one and five days.

Around 90 per cent (20 services) had attended a planning, training or information day managed by schools or local education authorities in the six months prior to the survey. Of these, around 80 per cent (16) had attended between one and four days; three had attended between five and 10 days; one service had attended more than 11 information/planning/training days organised by schools or local education authorities within this period.

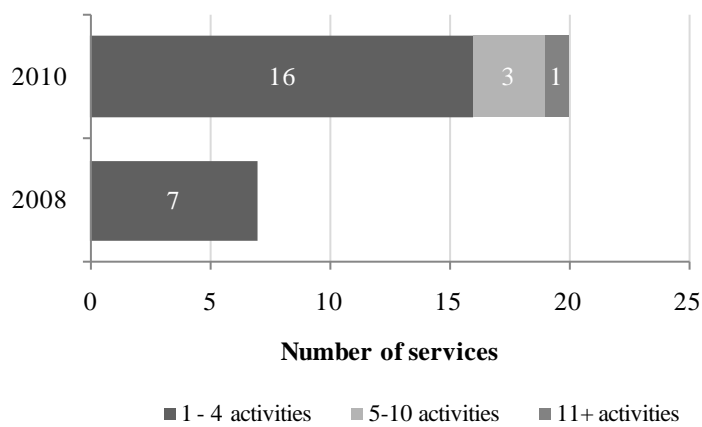


**Figure 4.8: Early education and care services, number of school/EA planning, training or information days attended in six months prior to the survey**



This is a significant increase in attendance of these events since 2008, when 11 of eighteen services (61 per cent) had not attended any of these events in the previous six months. A comparison is shown below in Figure 4.10

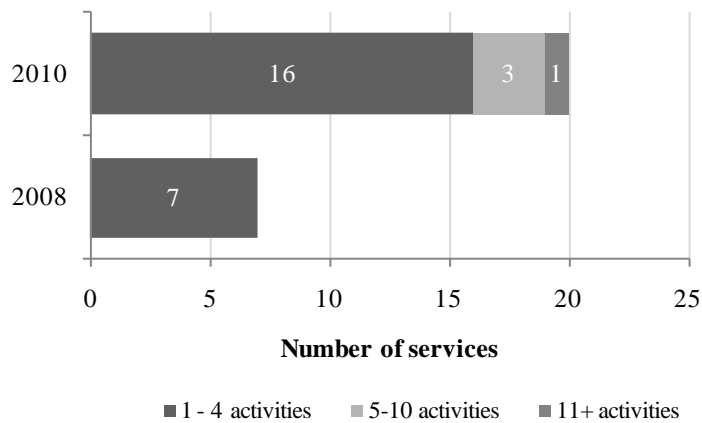
**Figure 4.9: Number of planning, training or information days attended by school staff in six months prior to survey, 2008 and 2010**



All but one of the early education and care services (22) have staff that attend planning, training or interagency meetings with staff from other early childhood education and care services.

Figure 4.10 below shows that just under one in five (4 of 22) early education and care services had organised an activity, group or community event that was held in local school grounds in the six months prior to the survey. Around a third of services (six of 23) had organised one of these types of events in conjunction with local schools. This is similar to 2008, when seven of 18 had done this.

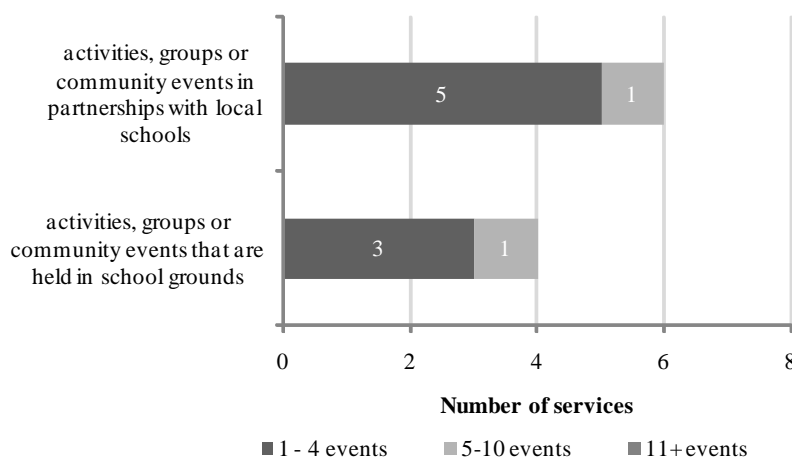
**Figure 4.10: Early education and care services, type and number of activities organised with local schools in six months prior to the survey**



All but one ECEC service responded that they have links with schools in the area (one service did not respond to the question). The majority of services have links with between two and four schools, two services only linked with one school and another two services have links with more than five local schools. ECEC services were also asked to rate the effectiveness of their relationships with feeder schools. On average, the services reported a rating of 6.6 out of 10, where one is ‘not at all effective’ and 10 is ‘extremely effective’, slightly up from 2008 when the mean rating from ECEC services was 5.5. The histogram below, Figure 4.11, shows that although most of the respondents indicated a score between six and eight, five services rated the effectiveness of their relationship with a score of five or below, indicating that they do not have a very effective relationship with feeder schools.

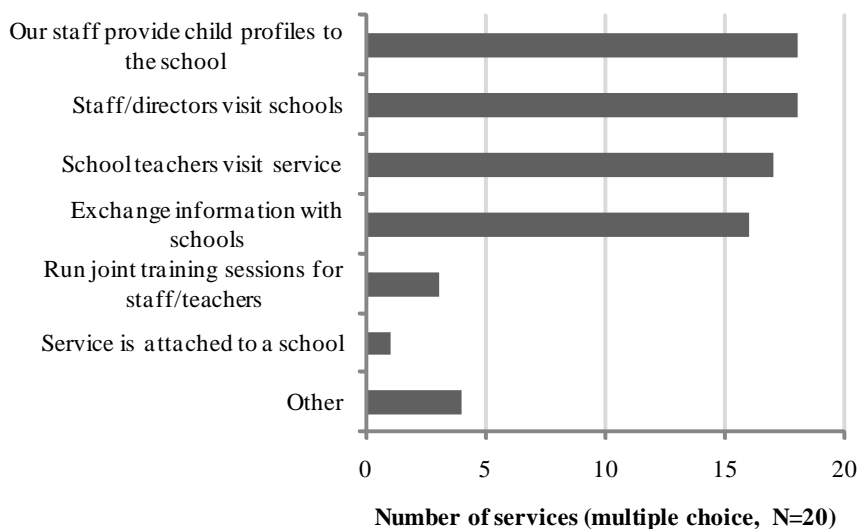
Looking between 2008 and 2010, the average relationship score improved from 5.5 to 6.6. Furthermore, looking at individual services across each wave, 11 of the 14 services that completed a survey in both waves reported either the same score or reported an improvement in the effectiveness of their relationship with their local school.

**Figure 4.11: Early childhood education and care services, histogram of the rating of effectiveness of relationships with feeder schools, 2008 and 2010**



Other than transition to school programs, Figure 4.12 shows that early education and care service reported a range of links with local schools. The most common were staff/directors visiting local schools (50 per cent in 2008), staff providing child profiles to schools (33 per cent in 2008), school teachers visiting services (67 per cent in 2008), and exchanging information with schools (56 per cent in 2008) – all of these activities were utilised by between 70 and 80 per cent of the respondents<sup>3</sup>. This is an increase from 2008, which reflects the energy that is being put into peer swaps and partnerships around the Transition Statement.

**Figure 4.12: Early education and care services, types of linking activities with local schools**



*School reported relationship with early childhood education and care services*

All schools (11) responded that they have at least one type of link between themselves and local early childhood education and care services.

As Figure 4.13 shows, all respondent schools reported that their teachers visit early childhood education and care services and that ECEC staff provide student profiles to the school, both unchanged from 2008. All but two schools reported that ECEC staff visit their school, compared to four of seven in 2008. Seven schools reported that they exchange information with ECEC services, and five run joint training and education sessions, and planning and management exercises with these services, compared to none in 2008. Although the numbers are too small for tests of statistical significance to be useful, these changes do seem meaningful and again reflect the activities and efforts of partnerships reported in interview.

<sup>3</sup> Note three services did not respond to this question – two responded in a later question that they did not have links to any schools.

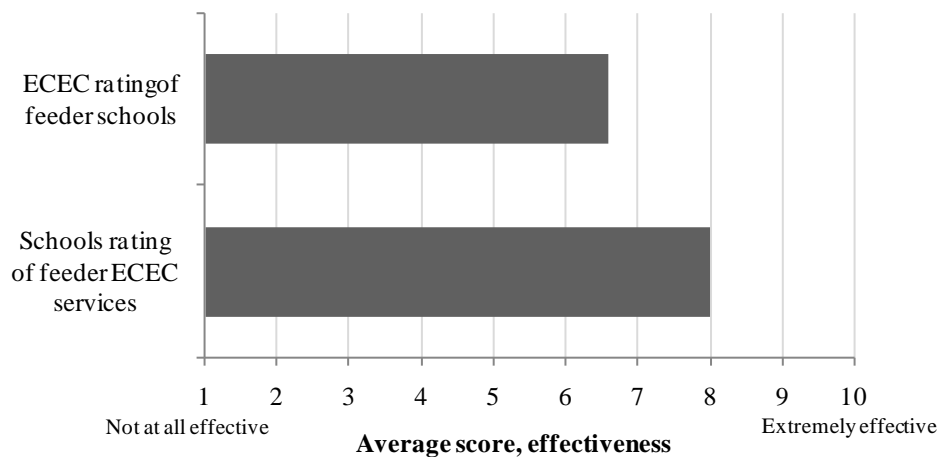
**Table 4.3: Schools, types of links with early childhood education and care services**

Type of link	2008 (total n=7)*	2010 (total n=11)*
Teachers visit ECEC services	7	11
ECEC staff provide student profiles to the school	7	11
ECEC staff visit the school	4	9
We exchange information with ECEC services	3	7
We run joint training and education sessions	-	5
We conduct joint planning and management exercises with ECEC services	-	6
Our school has a kindergarten	1	2
Other	2	2

\* Multiple choice

Schools felt that they had a very effective relationship with their feeder early childhood education and care services, with an average rating of 8 out of 10, unchanged from 2008. Only one of the eight schools reported a lower than average rating (5 out of 10). Figure 4.13 below shows both the early childhood education and care services rating (also shown in Figure 4.11) combined with the schools rating of their relationship. Although a relatively small difference, the schools perception of their relationship with their feeder ECEC services was seen to be more effective than the ECEC perception of the relationship with local schools, also unchanged from 2008.

**Figure 4.13: Effectiveness of relationship between feeder schools and early childhood education and care services**



In interviews, participants reported a number of LSEY activities have increased the capacity of schools and services to work in partnership. These partnership activities have probably driven the changes in questionnaire data, and also represent changes to the network not covered by questionnaires. For example, in Hastings:

- The partnership has established a Practitioner Network between early education practitioners and prep teachers to increase understanding of the environments in which each operates. They are also able to share ideas particularly around making the transition to school effective. This then is shared with the partnership as a whole.

- 
- The partnership has invited early intervention professionals to their meetings, in recognition of the importance of their role in transition to school for many children and families.
  - The partnership is also beginning to look at other projects with which it could engage and seek funding. An example of this was the Reading for Life project that has engaged Rotary as active member of the Partnership and has received sponsorship from commercial sources. The project is to be run across the three LSEY schools. The partnership had also identified low language skills of children starting school and this became a priority within the project Partnership and Practitioner Network.

In Corio/Norlane the Linking Schools and Early Years project Partnership has been merged with the Best Start project partnership, because both projects are working with the same group of local stakeholders. This has enabled the community to pool local resources and reduce the duplication of stakeholders' time, and to start building the sustainability of project Partnerships. This has enabled Corio/Norlane to develop links with other schools and ECEC services. It has also built links with other projects being undertaken within the community, particularly those associated with Education Regeneration and Extended Schools pilot projects, ensuring a consistency in approaches and less duplication of time and local resources. The links with local projects also include the Child First Northern Suburbs Hubs project which specifically aims to engage 'hard to reach' families.

Service providers who are new to the area have found LSEY to be an effective medium through which to build relationships with other professionals and learn about the different services in the area to better support children and families, as discussed below.

It's helped me enormously to connect with the other services who are in the area because they attend the meetings. I get to meet people and hear their discussions about their work and what programs they're working on so the information sharing is a really important thing. (Keely, school nurse)

In Corio/Norlane there has been a specific focus on engaging families within early education and care services to focus the development of information especially around transition to school.

Across the three project sites, practitioners and educators have had the opportunity to develop awareness about other organisations, and to develop relationships with others. This has improved the capacity of schools and services to meet the needs of children and families.

We've always had a good connection with a lot of professionals in the area but we're definitely involved more, we know the who's who of every area, we've had a lot more contact with speech therapists. Just accessing different services for our families... I think just linking with the other professionals has probably been one of the biggest benefits for us. (Jacqueline, early years educator).

A number of service providers also share this opinion, attributing to LSEY the improved relationships between schools and services, and the benefits this has for children and families.

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### **4.3 Have schools improved their ability to meet the specific needs of children in their first year?**

This section reports on findings from the parent, ECEC and child and family service questionnaires, and from interviews, on the extent to which schools have improved their ability to meet the specific needs of children in their first year. Compared to Round One questionnaire results, more schools had cultural/community specific programs in 2010 (8/11) compared with 2008 (3/7). As with the previous section, interview data reveals changes to relationships between schools and ECEC services and child and family services—as well as with families—that should bring about future improvements.

#### **Parent reported relationships with school**

We asked parents whether they spend any time at their children's school, other than drop-off and pick-up, as this could indicate the extent to which schools are welcoming environments for all families. In turn, this information could indicate schools' capacity to respond to individual child and family needs. Just under half of the parents (46 per cent) indicated that they spend time at their children's school, not including the time they spend dropping off or picking up their children, about the same as 2008. Around half of these parents responded that they attend community or cultural events at the school (up from 39 per cent in 2008), with around a third reading or participating in other classroom activities with children (up from 19 per cent in 2008).

Parents with children already attending the school may be more likely to spend time at the school. They may already be involved in tuckshop or classroom activities, and familiarity with the school may mean they are more likely to know about events such as sports carnivals and cultural days. We therefore asked if this was the first child in the family starting school. For half of the parents that responded to the survey (53 per cent), this was their first child starting school. Parents whose eldest child was entering school were significantly more likely to attend an orientation program (90 per cent) compared with other parents (78 per cent)<sup>4</sup>. The eldest children (that is, the first child in the family starting school) were more likely to attend an orientation program (94 per cent) compared with other children (89 per cent) however, this is not a significant difference. This finding is not surprising, as parents are likely to feel their own attendance at orientation programs for younger children is unnecessary if they have attended for their older children.

In terms of activities at school, more parents whose first child was starting school attended classes or groups with other parents compared to parents with more than one child at school, and parents with more than one child at school were more likely to work in the tuckshop, attend parent committees/P&C and undertake a classroom activity with children (however, these proportions were not significant). As in 2008, this suggests that previous experiences of having a child start school makes a difference, but is not the only factor determining parental attendance at school.

Parents were asked a group of questions about their relationship with and the communication between themselves and their child's school. They were asked to indicate their agreement with five questions (shown below). The majority of parents had high satisfaction levels with the services provided, and all five questions rated an overall average score of four out of five.

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<sup>4</sup> p<.01 by Fisher's Exact test

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Parents were also satisfied with these aspects of school in 2008, and these results are similar to those findings.

**Table 4.4: Parental rating of experience and communication with school**

	Average score (1-5)
Parent experience with school	
My child's school provides me with useful information about their time at school	5
My child's school offers activities and resources for parents as well as children	4
If I need to speak to someone about my child's experience of school, I know where to go	3
I have a good relationship with my child's teacher(s)	2
My child's school is friendly and welcoming for parents	3

As with the questions on parental satisfaction with early childhood services, further analysis was conducted on these responses, however, there were no statistically significant differences between available demographic information and parents that rated below or above the median satisfaction score<sup>5</sup>.

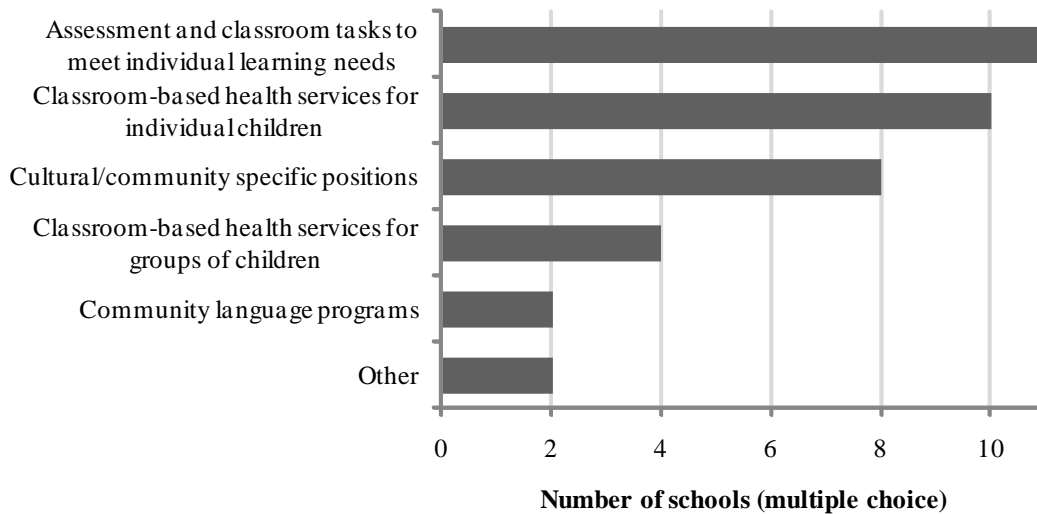
Schools reported conducting a range of activities in the questionnaires. All schools conducted at least two activities shown in Figure 4.14. All schools reported that they provided assessment and classroom tasks to meet individual learning needs. All but one school provided classroom-based health services for individual children, and three schools reported having these for groups of children. Eight schools have cultural/community-specific positions, and two schools had community language programs. These results are very similar to 2008 findings.

Schools also rated themselves on average as being very effective in responding to children's individual learning needs (scoring 9 out of 10 where 10 is 'extremely effective'), slightly up from 2008.

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<sup>5</sup> Mother's age, language spoken, years in Australia, child on health care card, region, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and child having special needs did not make any statistically significant difference to the score.

**Figure 4.14: Schools, types of programs and resources provided**



### **School-reported relationships with child and family services**

The following results (Figure 4.15 – Figure 4.17) show the links between schools and child and family services. Strong relationships between schools and these services may show that schools have the capacity to respond to the needs of children and families by referring families to services, or providing information to families about services, or providing information to services about the needs of local children and families. School engagement in child and family service provision may also reflect efforts made by schools to integrate service provision in the area and ensure services are accessible. The results show that schools have active connections with service agencies and are engaged in the provision of services. For example, seven of the 11 schools responded that they were involved in an early intervention or health program. These results show no significant changes from 2008, but as the interview data shows, stakeholders report that the quality of relationships has improved, which should bring future benefits.

As in the previous section, descriptive data is provided to assist sites in future planning, and to show where schools and services have different perspectives on their relationship.

As shown below in Figure 4.15, all schools were in contact with allied health services, and most were in contact with psychiatric or behavioural services for children. All but two schools were also in contact with church groups, domestic violence services, parent support and parenting groups. Four schools were in contact with alcohol and other drug services. These results are similar to 2008.

These results contrast with those shown above for child and family services (Figure 4.6) which shows that proportionally more of those services were in contact with migrant/ethnic resource services, maternal and child health services. Proportionally more schools were in contact with religious groups and family/domestic violence services than child and family services.



**Figure 4.15: Numbers of schools in contact with other services in area**

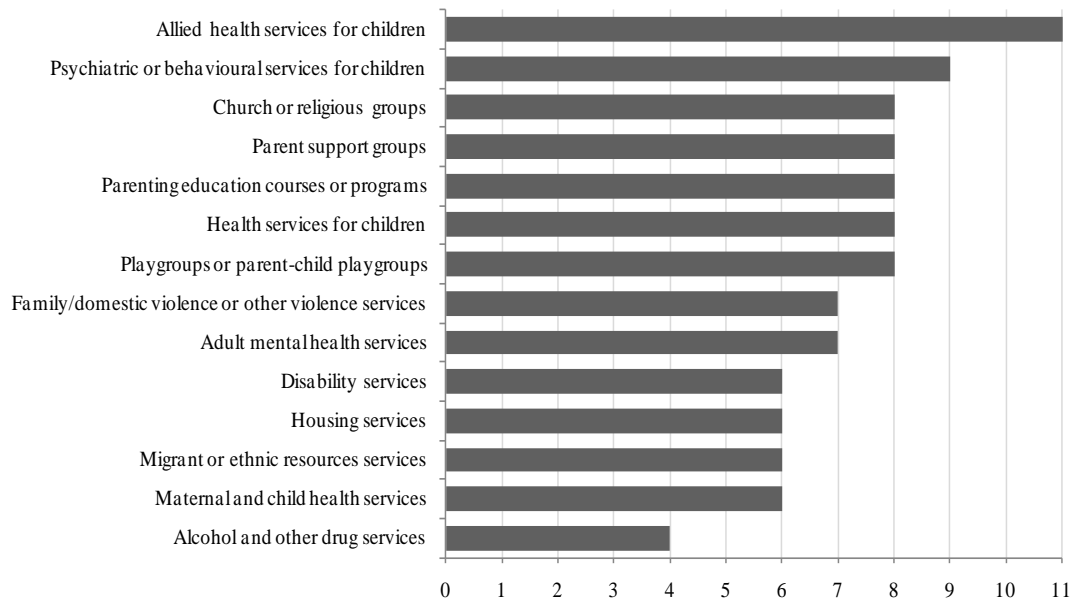
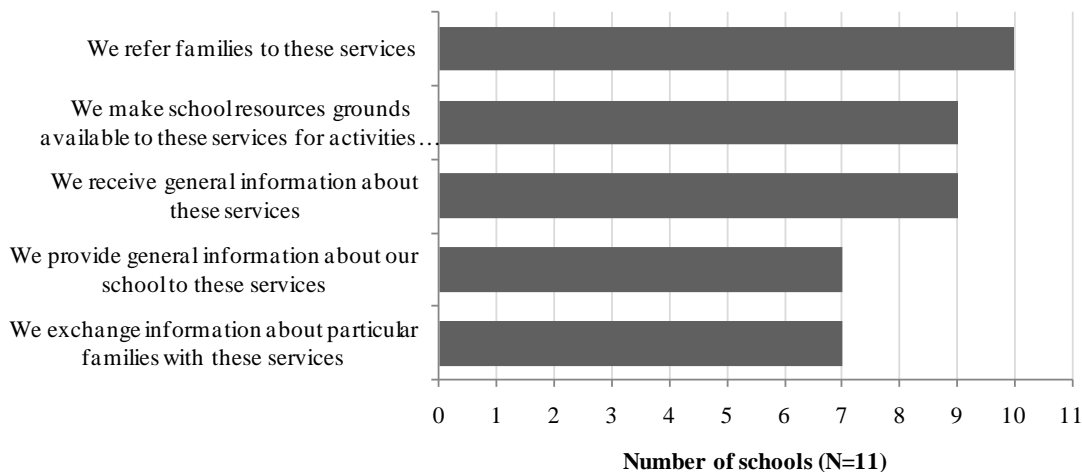


Figure 4.16 shows that all but two schools reported that they received general information about the above services, and make their school grounds open to the services for activities and groups. All but one school referred families to the services; seven schools provided general information about themselves to the services, and also exchanged information about particular families with the services listed.

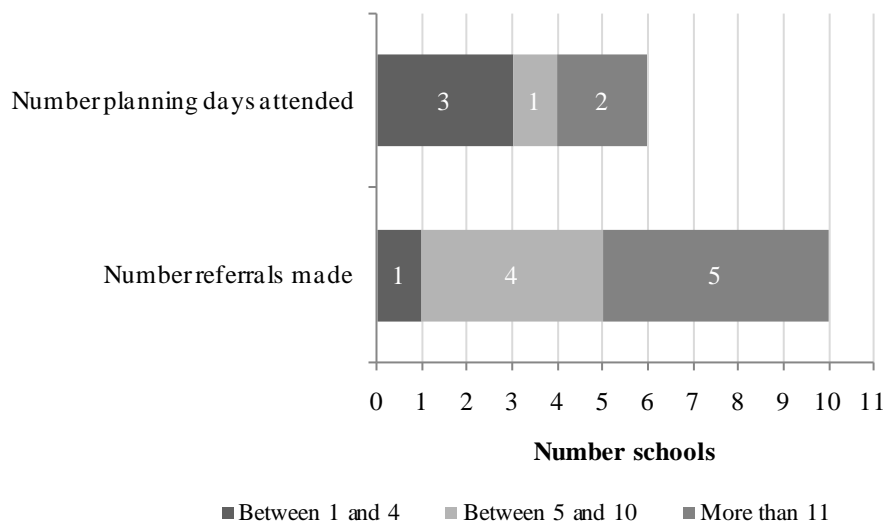
**Figure 4.16: Schools, types of activities with child and family services in the area**



As Figure 4.17 shows, 10 schools made referrals to child and family services within the six months prior to the survey. One school could not respond to this question as the survey was being completed by a teacher on behalf of the principal. Nearly half of the schools (five) made more than 11 referrals, four schools made between five and 10 referrals, and one school made between one and four referrals during this time. These results are similar to 2008.

Schools were also asked whether teachers and/or other staff from their school attend planning, training or information days organised by child and family services. Six schools responded that they had attended these days within the previous six months, three attended between one and four days, one school had attended between five and 10 events, and two had attended more than 11 events. Again, these results are similar to 2008.

**Figure 4.17: Number of referrals made and events attended by schools in six months prior to survey**



Eight out of the 11 schools had attended planning, training or other information days with teachers/staff from other schools, compared to all schools in 2008.

In interviews, participants reported that the partnerships have improved awareness of services available to children and families, which in turn improves the capacity of schools.

We've engaged a much broader range of community people and people are just always saying ... they had no idea really what services were available, or how they might tap into the various services, and you now have a great network of people all working together to support the community needs. (Matilda, policy/practice stakeholder)

As a result of participating in LSEY, schools have looked critically at how they work with children in prep, and have modified their scheduling to include 'learning through play' activities, with which children are familiar from ECEC services.

In one area, as a result of the LSEY project, and its location within the broader context of Best Start, the Partnership has focussed on modifying the prep school curriculum to better integrate it with ECEC curricula.

So a lot of the work is about consistent approaches everywhere so all of the schools, we do developmental curriculum which is one of the reasons the kids are ... transitioning with such ease is because it looks a bit like kinder, you know, so it's already got that familiar feel (Heidi, principal).

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The Transition Statements have been particularly useful for identifying children early who may need extra assistance to prepare them for school. These resources prompted communication to occur between the ECEC services and prep teachers, which they could then follow up if they had a concern about a particular child, as one prep teacher explains.

It was good to still have that relationship that I could ring her if there was a concern or a problem, particularly if we had a child that was very low in a particular area and we wanted to put them up for funding and go through the integration application process. Those documents are very useful for that because you've got that prior information and we can ring up and say, you know, can you elaborate on this because we're thinking we might have this child assessed and I'd like a bit more information (Cindy, school teacher).

#### **4.4 In addition to LSEY, what other factors were involved in changes?**

A number of other interventions and activities in the sites, in addition to LSEY, are likely to have caused changes to the experiences of children, families, schools and services.

The introduction of Transition Statements, part of the state-wide Early Years Learning and Development Framework, has likely had an impact on transition to school across the state. In addition, each of the three sites is receiving new services and resources as part of community regeneration and other initiatives, as described in Section 6. The partnerships in each area have made efforts to ensure that these initiatives complement LSEY, rather than duplicate or work in competition with the project.

Schools and early years services held transition programs prior to the introduction of LSEY, and have always made efforts to ensure that children and their families have a good start to school. As these programs change over time in response to lessons learnt and feedback from families, the impact of transition activities between early years services and schools cannot be attributed wholly to LSEY. Similarly, schools and education authorities, and other agencies, have introduced new programs, including those to support the additional learning needs of children with disabilities. Improvements to the ability of schools to respond to the individual learning needs of children cannot therefore be attributed wholly to LSEY.

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## 5 Implementation effectiveness

### 5.1 Have schools and services changed their operations to better facilitate the achievement of the project goals?

Schools have made changes to their transition programs. Typically, transition programs happen for children in the year prior to enrolling in school and involve visiting the schools and engage in various activities. The purpose of this is to familiarise the children with the classrooms, the school layout and to understand what occurs in the prep classroom. It also gives the teachers an opportunity to observe the children and their learning techniques and to discuss any concerns they have with the parents and the early education specialists.

As a result of LSEY, the Hastings site has made significant changes to their transition program to make it more accommodating for families and early years services. The Practitioner Leadership Group organises the transition calendar, in partnership with all key stakeholders at the Partnership and Practitioner levels. Information sessions and transition days for families do not overlap between schools so that families can attend events at each and make an informed decision about where they would like to send their child. This year the practitioner leaders group is also providing information packages to early years services to hand out to the parents of children who will be starting school next year.

Corio/Norlane and Hastings are combating traditional practices of competing for enrolment numbers through joint advertising of upcoming events and transition sessions. Corio/Norlane and Hastings distribute a transition calendar, an activity that Footscray is also exploring. In interviews, participants described why it is important to promote their schools as having equal standing, and the ways they communicate this message through their media.

Our big objective was to say that we're three schools over a government and a Catholic system and we're all equal. We just offer different things to different people and that's really all it is [...] It was just a matter of come and have a look at all three, see what's best for your child and your family circumstances, and we would accept that. (Skye, prep teacher)

This attitude is important to the maintenance of positive relationships between the schools in the LSEY projects. Principals in both of these areas have described the emphasis of schools on co-operation rather than competition, by using the example of potential transfers between schools. When parents apply to transfer their child, typically because of conflict, both the previous and new school ask the parent to work with the principal of the school initially attended, to try and resolve the conflict.

Respondents from the Corio/Norlane area have also identified the importance of being inclusive of parents during the transition programs, because, as one teacher puts it, 'they're often just as wary of school as the children'. This teacher goes on to explain the importance of providing the parents with a tour of the grounds, conducting information sessions, and introducing them to teachers and staff as a way to help ease their anxiety about their child starting school. This school organises activities for children, with different teachers in different areas of the school, 'so by the time they get here they're very familiar with everything'. This teacher then goes on to observe that 'our children have been very settled when they come in and I think that's as a result from all the transition' (Beth, prep teacher).

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The Hastings community is also endeavouring to reach those families who are not ‘on the radar’ of schools because they do not attend any early years services. For instance, the school principals are having a presence at community events, such as family day celebrations. The principals are also working closely with a range of community services to minimise the likelihood that they will encounter families at the beginning of the school year who they have not known previously.

One school in Footscray, as a direct result of information from the LSEY project and examples provided by other Footscray schools, has changed their transition program from one morning tea for children and families to a series of orientation days that include a range of opportunities for children and families within the school environment. Prior to LSEY this school had a strong history of providing information about school to children and families, including comprehensive school tours. This change to their transition program has enabled them to provide more frequent and diverse opportunities for children and families, in addition to their existing individual approach.

Another school in Footscray has dedicated time and resources specifically to the transition to school by time-releasing their lead prep teacher one day per week for the whole school year to focus on the transition to school. Although this initiative is not funded by the LSEY project (self-funded by the school), their involvement in LSEY contributed to the awareness of the importance of the transition to school and the subsequent allocation of time and resources.

## **5.2 What were effective strategies in meeting the project goals?**

Overall, partnership groups in all LSEY sites have provided professionals with the opportunity to build relationships with other practitioners in the area who work with children and families. This enables them to gain an understanding of their different roles, to take advantage of community resources, and draw on one another for support and information.

In all the project areas, local service providers participating in LSEY attend working group meetings where all involved brainstorm to formulate strategies and actions to implement the aims and objectives of the project.

In addition to the Practitioner Network Group and the Practitioner Leaders Group, the Hastings site also holds a forum twice per year where all service providers involved in the LSEY project in Hastings are invited to learn about a specific topic to improve their knowledge for working with children and families. These forums are highly anticipated in the community because they add to the professional knowledge base within the community, and because it is an opportunity for service providers to gather and engage with one another on a professional level.

Whenever there’s a forum they’ll get a room full of people, you know, from 5pm until 7pm, teachers, all the community leaders, that’s just phenomenal ... people just can’t believe that, you know, we have a forum and everybody comes. (Corrine, school nurse)

The time release opportunity for the practitioner leaders has proven invaluable for this group to consult, liaise, and formulate ideas with professionals in the community in relation to the LSEY project actions and goals. The time release is also a great resource to informally visit the services and maintain those professional relationships.

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In Footscray, the partnership groups provide opportunities for service providers to gather and gain a shared understanding of one another's profession. This has not only helped to build relationships, but is also thought to benefit children starting school.

The strength of the practitioner group has strengthened the relationship between early years services and schools, and I expect that certainly the transition from last year to this year for that cohort of children from kinder to primary school ... were probably in a better position than in other years in terms of that common language (Juliette, early years educator).

The network groups have built relationships between schools and ECEC services in Footscray, which has been beneficial for mutual learning, including how to adopt successful ideas into their own practice.

In all three sites the feedback about the effectiveness of peer swaps to develop relationships with other professionals and gain a better understanding of transition for children, has been overwhelmingly positive. One early years educator from Footscray stated that since her peer swap, she and one of the prep teachers at the school she visited have, 'developed a really good connection so we're often on the phone to each other or visiting each other' (Fleur, early years educator). From these peer swaps, prep teachers have more awareness and respect for the quality of the ECEC environment and the significant role it plays.

Having [prep teachers] actually come in and do the peer swap and actually seeing the developmental records and the documentation and the legal requirements that we're actually bound by I think really freaked them out; they couldn't believe the amount of work that we actually do and what we do with the children. So that's gained their respect of us and it's made it a lot easier for us to actually be sharing information (Ruby, early years educator).

The Hastings and Footscray sites each employed a links worker to assist in the development of relationships between services and professionals in their respective areas, and to aid in the development of practitioner networks and peer swaps.

The role of the links worker in the Footscray area was crucial to the successful development of relationships between prep teachers and early years educators, as explained by one early years provider:

It is about establishing relationships, it's about understanding where individuals are coming from and then bringing those common things together. And that takes time and it takes resources. And I think that that's a critical point because I'm not sure if it would have been as successful without that resource (Juliette, early years educator).

This opinion was seconded by the Footscray links worker, who found the role to be necessary for building momentum and enthusiasm for the project among practitioners.

The introduction of compulsory Transition Statements was successfully used as an opportunity to build networks. In Footscray the Practitioner's group used the Transition Statements as a way to develop relationships between schools and early childhood teachers.

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The Transition Statements provided a way for teachers to discuss what information they felt was important about children and needed to be shared between services.

From the beginning of the school year parents, children and their teacher have informal discussions about how the child is settling in and how they are adjusting to school life, the outcome of which is, from one principal's perspective 'a stronger social connection with the families' (Heidi, principal).

Footscray practitioners also identify parent information sessions and classroom practice for children as effective ways of smoothing the transition to school for families. In one school in Footscray each classroom practice session has a particular focus, such as art, or literacy or numeracy. To help the children in this process some of the current prep year students act as peer mentors. While the children are in the classrooms parents have the opportunity to meet with school staff and other parents and engage in targeted information sessions to become familiar with the school and its programs.

Interview participants reported that LSEY has improved the capacity of schools to meet the learning needs of children from CALD backgrounds. Child and family services and ECEC services have shared with schools how they have changed their ways of doing business, such as producing brochures in community languages. The conversations that take place during the LSEY meetings are helping schools to prepare for children of diverse backgrounds and providing them with an insight into how they will need to shift their current practices.

One principal described how changes to the school's operations have made a significant difference to the rapport teachers are able to build with parents and the level of information they receive about their children, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds. The school has increased their efforts to interact with parents by extending the invitation to prep parents to talk to teachers across the whole school. Previously interaction between parents and teachers (for years other than prep) was written.

LSEY has also assisted schools in building capacity to meet the needs of children with disabilities. One school has hired a psychologist to work closely with children and their families to prepare and help settle them into school. Another strategy is encouraging these families to attend the on-site supported playgroups that have been introduced as part of LSEY, to provide a supported social experience for the children and their parents. Another school has implemented an extended transition program for children with a disability so as to try and ensure that the environment for those students is comfortable and facilitates engagement.

### **5.3 What strategies were not effective?**

System-level and process-level difficulties with the partnership model as a whole are described elsewhere, in the section on strengths and difficulties of the project model (Section 6, page 41). A small number of attempted activities were less successful than the others described so far, mostly due to competing priorities and time commitments.

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## 6 Barriers and facilitators

### 6.1 To what extent has the project been implemented as intended?

In all three sites partners and practitioners are actively planning and implementing activities to engage families, meet the learning needs of all children, and ensure that children and families make a smooth transition to school. The planning and implementation of these actions align with project goals and objectives, suggesting that at this stage, LSEY is progressing in a way that reflects the intent of the project.

The *Hastings* Partnership Group, though still supported by CCCH, shows many indications of being a vibrant group, likely to continue running after the LSEY project is completed. This is largely due to the dedication and motivation of key leaders in the area, including principals, early years educators, prep teachers, and the Best Start community facilitator. The partnership groups have also been successful in recruiting other community members, such as neighbourhood renewal, maternal and child health, and a Federal MP. While engagement with private ECEC providers, both at a practitioner and management level, has been a challenge, progress is being made with this sector.

There are clear indications of sustainability of the project with one principal in particular taking a leadership role and the group actively attracting funding or their Reading for Life program to support all three schools. The Hasting Partnership Group has been very proactive in establishing a Practitioner Network to support early years educators and prep teachers to share practice ideas and support the implementation of the VEYLD Framework into their practice. The Partnership Group manage their own budget which in itself is likely to sustain the development of further projects.

Hastings partnership activities fit strongly with the LSEY project goals. Many LSEY principles have been incorporated into the philosophies of the organisations, for example, concentrating on parent strengths within a school rather than negative interactions with parents.

Overall the project is being implemented as intended for the Hastings site; partnerships have been developed and are being maintained locally, though there is still active input from CCCH. The partners and practitioners are actively planning and implementing activities to engage families, meet the learning needs of all children, and ensure that children and families make a smooth transition to school.

The *Corio/Norlane* partnerships participated in peer swaps as part of their Phase I plan. However, this did not take place during the current school year, indicating that this activity has not become part of the culture for ECEC services and schools. Instead, schools and early years services have focussed on implementing a co-ordinated approach to transition planning by jointly planning transition programs, and the development of a Transition Calendar is a tool within this approach. The Transition Calendar will promote a coordinated and collaborative approach between schools and early years services to provide orientation sessions and events to children and families. The working group is also hosting a starting school forum for families, where schools will provide information about transition to school and upcoming orientation programs.

The Practitioner Group for the *Footscray* site was established after the appointment of a links worker to develop sustainable relationships and coordinate meetings between the schools and



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early years educators. This group is continuing to meet to discuss practices as well as plan and implement activities. With the guidance of the links worker this group was motivated to plan and implement LSEY activities. However, since the end of the links worker's contract at the end of 2009 the group seems to have lost some impetus, possibly due to the difficulties faced by Maribyrnong Council in providing support to the partnership, although the Practitioner Group still meets regularly to share information, discuss practices and plan and implement activities.

Of the three LSEY project sites, Footscray has experienced the most challenges in implementing the project as originally intended. These challenges seem to emerge, at least in part, from the characteristics of the site. Unlike Corio/Norlane and Hastings, Footscray is an urban area with an indistinct geographical community due to its population density and the proximity of other areas with separate schools and early years services. At the time that data was collected for the evaluation, attendance at partnership meetings was very patchy and insufficient to make decisions and progress in activities. The variation between the sites in sustaining participation from all key groups is discussed in the section on strengths and difficulties of the project model.

While many of the LSEY partner organisations in Footscray are engaging with LSEY initiatives to engage families and promote smooth transition to school for all children and families, this is largely at the level of individual schools and early years services, rather than as a collective partnership.

Despite the challenges faced by the partnership, there are regular activities occurring within the network. Regular peer swaps are occurring as well as specific schools carrying out activities to connect with parents, and a Footscray action plan that includes strategies and activities by both Practitioner group and partnership group members.

Parents' comments on the evaluation questionnaires indicate that there is still room for improvement across the three sites. In particular, parents indicated that they want more information about what the child was doing in the first year of school in terms of curriculum and how they as parents could assist children. Some parents felt that the welcome they experienced in being able to drop in and observe their child in their ECEC service, would be beneficial in school. The weekly newsletters received in the first term of prep class were referred to in particular by a small number of parents as beneficial, and something they have would have liked to continue.

The LSEY partnerships have fostered an improved understanding of the environments each organisation operates in, and the overarching goals and practices. As a result there is a growing mutual respect between schools and ECEC services.

## **6.2 What are the core elements that assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved?**

Leadership from the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) that provided the initial leadership and tools for the process was particularly important. This included providing workshops and training around how the project would work. All the partnerships believe that without the efforts put into the networks by the CCCH during inception and the shaping years, the networks would not be so effective. In Corio/Norlane and Hastings in particular this has not only meant that the CCCH staff provided the initial motivation and momentum,

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but they also were able to encourage the natural leaders from within each partnership to take ownerships of the networks.

The partnerships have provided schools and services with an opportunity to use evidence-based research to develop their practices. Early years educators, prep teachers and service providers would not have the time to do this research on their own. Through the partnerships there is an opportunity to share information:

[What] LSEY brought, by virtue of its connection to the Centre for Community Child Health, is that sort of research evidence-based practice that is ... a strong feature of the projects ... and makes for a very strong connection ... So it facilitates opportunities that we perhaps were not otherwise well positioned to be able to facilitate at this stage (Martin, child and family service provider).

The relationships between service providers that have developed as a result of the LSEY partnership in each site should benefit children transitioning to school and their families. The partnerships have provided all services and schools working with children and families with a greater understanding of available services and the roles they play.

### **6.3 What are the strengths and difficulties of the project model?**

The strengths of the project model are described throughout this report. They include:

- Partnerships build on existing relationships and practices
- The model recognises the expertise of all participants, and the efforts currently in place to improve transition to school and children's capacity to engage in school
- Local knowledge and other initiatives in place are used to complement LSEY activities.

This section describes the primary difficulties of the model. These are:

- Challenges in putting ideas into practice
- A reliance on volunteerism and goodwill
- Differences in capacity, resources and priorities among stakeholders
- Gaining and maintaining participation

#### **Challenges in putting ideas into practice**

Partnership members identified challenges they have encountered with their partnership meetings. Members of the practitioner group have expressed that there is a difference of understanding from the partnership group about what actions are actually achievable for the practitioner group to implement.

I think sometimes people in the partnership group are more administrative, definitely more high-level management, and they often do a lot of lip service, which is very hard to put into practice. So our job of putting things into practice is not always easy, or valuable to the people that we're working with within our network (Cindy, prep teacher).

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The practitioners go on to explain that while it may be simple for the partnership group to make suggestions and put plans on paper, sometimes it is much more difficult to implement in reality.

### **Reliance on volunteerism and goodwill**

Much of the work that goes into preparing for these groups and attending these meetings, occurs outside working hours. As one principal acknowledged in an interview, much of the success of LSEY is due to a lot of goodwill on the part of the participants. Although this goodwill and energy is an asset to each of the partnerships, it also places them at some risk if the most active individuals change positions or leave the area.

### **Differences in capacity, resources and priorities among stakeholders**

Participants have commented on the difficulty of engaging private ECEC services to participate in the LSEY project. One of the common speculations for the reason for this is that the centre owner cannot afford to allow their staff to be released during opening hours to attend LSEY activities, such as peer swaps or meetings.

School principals also raised this issue, discussing the difficulties for early years educators to physically attend LSEY events. Principals also reported they are slowly breaking down those barriers between private ECEC services and the LSEY partnerships by ‘going knocking on the door ... and sort of talking to them and actually having that communication, that conversation’. Another suggestion for why it has been difficult to engage long daycare centres may be because those centres don’t perceive their role as related to the LSEY goals of preparing for transition to school, assuming many children will go from long daycare to a kindergarten program and transition to school from there (although many children do in fact transition directly from long daycare to school). Schools may also be reinforcing this belief and in the past have not actively engaged with long daycare centres because of this. A recognised challenge for the LSEY partners is the need to change that perception.

Engaging maternal child health nurses was also raised as a difficulty for the LSEY project. An explanation for this may be the lack of resources and funding that is available for these workers in this area, so they simply do not have the capacity to participate.

### **Gaining and maintaining participation**

The primary difficulty with the partnership model seems to be that its success is dependent on the participation of all relevant stakeholders, and participation is difficult to secure if key individuals and agencies are not enthusiastic about the project, prior to becoming involved. In addition, the experience of one site indicates that partnerships may be difficult to sustain if they grow beyond their initial size, or if the area is characterised by high mobility and changes to services.

In Footscray, the partnerships have been challenged by the difficulties that partnership members have faced in maintaining active membership. Attendance at partnership meetings has been inconsistent at times, with only very few members attending regularly. Additionally, while activities such as peer swaps between schools and early education staff are ongoing, local government representatives have not been well supported to participate. Staff at the Council found the delineation of the LSEY project to be too specific to one local area within the municipality. They also found their involvement in a large number of other early years projects precluded them from attending LSEY partnership meetings.

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Footscray is the only partnership in an urban area. It is an area of high mobility both of families and staff. As the links worker noted ‘there are no direct feeder early childhood centres’ into the schools of Footscray. Many of the families that access the schools in the area are not living in the area and are thus not accessing LSEY transition programs. There is a high migrant and refugee population within this area, and some of these families either cannot afford or are not used to using ECEC services. Therefore the motivation to invest a lot of time in peer swaps and other transition activities may not be as strong in this area. One of the LSEY partner members stated:

I think all of the participants of that group have had difficulty getting to those meetings, but as I said unless people see a real value and a purpose, then it tends to lose priority in your diary against competing appointment times. (Matilda, practice/policy stakeholder)

Now that the partnership group has been extended, it becomes a challenge to focus and make plans to implement plans to achieve outcomes, as explained by one principal, ‘going to meetings and things like that it was quite frustrating sometimes because we would go to a meeting once a term, twice a term and there were so many stakeholders that very little actually got done’ (Colleen, school principal).

The size and population density of the area also makes engagement with all relevant schools and services very difficult. As a large urban site, each school has a lot of feeder early years services, and schools don’t have the capacity to engage with each of them in a way to build sustainable and valuable relationships.

#### **6.4 What are the characteristics and effective elements of the project partnership groups?**

Key characteristics of the partnerships are described in this section. These relate to:

- Multidisciplinarity
- Engagement in planning and implementation of activities
- Variations in size and capacity across the three sites

Each is briefly described below.

##### **Multidisciplinarity**

Each partnership included a project officer from CCCH, a representative from the DEECD and the Catholic Education Office. This ensured that while the initiatives in each partnership were locally specific, they also reflected the wider thinking of the central departmental policies, took advantage of current research in the area and transitioning to school and early years development, as well as feeding back into the central offices of the Department local initiatives. This gave the partnership activities value on a much wider scale.

The partnership groups are made up of a mix of practitioners, leaders (school principals and ECEC directors) as well as community health advisors and school nurses. In Hastings the partnership group also includes members of Rotary, the Catholic Education Office and a member of the office of the local federal Member of Parliament. The partnership meets regularly once a month with sub groups such as the Practitioner Network Group meeting once a month between the main partnership meetings.

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## **Planning and implementation of activities**

One of the first activities of the partnerships was to fully understand what services were available within their area, map their activities and then to plan how partnerships with the families can be strengthened. This included documenting good practices that were already occurring within the partnerships. The next activity was to set action plans for the achievement LSEY goals. The action plans were defined according to the needs identified within that particular partnership.

## **Variations in size and capacity across the three sites**

In Footscray the partnership group has had inconsistent active membership; local government representatives have not attended for some time and one partnership group meeting was only attended by two principals and an early childhood centre director<sup>6</sup>. This poor attendance reflects, and may be the cause of, the challenges faced by the partnership in maintaining momentum and active collaborations.

In Corio/Norlane the merging of the Best Start project with LSEY meant that a diverse range of stakeholders were attending meetings including community health, prep teachers and kindergarten staff. This reflects the fact that there are specific points of difference between LSEY and Best Start, as well as many commonalities. LSEY has a focus on transition to school, engaging families and responsiveness to children's individual learning needs, whereas Best Start has a focus on early education and care, health and community connectedness. For the first half of 2010 the focus of the meetings was on merging these partnerships. A particular focus was on the prior-to-school years, and since evaluation data was collected it has been reported that the merged partnership has expanded its focus.

The partnership in Corio/Norlane has noted that the partnership group has 'developed new and creative ways to solve problems'<sup>7</sup> and to develop goals that were widely understood. The evaluation in Hastings noted the Partnership Group's strong connections into the community<sup>8</sup>.

## **6.5 What are the functions and characteristics of local leadership in schools, local government, ECEC and community services?**

Leadership has been critical to the successes of the project. Specific positions, that have ensured that staff have responsibility for partnership engagement as part of their core role, have been critical. These have been Links workers in two sites, and the CCCH project workers in all sites. Schools and ECEC services have advocated for LSEY in communities and have taken key leadership tasks within the partnerships. In addition, local government plays a critical role.

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<sup>6</sup> The last meeting recorded and sent as part of evaluation data is from March 2010 so attendance may have improved at subsequent meetings.

<sup>7</sup> Linking Schools and Early Years (2009) Corio/Norlane Partnership Evaluation Survey Summary of Results October 2009

<sup>8</sup> Linking Schools and Early Years (2009) Hastings Partnership Evaluation Survey Summary of results

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## **Key positions**

Several participants described the importance of having an outside group facilitator, such as a CCCH staff member, to provide an unbiased, fresh perspective on community strengths and issues. However, in some cases the downside to such an active involvement from the CCCH worker has enabled members to remain passive participants in the partnerships groups, rather than promoting leadership of group members.

Particularly in Footscray, the high rate of staff change in schools and services has meant a heavy reliance on the CCCH project co-ordinator to ensure that commitment and momentum are sustained. Additionally the Links Worker was an invaluable resource for the Footscray area. The Links Worker was temporarily employed to create momentum at the practitioner educator level to develop relationships between service providers and implement LSEY activities, such as the peer swaps. However, the progress made by the Links Worker may not be sustained. Since the Links Worker has left there has been no one locally to continue in that leadership role. As a result, the formal partnerships continue to be facilitated by CCCH and do not appear to be as strong as in the other sites. In acknowledging the need for council involvement in the LSEY project, there are plans to develop stronger links with the Maribyrnong Early Years Alliance.

The Hastings Best Start community facilitator was identified by CCCH as a clear leader in driving the LSEY project. Their role was to liaise between the partnership groups and local government, attract community services into the LSEY project, and oversee and support the Practitioner Leaderships Group. When the Best Start worker left this position recently there were concerns that this would result in the project losing some of its momentum. However, the new Best Start facilitator appointment helped to maintain engagement. The maintenance of key groups and activities has demonstrated the sustainability of the LSEY project in the Hastings area. As a site, Hastings has not faced the interruptions and challenges that Footscray has, so these successes indicate that as partnerships mature and gain momentum they also develop leadership capacity and move towards sustainability.

## **Schools and ECEC services**

While ECEC services have been very engaged in the partnerships, and in many cases have provided leadership, the role of schools appears to be critical. Schools arguably have the most to gain from the LSEY project as it intends to achieve engaging school environments and learning curriculums for children and families. This also means that schools need to be highly committed to the project and take initiative in completing LSEY activities. At a management level it is also crucial to the success of the project that principals are dedicated to the achievement of LSEY goals. Without the support from principals it would be difficult for practitioners to implement the LSEY activities, including the peer swaps and much of the transition programs, and it would be highly difficult to create a culture change to align with LSEY goals within the school. In turn, without the motivation from teachers to carry out tasks on the ground, such as participating in practitioner meetings and organising LSEY activities, the project would not succeed. ECEC services are also central, as their engagement in transition activities and the Transition Calendar is critical.

The Footscray site provides an example of how difficult it can be to make progress in the project without the input of schools; the non-attendance from the two original schools on the partnership group ultimately stalled the LSEY project as the activities could not be completed without school participation. On the other end of the scale, the leadership from school representatives in both partnership and practitioner groups in the Hastings area has

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demonstrated how successful the project can be for schools when strongly supported by school representatives.

### **Local government**

The participation of the local government is an important resource for the success of the LSEY project. In both the Hastings and Corio/Norlane areas the Best Start community facilitator played a significant role in the development and facilitation of partnerships, and in the access to resources for LSEY activities and initiatives.

The Hastings area provides an example of the positive outcome when the local government representative (Best Start worker) is fully dedicated and highly motivated about the LSEY project. This worker has now moved to a different position but did such a great job of developing relationships that the partnerships were able to continue the project autonomously while the new Best Start worker settled into the role. In the Corio/Norlane area the merge with Best Start will potentially extend the project, generating more interest from the community and a greater access to community resources and partners.

#### **6.6 What characteristics of the local service network in each site assisted and impeded the project goals being achieved? What enabled and hindered the capacity of partnerships to work with local initiatives?**

As each of the sites were identified for the LSEY project due to their relative disadvantage, it is unsurprising that a number of initiatives other than LSEY are in place in these sites. LSEY has complemented these initiatives, and has also been strengthened by them. Particular efforts have been made by the LSEY partnerships to ensure that all local initiatives are working in collaboration. This is particularly true of Corio/Norlane, which has a lot of early years networks and programs.

Hastings and Corio/Norlane were recognised as neighbourhood renewal sites by the state government, so received a large investment from the community. Best Start was very active in these areas prior to LSEY and the Best Start co-ordinators also sit on the partnership groups. Best Start was also an initiative in Footscray's municipal area, however when LSEY began there was not a Best Start coordinator and this position was vacant for an extended period. This added to the challenge of engaging the Footscray community.

In Corio/Norlane the Best Start project was facilitated by the local council. Together with the combined efforts of schools, early education services and child and family services, this provided a framework that added another dimension of supporting families and stakeholders within the project. Corio/Norlane has a number of existing partnerships to engage children and families in the education process including the Education Regeneration project and Extended Schools Hub, which are designed to improve relationships between families and schools. As each new project is developed in the area they have representation on the LSEY partnership group thus ensuring complementary rather than conflicting activities occur.

Both Corio/Norlane and Hastings have the advantage of having organisations within the partnerships that are well embedded in the local community, such as Best Start. As a result, it was easier than in Footscray to link in to that community.

Although the introduction of new initiatives into established service networks can raise tensions and competition, this does not appear to have happened in any of the LSEY sites.

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One interview participant discussed the effectiveness of developing LSEY in Corio/Norlane because the connections between many of the service providers had already been established.

I think it was a perfect place for it to go as a pilot because Best Start and Education Regeneration were here doing the work. And again, it came in at the right time and with that foundation now, I think it's just coming in to an area that didn't have those networks and that foundation established, it might be quite difficult for a project like Linking Schools. (Sally, practice/policy stakeholder)

### **6.7 To what extent was the project adopted and championed by the partnership groups?**

As discussed in Section 6.1, the Hastings partnerships have demonstrated an ongoing motivation and commitment to the LSEY project and achievement of the project goals. The group works cohesively and collectively to formulate action tasks for the project. The Practitioner Network Group works at a grass roots level to carry out LSEY actions and goals. The Practitioner Leadership Group has been developed out of the Practitioner Network Group. Through ongoing liaison with practitioners and professionals in the area the Practitioner Leadership Group has taken on the initiative to introduce new and innovative activities for engaging children and families into the transition process, and attracting service providers to the LSEY project.

In Corio/Norlane, attendance at the Working Groups were initially mostly from schools and early education and care services as the group discussions were not as relevant to early years community services. In common with other initiatives, attendance at meetings has sometimes been patchy over time. Participants of the working groups are keen to formulate strategies and actions to achieve the LSEY project goals. As the group has grown comfortable more people began voicing their opinion and new relationships between service providers have developed. While some members are committed and consistently participate in LSEY activities, this group is still building leadership capacity and is strongly guided and facilitated by CCCH staff.

In Footscray, a small number of participants consistently attend LSEY meetings and a larger number of stakeholders demonstrate their ongoing support for the project through engaging in LSEY activities. However, the partnership has struggled to consistently engage all stakeholders in the partnership meetings and this has so far made it difficult to identify and allocate leadership roles. Since the collection of data, engagement of stakeholders is reportedly improving. However, the project remains strongly directed by the CCCH.



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## Appendix A: Families' experiences of the service network

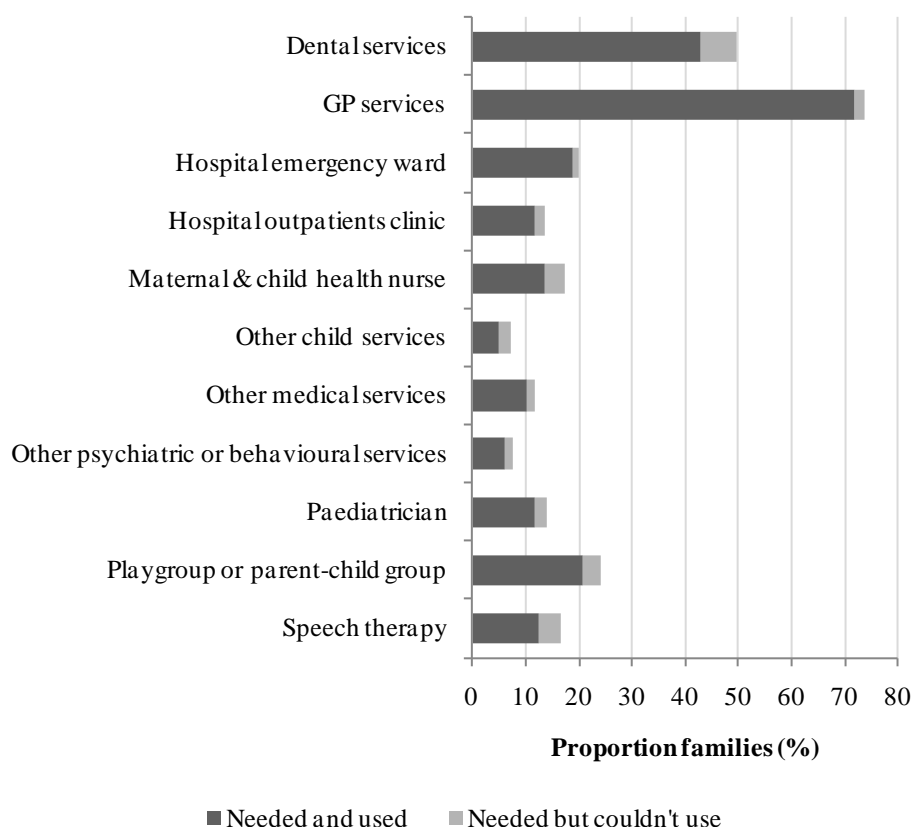
The use and non-use of services can be an indication of the capacity of schools and services to work in partnership, and of the capacity of schools to respond to the individual learning needs of children. Although not an evaluation question, we collected data on the use and non-use of services, as we did in 2008, and this is reported here.

### Parents' experience with child and family services prior to starting school

Parents were asked whether their child used any child and family services in the year before starting school. Figure A.1 shows both the proportion of parents that responded that they needed and used the service (represented by the darker lines) as well as the proportion of families that needed but couldn't use the service (represented by the lighter sections).

In terms of overall use, GP services, were needed and used by just under three quarters of the all children (72 per cent). This was followed by dental services, utilised by just under half of the children in the survey (43 per cent). Playgroups and parent-child groups were the next most popular services, utilised by one in five children (21 per cent). These figures are very similar to 2008.

**Figure A.1: Utilisation of child and family services in twelve months prior to starting school**



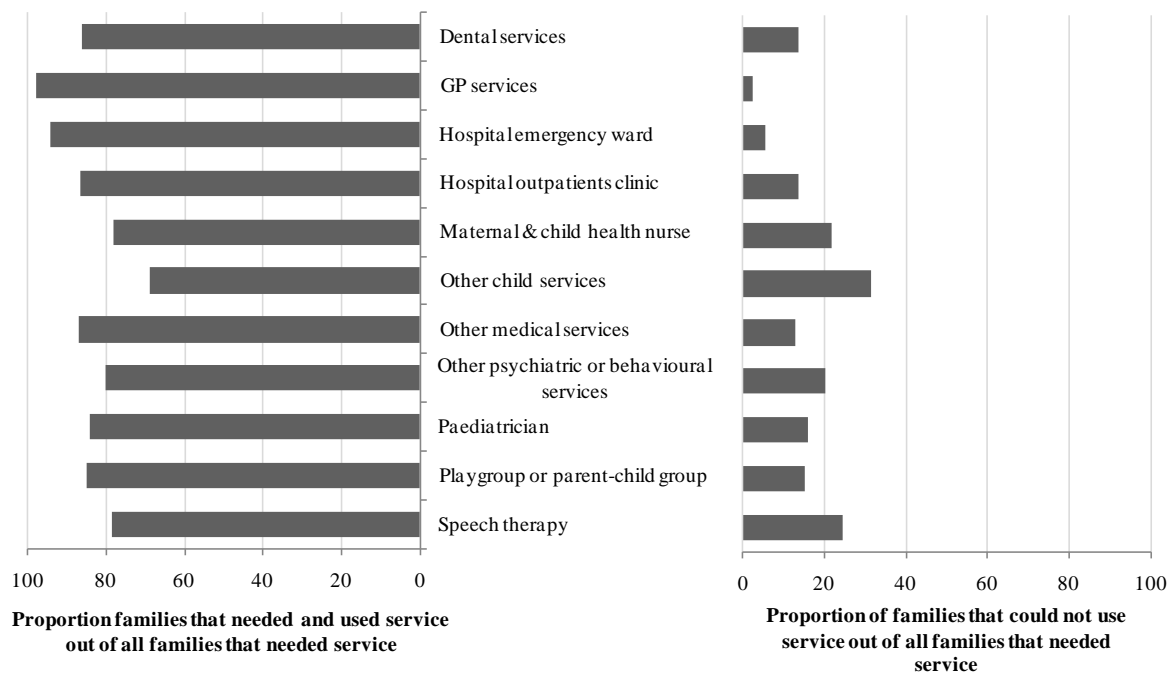
The chart below expands on the group of families that needed each service. It excludes children that did not need each service, and shows the proportions of children that needed and used each service (shown on the left) and compares that to the proportion that needed but

could not use each service (shown on the right). The base figure is the number of children that needed each service (as opposed to all children in the survey).

We conducted additional analysis for the 2010 data on the characteristics of services needed and not used, and families who needed them. What becomes clear in Figure A.2 that is not clearly shown when examining all families in the survey, is that there was a substantial proportion of children that needed speech therapy but could not receive it – nearly a quarter of the total number of children that needed services but could not get them (24 per cent, or 11 of 44). A similar proportion of children needed but could not utilise support from a maternal and child health nurse (22 per cent 10 of 46). Four out of the twenty children needing other psychiatric or behavioural services did not .

There were a range of other child services that families could not utilise, with almost a third of the ‘other services’ group not being able to be used by families.

**Figure A.2: Proportions of children that needed child and family services by whether they used or couldn’t use each service in the year prior to starting school**



Further analysis was conducted on these services by region, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, child having special needs and parent language, using all families in the survey. Two service types showed significant differences between regions. Proportionally more children in Footscray both needed and use a playgroup or parent-child group, and proportionally more children in Hastings needed and used other medical services<sup>9</sup>. Further proportional differences could be seen children whose mothers spoke a language other than English at home. Proportionally more of these children needed but couldn’t use maternal and child health nurses, 11 per cent of children whose mother spoke a language other than English at home needed but couldn’t use this service compared with 2 per cent of the children

<sup>9</sup>Footscray, used playgroups  $\chi^2(4, N=272)=15.34, p<.01$  Hastings, used ‘other medical services’  $\chi^2(4, N=261)=10.15, p<.05$

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of English speaking mothers, although similar proportions of children of both English and non-English speakers both needed and used them. A similar proportion of children of non-English speaking mothers were unable to use dental services<sup>10</sup> (15 per cent compared to 5 per cent of English speakers).

Slightly more children of non-English speaking mothers needed but couldn't use GP services, psychiatric or behavioural services and other medical services – these were all significant, however, the actual numbers were very small so ideally this should be measured using a larger sample and should be interpreted with caution.

The same can be said about proportions of children whose mothers who did not complete high school. The numbers are small, however, proportionally more of these children needed speech therapy (30 per cent compared with 12 per cent of children whose mothers that had completed high school), and also needed but could not use that service (9 per cent compared with 3 per cent). Children whose mothers did not complete high school were also more likely to need dental services but could not use them (11 per cent compared to 5 per cent of children whose mothers completed high school).

Children who were named on healthcare cards were more likely to need but not use dental services (10 per cent compared with 3 per cent of non-health care card children), speech therapy<sup>11</sup> (7 per cent compared with 1 per cent).

No significant differences were seen between services and children identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, nor by children with special needs.

Parents were then asked to provide reasons why they couldn't get any of the services they needed but couldn't use. The most common response from parents is that they had to wait too long for an appointment, or it was too expensive; this is unchanged from 2008 (Figure A.3).

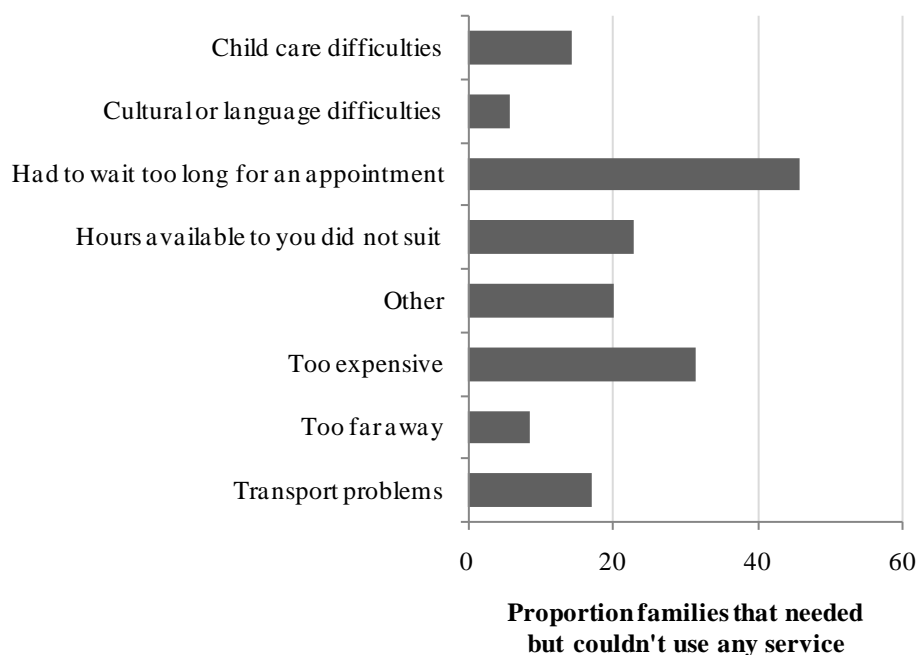
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<sup>10</sup> LOTE, couldn't use child health nurses  $\chi^2$  (2, N=249)=8.13,  $p<.05$  and dental services  $\chi^2$  (2, N=263)=14.66,  $p=.001$

<sup>11</sup> Health care card holders, needed couldn't use dental  $\chi^2$  (2, N=281)=8.01,  $p<.05$  and speech therapy  $\chi^2$  (2, N=272)=11.10,  $p<.01$

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**Figure A.3: Reasons why parents could not access child and family service if needed but could not use**



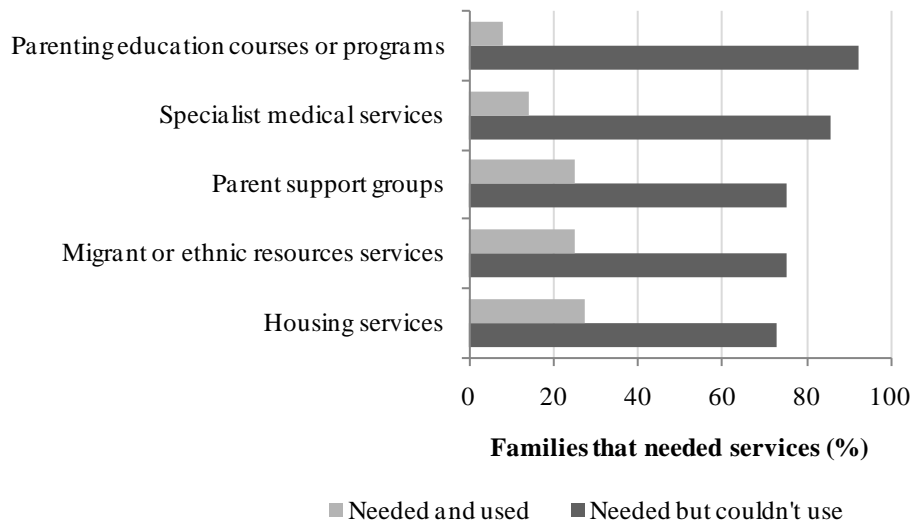
*Service usage for family members other than their child starting school*

As in 2008, most respondents indicated that family members other than the child starting school did not need additional services in the previous year<sup>12</sup>. Of the small number of families that indicated they needed services, the services with the highest proportions of families that could not use them are shown below in Figure A.4. This shows that the services with the highest proportions of families that couldn't use services include parenting education courses or programs (92 per cent of families that needed this service could not access it) and specialist medical services (86 per cent of families that needed this service could not use it). The other services – parent support groups, migrant or ethnic resource services and housing services shown below – also have high rates of service non-use. It is important to note that although these rates appear very high, the numbers reported for these questions are very low (ranging between 4 and 13 responses for the group in Figure A.4), so are likely to be unrepresentative of the actual service types not needed, needed and used, or needed but not used in these areas.

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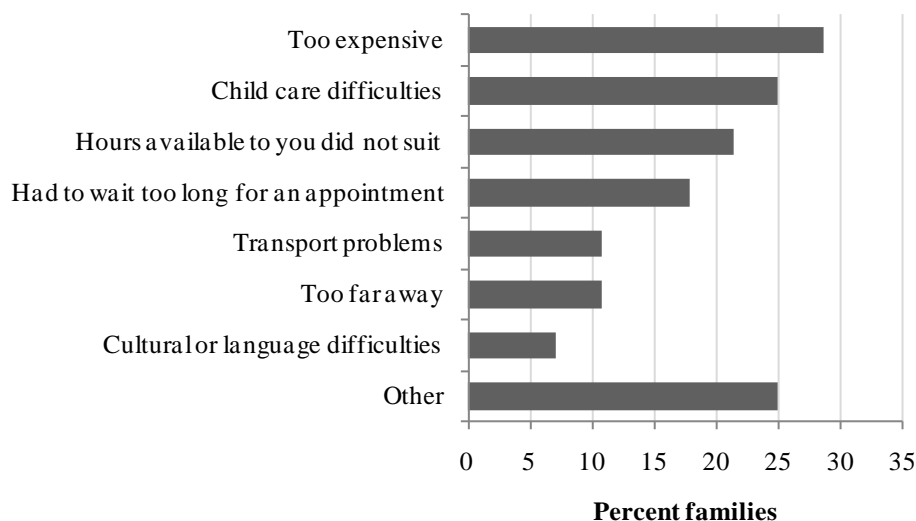
<sup>12</sup> Note that this group of questions had a very high non-response rate (see Appendix for individual item non-response numbers). For this reason only the respondents that indicated they needed a service are shown (this includes those that needed and used, as well as those that needed but did not use services), and all but the top five of these categories have been grouped together to assist with confidentiality of respondents.

**Figure A.4: Family services with largest rate of non-use in the year prior to child starting school**



The respondents that indicated they needed but could not use the services during this period were asked why they couldn't use these services. As shown below in Figure A.5, the main reasons indicated by these parents were that the services were too expensive, and because of child care difficulties, with more than a quarter of families that needed but could not use these services indicating they could not because of these reasons. These results are unchanged from 2008.

**Figure A.5: Reasons for not being able to use services for other family members in the year prior to their child starting school**



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## Appendix B: Demographics of Prep Children and their Parents

The following summary of demographic information was collected as part of the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ). As mentioned in the sampling chapter, 306 parents completed both a SEHQ and a parent survey.

### *SEHQ respondent information*

The majority of respondents were the biological mother of the child (also see below for more demographic information about the child's mother and father), with 86 per cent of respondents being female, and 97 per cent biological parents. Fourteen per cent of the respondents were fathers of the prep student. These figures showed similar proportions as the parents in 2008.

**Table B.1: Respondent demographic information**

	Number	Col %
Respondent relationship to child		
Biological parent	291	97.0
Grandparent	3	1.0
Other (incl. adoptive/ foster parent, step parent, other) +	6	2.0
Total relationship	300	100
Respondent sex		
Female	263	86.2
Male	42	13.8
Total sex	305	100.0

Valid N used throughout, + Categories combined for confidentiality

### *Child demographic information*

Table B.2 summarises the demographic information of the entrant children, it shows that the majority of children lived with both parents (69 per cent), although a quarter (26 per cent) lived in a single mother household. Nearly one in three children lived with siblings, and 4 per cent lived with their grandparents. A small number of children lived with other people, including mother/father and partner, father only, unrelated adult and other people. Eleven students identified as being either Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal, these children represented 4 per cent of all respondents.

Over half of the students were named on a Health Care Card (58 per cent), however out of the children that responded with the main language they spoke at home, three quarters of Vietnamese and Cantonese speakers were named.

All but 17 children (94 per cent) had attended kindergarten prior to entering school.

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**Table B.2: Child demographic information**

	Number	Col %
Child living arrangements (multiple choice)		
Both parents	209	69.2#
Mother only	78	25.8
Mother and partner	5	1.7
Father only	3	1.0
Grandparent(s)	13	4.3
Sibling(s)	83	27.5#
Other <sup>+</sup>	6	2.0
Child indigenous status		
Aboriginal, or Torres Strait Islander	11	3.7#
No	284	96.3
Total child indigenous status	284	100.0
Child on health care card		
Yes	172	57.9
No	125	42.1
Total health care card	297	100.0
Child attended kindergarten		
Yes	251	93.7
No	17	6.3
Total kindergarten	268	100.0

Valid N used throughout,

+ Categories combined for confidentiality # indicates change from 2008

Looking at change over time, there were fewer children living with both parents in 2008 (64 per cent). Also, fewer children lived with siblings in 2008 (15.8 per cent). In 2008 a higher proportion of children were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander than in 2010 (11.8 per cent).

### Country of birth and language

As shown below in Table 6.3, most of the children were born in Victoria (84 per cent) or elsewhere in Australia (6 per cent), combined totalling 89 per cent of the entrants. The majority of the remaining 11 per cent of entrant children were born in India (4 per cent of all entrant children), or other countries (7 per cent of all entrants). Most children spoke English as their main language at home (81 per cent), and the remaining children had the same breakdown of main language as their parents, with most of the remaining children speaking Vietnamese (7 per cent) or Cantonese (3 per cent) or other languages.

Although English was the main language spoken at home, (77 per cent of respondents), just over one in five parents spoke another language as their main language, the most common being Vietnamese (8 per cent of respondents) and Cantonese (3 per cent of respondents). Fourteen percent of respondents needed an interpreter (these represented most of the Cantonese speakers, and just under half of the Vietnamese speakers).



**Table B.3: Child and parent/respondent country of birth and language spoken**

	Mother / respondent		Child	
	Number	Col %	Number	Col %
Country of birth				
Victoria	-	-	256	83.7
Elsewhere in Australia	-	-	17	5.6
<i>Subtotal Australia</i>	205	67.7	273	89.3
India	13	4.3	13	4.2
England	4	1.3	0	0
China	4	1.3	0	0
Other countries <sup>+</sup>	77	25.4	20	6.5
Total country of birth	303	100.0	306	100.0
Main language spoken at home				
English	223	77.4 <sup>#</sup>	233	81.2
Vietnamese	22	7.6	20	7.0
Cantonese	8	2.8	8	2.8
Other <sup>+</sup>	35	12.2	26	9.1
Total language	288	100.0	287	100.0
Interpreter required				
Yes	21	14.0 <sup>#</sup>	-	-
No	129	86.0	-	-
Total interpreter	150	100.0	-	-

Valid N used throughout

+ Categories combined for confidentiality, # indicates change from 2008

Mothers that were born overseas arrived in Australia between 1970 and 2009 (the year of survey collection). Half of the mothers arrived in 2000 or later, with a quarter of all mothers arriving in 2006 or later. Three mothers indicated that they will be in Australia for less than one year.

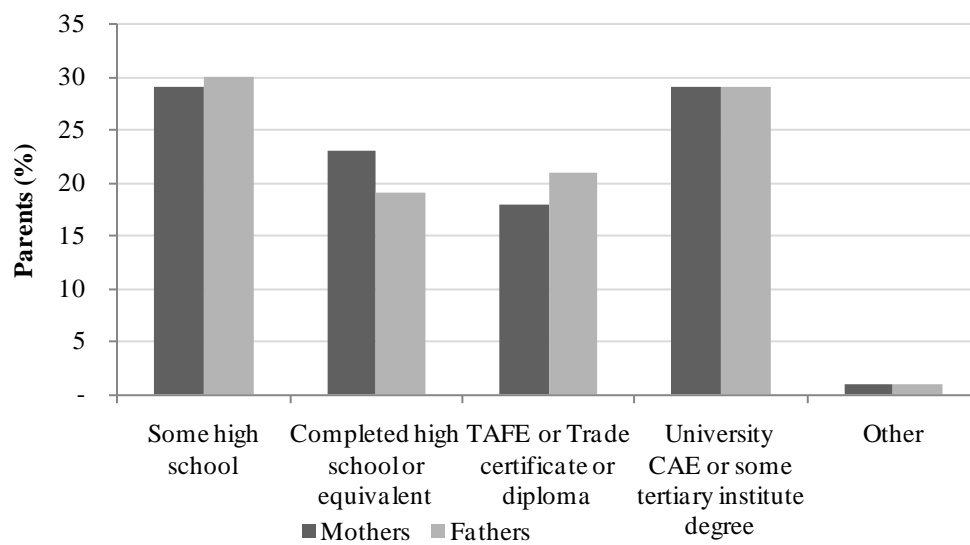
There were some changes of these demographic characteristics between 2008 and 2010, namely in 2008 more respondents indicated that they mainly spoke English at home (82.3 per cent). A larger proportion required the use of an interpreter in 2010 (14 per cent) compared with 2008 (8.5 per cent) Only 12/60 mothers had entered Australia in 2000 or later compared with half of the entrants in the 2010 round, indicating that mothers in 2010 are newer to the country than the previous round – this could also be associated with the lower proportion of English speakers in 2010. These changes were not echoed for children, however, with similar proportions speaking English and born overseas in 2010 compared with 2008.

#### *Parent education*

Around a third each of both mothers and fathers had tertiary education. Another third had completed some high school. Mothers had a slightly higher rate of high school completion compared to fathers, however more fathers than mothers had completed a TAFE trade certificate.

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**Figure B.1: Parents' highest level of education**



In 2010 parents had higher levels of education than in 2008, with more parents holding a high school certificate, TAFE or trade certificate or higher degree than parents in 2008.

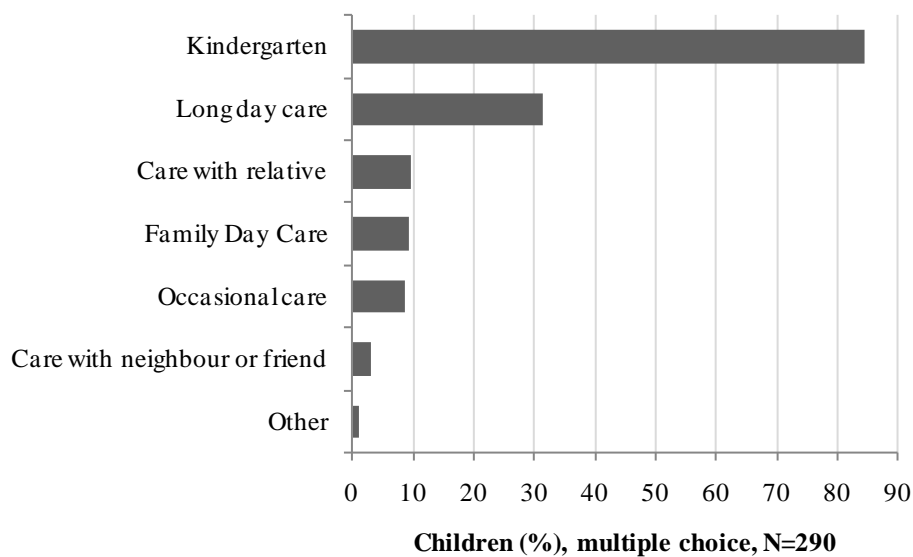
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## Appendix C: ECEC attendance

Parents were asked about their child’s involvement with early childhood education and care (ECEC) services prior to starting school. The majority of children (96 per cent) attended at least one of these services. Eleven children did not attend these services, however further analysis found no differences between regions, health care card status, or whether this was the parent’s first child starting school.

Figure C.1 shows that almost all children attended kindergarten prior to starting school, the next most popular service was long daycare, attended by just over one in three children. Care with neighbours or friends was used the least, with only 3 per cent of parents reporting that they used that type of care.

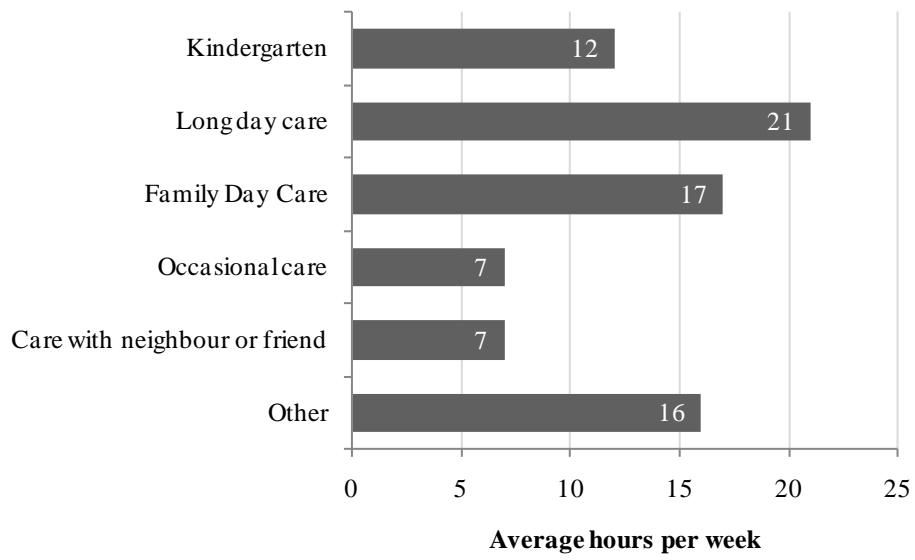
**Figure C.1: Early childhood education and care services utilised prior to entering school**



Not surprisingly, children spent the longest amount of time each week in long daycare, with an average of 21 hours per child (approximately three days of care at seven hours each day), as shown below in Figure C.2. This was followed by family day care with an average of 17 hours each week, and then kindergarten (12 hours).

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**Figure C.2: Average hours spent in early education and care services each week**



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## Appendix D: Summary of questionnaire findings

### Comparing results between 2008 and 2010

Goal one: Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools

- More children participated in orientation activities, in 2008 just under half attended schools over a period of weeks for half days or longer. In 2010 this figure was up to 68 per cent. Fewer children in 2010 visited the school (15 per cent) compared with 2008 (48 per cent).
- Larger proportions of ECEC services have children visit the school and have information sessions compared to 2008.
- Around the same proportion of families received enough information about schools from ECEC services. Parents gave similar scores over the two waves in regards to their satisfaction with the information (8/10 in 2010).
- Similar proportions of schools held orientation activities in 2010 compared with 2008.
- Both schools and ECEC services gave the same ratings in 2010 as they did in 2008 to the importance of ECEC services in transition to school.
- ECEC services rated their relationships with feeder schools higher than they did in 2008 (average 6.6 out of 10 compared with 5.5 out of 10), however this was not significantly different.

### Goal two: Early years services and schools actively connect with families

- Parents provided similar rates of satisfaction with ECEC services in 2010 compared with 2008.
- Similar ratings in 2010 and 2008 for relationship with school.
- Similar proportions of parents were asked for information about their child upon starting school, and similar rates of parents attended an interview with their child's teacher.
- Slightly more parents spent time at school in 2010 compared with 2008 (but this is not a significant difference). Similar proportions of parents participated in a range of activities at school.
- Although the numbers are very small and are statistically not significant, fewer ECEC services held one or more activities, groups or community events in school grounds in the six months prior to being surveyed in 2010 (18%, 4/22 services) compared with 2008 (44%, 8/18 services).
- Similar proportions of child and family services had organised one of these activities in 2010 compared to 2008.

### Goal three: Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children

- More schools had cultural/community-specific programs in 2010 (8/11, 73%) compared with 2008 (3/7, 43%).
- The same proportion of children was identified as having special needs in 2010 and 2008. Parents of these children rated themselves in both years as very satisfied with the school's response to their child's special needs.

- 
- More schools had community language programs in 2010 compared to 2008 (although this was only one more school, up from one school in 2008).
  - Fewer schools had group classroom-based health services in 2010 (4/11, 36%) compared with 2008 (5/7, 71%).
  - More child and family services received at least one referral from schools in the six months prior to the survey in 2010 (compared with 2008).
  - Similar proportions of early childhood education and care services reported referrals and information exchange with local school in 2010 compared with 2008, they also reported making similar numbers of referrals

### **Summary of 2010 results**

#### **Goal one: Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools**

##### Parent responses

- Most of the parents and the children attended at least one type of orientation program. These were most commonly children attending school on part days over a number of weeks, and parents visiting the schools.
- Most received enough information and support upon starting school.
- Parents reported that their children had very good experiences at school, reporting that their child was happy at school and has positive relationships with other students and teachers.
- Parents that reported lower scores for their child's experience at school also tended to report lower satisfaction levels with their early childhood education and care services.

##### ECEC

- Most ECEC ran transition to school programs
- A range of activities were provided; mainly children visiting schools, half held information sessions for parents.
- ECEC services saw themselves as playing a very important role in all elements of school transition for children, in particular adjustment and disposition.

##### Schools

- All schools ran a transition to school program
- These were seen to be most useful (10 out of 10) for teachers and schools, and equally effective for both disadvantaged/vulnerable families, as well as all families (both scoring 9 out of 10)
- Schools saw ECEC services as having an important role in elements of the transition-to-school process, but sometimes less than the ECEC services saw themselves. Schools felt that ECEC services played the most important role in adjustment, skills and rules.

#### **Goal two: Early years services and schools actively connect with families**

- Parents found the information received from their ECEC provider about school was very useful. They also had very high satisfaction levels with the services.

- 
- Most parents were asked for information about their child, and most attended an interview with their child's teacher in the first term, parents were satisfied with these interviews on the whole.
  - Parents were also very satisfied with information provided by the school (rating 8 out of 10) and were also satisfied with the opportunities to provide information about their children.
  - Half of the parents responded that they spend time at school other than dropping off or picking up their children. The most common activity was attending community or cultural events, and reading or participating in other classroom activities with children.
  - Nine of the 11 schools (82%) reported that they host activities for groups of parents.
  - Parents on the whole reported very good relationships with their child's school, responding that the school communicates effectively, is friendly and welcoming and offers activities and resources for parents.

### **Goal three: Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children**

- Around 16 per cent of the children in the cohort had a special need (e.g allergies, disability, health problems). Parents of these children reported high satisfaction with the school's responses to their child's special needs.
- Although no differences could be seen between regions or other demographic information, parents that reported lower scores for their school's response to their child's special needs also tended to report lower scores for their child's experience at school.
- All schools responded that they provide individualised classroom and assessment tasks to children and at least one other type of listed activity. Most provided either classroom-based health programs for individual or groups of children. Seven schools provided cultural/community specific positions and two of these schools had community language programs.
- Seven of the 11 schools responded that they were involved in an early intervention or health program.
- All schools were in contact with allied health services, and most were in contact with psychiatric or behavioural services for children. All but two schools were also in contact with church groups, domestic violence services, parent support and parenting groups.
- All but two schools reported that they received general information about the above services, and make their school grounds open to the services for activities and groups. All but one school referred families to the services.
- Ten schools responded that they made referrals to these services within the six months prior to the survey; one school survey was completed by a teacher on the principal's behalf and was unsure of this answer.
- Seven schools had attended planning, training or information days organised by child and family services within the six months prior to the survey, and eight out of the 11 schools had attended planning, training or other information days with teachers/staff from other schools.

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## **Links between services**

### **Child and family services**

- The most common activity reported by child and family services was communicating with families about ECEC services
- Most had referred a child to one of these services
- Staff at child and family services found out about other services mainly through information brochures/websites, but also through other services and interagency meetings
- Most child and family services provide information to local schools
- Around two-thirds of services had recently provided information about their service to local schools
- About half had provided information about particular families or children in the six months prior to survey
- Around half of the services have had recent contact with local schools, either through organising activities with local schools, or service staff attending planning/info events held by local schools.
- Around a third of services had recently held community events at the grounds of local schools.

### **ECEC**

- Most ECEC services were in contact with other services in the area, these were most commonly either allied health (GPs, hospitals) or maternal health services
- Nearly all services made referrals to local services in the area at least once in the six months prior to the survey, and about half of the services received a referral in that time
- About three quarters of services received general info about other local services, and the same number provided information about specific families
- A majority of ECEC services participated in planning, training and information days, both with local schools and local child and family services
- All but one ECEC service attends planning, training or interagency meetings with staff from local child and family services
- Fewer ECEC services participated with local schools to organise or attend activities, groups or community events at local school grounds – around half attended these types of events in the six months prior to the survey, and around 20 per cent actually organised an event of this type.
- All respondents had links with local schools, mostly with between two and four schools
- Links with schools were seen to be mostly effective but not extremely effective (rated 6.6 out of 10). Five services responded that their links with schools were less effective (<=5 out of 10)
- About 60 per cent of ECEC services recorded information about the schools that children attend after leaving their service, because it was both a policy, and to use in planning transition programs.
- ECEC felt they had a good relationship with feeder schools



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- ECEC most linked with local schools by: staff/directors visiting local schools, staff providing child profiles to schools, school teachers visiting services, and exchanging information with schools.

### **Schools**

- All schools (11) responded that they have various linking activities between themselves and local early childhood education and care services
- Schools felt their relationship with feeder early childhood education and care services were very effective (rating of 8 out of 10), which is a higher rating than the ECEC services gave to their feeder schools.

### **Child and Family service use information**

- For half of the parents, this was their first child starting school.
- Most children attended at least one ECEC service prior to starting school, this was mostly kindergarten (average 12 hrs/wk) or long daycare (average 21 hrs per week).
- Parents found the information received from their ECEC provider about school was very useful
- They also had very high satisfaction levels with the services
- Nearly three quarters of all children needed and used a GP service in the year prior to entering school.
- Just under half of the children in the cohort needed dental services, and out of those children, almost 80 per cent of them actually used the service.
- There were areas of need for some child and family services, namely speech therapy, maternal and child health nurses, psychiatric or behavioural services and dental services all had relatively high proportions of children that needed but could not use those services in the year prior to starting school; the main reasons provided were that the services were too expensive or they had to wait too long for an appointment.
- Proportionally more children in Footscray both needed and were able to use a playgroup or parent child group compared to other regions.
- Proportionally more children in Hastings both needed and were able to use medical services compared to other regions.
- Children whose mother spoke a language other than English at home were more likely to need but not be able to use maternal and child health nurses or dental services.
- Children who were named on health care cards were more likely to need but not use dental services and speech therapy.
- From the very few responses to this question, the main services that families needed but could not use were parenting education courses or programs and specialist medical services
- The main reasons for not being able to use any of the family services were that they were too expensive and child care difficulties.

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