



*Engaging Our School Communities*  
**Taskforce Report to the Minister for Education**

---

## Chair's foreword

---

This taskforce was challenged with producing a report in just four months that explored how to “Engage Our School Communities”. To do justice to such an opportunity, we thought would be nigh impossible. We sought and received submissions from many people and organisations committed to ensuring that Tasmanian government schools and their communities are working together to make every opportunity count. Whether that was through using school facilities, or finding ways to enhance student learning through partnerships with the wider community, and much more as you will see as you read our report.

Nowhere did we hear that the task given to us by the Minister was not worth doing. In fact, through both the deliberations of the taskforce and what we were told by others, it became clear that further development of school–community links is a good investment for both schools and the government to make.

We were overwhelmed by the many examples of innovative and collaborative partnerships already existing between schools, families and the community, that are leading to fantastic benefits for all concerned. Seeing these examples, some of which are outlined in this report, made the taskforce very aware of the need to concentrate on ensuring that the recommendations we made to the Minister were concrete and built upon the inspiring work already occurring in our schools and communities.

After considering all the information and experience we gained during the four months, we have developed three types of recommendations. Firstly, we have taken a role in documenting and disseminating what has been learnt from work currently occurring in schools so that other schools and their communities can draw on these experiences when setting up local partnerships. Secondly, we have recommended the piloting of a number of initiatives to enable the development of new partnerships and provide new learnings that can be shared. Thirdly, we have identified areas in which we believe further work needs to occur in order to better understand what needs to be done to achieve improved outcomes for schools and communities.

It has been a privilege to work with the members of this taskforce. Although coming from a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives, they have worked cohesively and beyond the call of duty to produce this report. Their commitment and willingness to engage in robust debate has led to the production of a report that is evidence-based and action-focused.

The wonderful support we have had from the schools visited has assisted in making this task achievable. However, I believe this is only the start of a journey—a highly rewarding journey that will provide real opportunities to better support schools and their communities in working together.

I commend this report to you.



Jennifer Branch  
Chair  
Engaging Our School Communities Taskforce

31 October 2006

## Executive summary

---

The Engaging Our School Communities Taskforce was established by the Minister for Education to identify strategies to improve school engagement with parents and their communities. The taskforce was required to report to the Minister in relation to its terms of reference by 31 October 2006.

Broad consultation was undertaken to determine current practice, identify issues and support the development of strategies.

Schools from across the state submitted examples of excellent practice, many of which are documented in this report.

The taskforce developed 20 recommendations for the Minister. The recommendations are:

1. That the Department of Education trial at least two school community partnership officer positions in the 2007 school year. These positions should:
  - work across a learning services group
  - report directly to the general manager of the learning services group
  - work with schools, parent and community organisations, and businesses to develop school relationships with their communities
  - be evaluated at the end of 2008.
2. That a twice-yearly, parent-friendly magazine be developed with input from the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends, and distributed by the Department of Education, to support better communication and provide useful information and updates to parents and the community.
3. That the Department of Education work with the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, in particular the new TAFE Recognition Centre, and Volunteering Tasmania to enable recognition of skills gained in volunteering in schools towards vocational education and training qualifications.
4. That the Department of Education work with Volunteering Tasmania and the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends to ensure that the training needs of volunteers in schools, including parents, are met.
5. That the Tasmanian Minister for Education approach the Australian Government Ministers for Education and Employment and Workplace Relations seeking to ensure that volunteer work in schools is included as approved activity for the purposes of compliance with the mutual obligation requirements of the *Welfare to Work* initiative.
6. That the programs proposed by the ACL Bearing Company be implemented in conjunction with the Launceston northern suburbs schools and that they be evaluated after 12 months. For details refer to page 17 of this report.
7. That the Department of Education and AFL Tasmania jointly fund, and work together to implement, the programs identified in *Real-life Learning 'Reaching Out'*. For details refer to page 18 of this report.
8. That the Department of Education and The Smith Family develop a memorandum of understanding that articulates how the department will work with The Smith Family to implement the proposed policy framework. For details refer to page 19 of this report.
9. That the initiatives identified by Rotary District 9830 in developing stronger links between Rotary and schools be endorsed by the Minister. For details refer to page 20 of this report.
10. That a set of principles be developed in conjunction with the Treasury that describes what sort of organisations should have the government's public liability coverage extended to them when using school facilities. If the content of these principles cannot be resolved, the matter be referred to the Minister for Education for discussion with the Treasurer.
11. That a checklist of matters to be considered in making school facilities available to non-school organisations be developed and made available to schools.

- 
12. That a pricing framework be developed to assist schools hiring out their facilities. This framework should:
    - take into account the capacity of the user to pay
    - take account of the cost to schools providing access, noting the importance of not confusing price and cost
    - be capable of being applied to other Department of Education facilities such as libraries, online access centres and Adult Education facilities.
  13. That a member of the taskforce be appointed to the Kingston High School Project Advisory Group to provide input on genuine community involvement in planning for the new school.
  14. That the Department of Education ensure the installation and the collection of library resources in the new community facility at Mayfield Primary School is undertaken when it is established, and that use of the materials be evaluated at the end of 2007 with a view to assessing its suitability for expansion to other similar communities.
  15. That the Department of Education is represented at a high level in the working group established by the Tasmanian Government/Clarence City Council Partnership Agreement. Quarterly reports should be supplied to the Secretary, Department of Education who should ensure that the working group reaches a successful conclusion on these matters within 12 months of the signing of this agreement.

Approaches should then be made to include the protocols and arrangements determined by this group, contextualised for the local community, in other state/local government partnership arrangements.

16. That the position of operations manager in each of the four new learning services groups in the department be given specific responsibility for supporting schools in improving inter-agency collaboration to improve service provision to families.
17. That the Minister instigate a review of the operations of school associations. This review should take account of the impact of the change to school associations on parents and friends organisations and on the capacity of parents to be meaningfully engaged in the life of their school.
18. That the Department of Education investigate the feasibility of using other alternatives to commercial auditors, including the possible use of its own internal audit resources, to undertake the audits of incorporated school associations that are required by law.
19. That the taskforce reconvene in November 2007 to assess the progress of, and learnings from, the implementation of the recommendations of this report.
20. That the Department of Education identify a set of key performance measures and use them to monitor parent and community involvement in schools and the impact of strategies established and that these be reported on in the annual report.

## Introduction

---

### Role and terms of reference

In May 2006, the Minister for Education, the Hon David Bartlett MHA, announced the Engaging Our School Communities Taskforce. This taskforce was to identify strategies to improve parent and community involvement in Tasmanian government school life. Central to the establishment of the taskforce was the idea that schools are an integral part of the whole community, contributing to improved quality of life and the development of positive relationships for all, not just for those families with children at the school and not just during school hours.

The taskforce was required to report to the Minister on the terms of reference by 31 October 2006. The terms of reference are:

- Document shining local examples of excellent practice in school–community engagement and recommend a set of programs and initiatives that can be implemented from 2007.
- Explore the role of school leadership in developing positive relationships between school, home and the community.
- Determine the things that get in the way of parents and the community engaging with schools.
- Review and enhance current structures for parent participation.
- Examine how schools and their facilities may be opened up to connect them with their local communities.

### Membership and meetings

The Minister established the taskforce with representation from key stakeholder groups to facilitate the achievement of its goals. The diversity of the subject meant that for practical reasons, not every group able to contribute in this area could be represented on the taskforce. Selecting members was a balance between ensuring appropriate representation and keeping numbers to an effective level. The 13 members were:

- Jennifer Branch (Chair)—President, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Inc
- Rachel Beach—President, East Launceston Primary School Parents and Friends
- Judy Fahey—Principal, Burnie High School
- Jason Furness—General Manager, ACL Bearing Company
- Maxine Griffiths—Chief Executive, Volunteering Tasmania
- Jenny Grossmith—North West Vice President, Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Inc
- Michael Hayen—Principal, Brent Street Primary School
- Jan Larcombe—President, Tasmanian Principals Association
- Kathra McTye—Chair, Lindisfarne North Primary School Association
- Katherine Schaefer—General Manager, Central Coast Council
- Ian Shuey—District Director New Generations, Rotary International
- Scott Wade—General Manager, AFL Tasmania
- Nick Evans—Director Policy and Services, Department of Education (ex officio).

The taskforce met over four months from July to October with the majority of the meetings held in schools. This provided members with the opportunity to hear first-hand the many different ways that schools engage with their communities.

The schedule was:

10 July 2006	Hobart
25 July 2006	Mayfield Primary School
8 August 2006	Rokeby High School
22 August 2006	Sheffield School
5 September 2006	Glenora District High School
3 October 2006	Newstead College
17 October 2006	Hobart
31 October 2006	Teleconference

---

## **Consultation methodology**

The nature of the subject matter covered by the terms of reference meant that extensive public consultation was essential. This was achieved in a number of ways.

The 13 members represented a significant proportion of the Tasmanian community. Members of the taskforce worked with their constituents to bring a representative voice to the taskforce discussions. Some members also worked with their organisations to develop specific initiatives and recommendations. These were the ACL Bearing Company, AFL Tasmania and Rotary International. The Smith Family and the Local Government Association of Tasmania also engaged directly with the taskforce.

The school-based meetings provided the schools with the opportunity to communicate directly with the taskforce. At the meetings, members of the schools and their communities described their achievements as well as the issues they faced. The taskforce was grateful to each of the schools for their frankness and were impressed by the obvious commitment and dedication of those involved.

Public submissions were requested through advertisements in Tasmania's three major newspapers on 12 August 2006. A memorandum was sent to all department staff, and letters were sent to key organisations to draw attention to the consultation process. Nine submissions were received. Organisations and individuals that provided submissions are listed in Appendix 1. The views, ideas and suggestions received through the consultation processes supported the work of the taskforce and the development of its recommendations.

## **Defining the task**

Given the diversity of the topic and fixed time period, it was essential that the taskforce be strategically focussed from the outset. At its first meeting, members identified five key areas on which to focus their efforts. These were both aligned with the terms of reference and achievable in the short timeframe. Key focus areas were:

- Increasing opportunities for school engagement with parents and carers
- Recognising and expanding the real-life student learning opportunities that are achievable through school engagement with the community
- Supporting school leaders in developing positive relationships with school communities
- Improving the effectiveness of community involvement in school governance arrangements
- Increasing community access to school facilities.

Over the four months from July to October, the taskforce worked to both unearth the shining local examples of excellent practice in Tasmanian government schools, and to systematically explore each of the key focus areas. The taskforce gained an understanding of the prominent issues in each area, and developed strategies that aim to provide the most significant results possible whilst minimising the imposition on schools and their resources.

The shining examples and recommendations for the Minister described in this report are the results of that work.

# Shining examples of schools engaging with their communities

---

## Associated terms of reference

- Document shining local examples of excellent practice in school–community engagement and recommend a set of programs and initiatives that can be implemented from 2007.

## Background

The taskforce was inundated with many wonderful examples of the ways in which Tasmanian government schools engage with their communities. Those documented here are only the tip of the iceberg. They were selected as samples of excellent practice to illustrate the diversity of programs, relationships and partnerships that schools have put in place. These examples illustrate significant results for all involved and were developed with improved learning outcomes for students in mind. The six examples provided in detail here are also the subject of the DVD accompanying this report.

### *Mt Faulkner Primary School* — engaging with parents to support early learning

In 2001, Mt Faulkner Primary School in Hobart's northern suburbs was established through the amalgamation of the two local primary schools. The founding principal quickly realised that action was required to address the school's lower than average student literacy levels. The principal and the Mt Faulkner team developed a strategy to improve literacy levels and therefore the children's overall education outcomes.

The adopted strategy was based on engaging with local parents and their young children before the children started school. A number of initiatives and programs were developed for children aged from birth to five. Working with these children and their parents meant the school could begin to support literacy learning and identify and address issues early on. By the time the children enrolled at school, they were already on their way to a successful education.

The *Magic of Reading* program introduced in 2001 is a storytelling program open for children from birth to five years of age to attend with their parents or carers. The program is led by an experienced teacher and aims to develop the children's love of books, their alphabet and their pre-literacy skills through stories, songs, games and fun. *Magic of Reading* was very successful from the beginning and continues today. However, recognising that one hour of support per week could not meet the school's literacy aims, more programs were developed.

The *Learning is Fun Together (LIFT)* program for three year olds and their parents helps the children to become 'school ready' and delivers interactive learning that focuses on literacy, social and motor skills development. Parents remain with their children during the program and the school works with each parent to actively engage them in their children's learning. It also provides parents with the opportunity to watch and interact with the school's teachers.

A weekly playgroup was established to support early learning for children from birth to five. Parents, carers and grandparents are actively encouraged to come along.

The school also set up a parent room to provide a supportive environment for parents to meet. This room includes a community area where parents can have a coffee and a chat, access a computer and the internet, and access a range of resources including books, videos and pamphlets that can be borrowed. The parent room has helped to break down the social isolation experienced by some parents in the area and increased parent interaction with the school.

As a result of Mt Faulkner's approach and the programs introduced, there have been significant benefits for the school, the children and their families. As hoped, there has been a major improvement in literacy outcomes for students attending the school— an improvement that is backed up by hard data. There have also been other positive spin-offs, including the ability to refer parents of some pre-school children to services that provide early intervention for behavioural and learning difficulties. This can significantly improve the chances of children's success at school. Early interaction with the school also means that

---

children settle in more easily when they start school as they are familiar with the environment. The fact that many parents feel at home and comfortable with the school has also had positive results for students' overall learning.

Mt Faulkner Primary School has successfully built a culture that accepts and values the involvement of the local community. The value of the programs is evident by the high participation rates resulting predominantly through word of mouth. A re-evaluation of the programs was undertaken by the school in light of the costs required to provide them. The enormously positive outcomes of the programs and the community's expectation for their continuation make their ongoing delivery assured.

There are many Tasmanian schools that engage with their parent communities to support improved outcomes for students.

**Mayfield Primary School** has also opened its doors to parents to help improve learning outcomes for children. The school's *Communities for Children: Relationships Encouraging Effective Learning* project supports parents and carers in preparing their children for school. The school engages with local parents with children from birth to four years. Teachers model learning activities and provide information for parents on developmental and educational issues in three sessions per week. They also provide support materials and referrals for children requiring early intervention. This project has been successful in supporting a significant proportion of parents including young teenage mothers. The school has also begun to develop a book and toy library for families of children, an initiative supported by donations from Rotary and the Connect Foundation.

**Abbotsfield Primary School** provides a range of programs to support parents and their children's early learning. These include a playgroup for children from birth to three years; *Book Bears*, a library program for children from birth to four and their parents; kinder gym, a physical activity program for children from birth to four; and a pre-kinder playgroup to support children before they start school. The school also established a parent room beside the Kindergarten which has a one-way mirror that allows parents to view their children whilst they are participating in the Kindergarten program. The parent room has become a valued meeting place for parents. Using a partnership grant of \$10 000, the school has use of the community centre where parents gather to discuss and learn about things such as parenting issues, life skills, budgeting, tax returns, and are able to participate in art/craft activities. A computer with internet access is also available.

In partnership with Colony 47, **Moonah Primary School** provides a family-group work program to enable families to work with their Year 3 and 4 students. Children attend the program accompanied by a parent, grandparent or other adult relative or friend. In the program, families and children play and work in a fun, supportive environment and build their relationship together. The program also enables families to get to know each other and the school.

**Glenora District High School** has a large number of programs in place that involve parents in their children's learning both before they start school and during the school years. Programs include a weekly playgroup, *ABC Play* (a literacy program for children from birth to five), a parent room, a Play Access Library, back to school mornings and parent workshops.

---

## *Warrane Primary School* and the University of the Third Age — community volunteers supporting students' learning

Although no one realised it at the time, a successful learning partnership began the day the University of the Third Age (U3A) first leased an unused classroom at Warrane Primary School. For some time, the school and the U3A had limited interaction. Then one day, the school principal gave a presentation to a U3A tutorial group studying contemporary educational practices. The presentation was particularly focused on literacy development in children, and the programs that the principal described inspired the group so much that they asked how they could become involved.

That was all the encouragement the school needed. In 2004, the school's *Reading Recovery* teachers developed a specific program where U3A volunteers work directly with the students. The teachers developed and provided training for the volunteers before they were introduced to their students. Careful selections were made to match tutors and students and all lessons were under teacher supervision.

The U3A volunteers bring a diverse range of professional and life skills into the school. As articulate individuals they provide strong role models for the children, demonstrating the value of education and of giving something back to the community. They now provide literacy support modelled on the *Bridges* program to students—and not just those with identified problems.

Before the program was established at Warrane, the school had been investing significant resources on providing individual intervention for students who had not reached average student literacy levels. This accounted for more than 30 per cent of the students. Established programs like *Bridges* and *Reading Recovery* had been implemented at the school with some success. These programs were supported by a parent volunteer program. The volunteer program was dependant on school community enthusiasm and volunteers from the parent group, many of whom were very young and inexperienced. As a result, limited success was achieved.

The results of the U3A volunteer program have been outstanding, with significant literacy improvements seen across the school. All students who completed their early childhood years at Warrane begin Year 3 with a minimum reading level of 28 which means that they are able to read independently. The children have responded very well to the “grandparent” figures and have developed a strong rapport with them. Most of the students look forward to meeting with their tutors, and programs are now being integrated into classrooms instead of being held separately.

The U3A volunteers have also benefited. They feel valued and important, forming strong bonds with their young charges. The school provides additional resources and activities for the U3A, including use of the school's computer labs. The value of their contribution is recognised and celebrated at the end of every term at morning and afternoon teas held with their students. The commitment of the volunteers is strong, with almost 100 per cent continuing with the program.

The partnership developed at Warrane is a shining example of what can happen when schools open their doors to their communities. Improving literacy outcomes is a very high priority for the governments of all Australian states and territories, and Warrane Primary School has shown that a little ingenuity can make a real difference to children's learning and the rest of their lives.

There are many Tasmanian schools that engage with their communities to support improved outcomes for students.

Bachelor of Education students from the University of Tasmania volunteer their time each week at **Mayfield Primary School**, where they work with individual children or small groups to implement programs devised at the school.

---

Mayfield participates in a *Co-pilots* mentoring program where students work with a community mentor over several weeks on a project that has a community focus. Students have benefited in a range of ways, including forging friendships with supportive adults outside their usual environment and developing new skills. Students at schools in the **Jordan River Cluster** have also benefited from a similar *Co-pilots* mentoring program. Improved attendance, higher motivation to learn and lower suspension rates have all been cited as benefits resulting from community members mentoring students.

In conjunction with Women Tasmania, **Claremont College** runs a *Girls in Real Life* mentoring program where young women at Claremont College are mentored by community volunteers. The female mentors provide friendship and advice, helping the girls to identify and work towards goals and continue with education or training. Claremont College has also established a learn to drive program called *Top Gear* in which community volunteers assist students to learn how to drive safely.

### *Smithton High School* — local partnerships providing real-life learning opportunities for students

In 2004, when the pathway planning officer based at Smithton High School approached the farm manager of the Woolnorth property in Tasmania's far north west, she really started something big. Her plan was to help make science real for Smithton's Year 9 and 10 science students. She did this by setting up a partnership between the school and the region's largest grazier property 'Woolnorth', which is owned and operated by the Van Diemen's Land Company.

Most of the students at Smithton High School come from rural backgrounds, but the links between their farms and science are not always clear. By developing a real-life science-based program through the partnership with the Van Diemen's Land Company, the pathway planning officer and school science teacher were able to demonstrate to science students the practical use of what they were learning and the opportunities for a career in science.

The main focus of the program is on water, soil and pasture testing. The students spend one day at the 22,000 hectare historic Woolnorth property on the far north west tip of Tasmania. They take water and soil samples which are then analysed back at school over the following weeks. The students provide a detailed report on their research results enabling the Van Diemen's Land Company to use the data to improve their business. All results reported are scientifically substantiated.

The project has had considerable benefits for all involved. The students feel that they are contributing to the prosperity of the community and they experience first-hand the positives of doing something to help others without financial reward. They also get an idea of the career possibilities that agricultural science offers.

The Van Diemen's Land Company was excited to participate in the program as it was clearly of value to their business. While soil testing had occurred previously at Woolnorth, water quality testing had not been undertaken before and the company has been able to use the students' data to improve the farm.

The program also resulted in a significant shift in community attitudes towards students and a major change in how the community views the school. Members of the local community, Rotary, local government councillors and even the Mayor have become actively involved in the school and are enthusiastic supporters of the program.

The success of the partnership and the program it supports far exceeded expectations. In fact, it has been so successful that the school has secured five years' financial sponsorship from Greenham Tasmania (a local meat exporter) toward continuation of the program. A number of other organisations have also approached the school to see how they can help. The school has not only continued to run the program

---

at Woolnorth, but has expanded it to other industries through new partnerships with ABN Minerals and Classic Foods. The Woolnorth project/partnership with the Van Diemen's Land Company is a fantastic example of how a single idea can benefit an entire community.

There are many Tasmanian schools that engage local business and industry to provide real-life learning opportunities for students.

Each year **Newstead College** media students (photography, film and television) develop real products for local business. Projects undertaken by the college students so far have included media work for community organisations and businesses such as Forestry Tasmania, Comalco, Rio Tinto, Carter Holt, The Corner Youth Centre, Probus and Launceston City Council. The students produce all of the college's 'in-house' promotional work and have also produced DVDs and exhibitions for the Department of Education's Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training. The college's integrative and authentic practices for student learning were recently showcased at the national *Learning Choices Expo* in Maroochydore, Queensland.

**Glenora District High School** runs problem-based learning (PBL) sessions for students from Prep to Year 4 which draw on community/parent partnerships to help keep learning relevant. Students are given a problem scenario and then work through defining the problem and identifying and testing solutions.

The Central Coast School–Business Alliance Project is working to grow community capacity to improve the participation of young people in education, training and employment on the central coast. It aims to achieve this by developing and enhancing school–business partnerships. The project involves the Central Coast Council, Cradle Coast Authority, local businesses, local schools, the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, the University of Tasmania and service clubs.

The *Men at Work* and *Girls' Day Out* programs at **Brooks High School** are two of the many programs underpinning the school's *No Dole* careers program. All Year 9 boys spend a day in a workplace where they are each visited by a male staff member—not just teachers. The same occurs for the girls on a different day during which they are visited by a female staff member. There are hundreds of employers in the community eager to accept a student for the day.

The *Traineeship and Apprenticeship Pathways Program (TAP)* is another program at Brooks High School that involves partnerships between the school, TAFE and local employers. Over 15 weeks, students spend two days at TAFE, two days at school and one day each week in a work placement.

The **Bicheno Primary School** is working with the Bicheno Community Development Association to develop a recording of Bicheno history that will result in visual and audio representations, community art pieces and a series of history walks through the Bicheno township.

### *Rokeby High School*, **Clarence City Council and the Institute of TAFE Tasmania — communities and schools working together, achieving results**

Encouraging kids to get out of the classroom and hang out at the local skate park seems an unusual way to create educational opportunities, but at Rokeby an idea originating from the council aimed to do just that.

Thinking outside the square, Clarence City Council's Parks and Natural Resource Officer saw a range of opportunities when he began the project to redevelop the Rokeby Community Park in 2006. The park had been vandalised and was in poor repair. The council officer, an ex-teacher and enthusiastic supporter of community-based learning, saw the potential benefits of students working on the project. He approached both Rokeby High School and the Institute of TAFE Tasmania's Horticulture (South) team. This resulted in both TAFE and high school students becoming involved in the redesign and soft landscaping of the park.

---

The TAFE students acted as project managers as well as mentors to the school students during the project. From the outset the school students were involved in all decisions including the location of new garden beds, the propagation of plants and the physical landscaping.

The school students were shown how what they were learning in the classroom was important in life. For example, they were able to see how maths could be applied to tasks such as calculating the volume of pine bark needed. Their teachers were impressed at how readily students learnt concepts in the field that they may have had difficulty learning in a traditional classroom situation.

Some of the project work such as plant propagation was undertaken at the TAFE campus with Rokeby High School students encouraged to visit. Student feedback indicated that this introduction helped to demystify TAFE and what it had to offer and opened up future pathways not previously considered.

This example highlights how one person's inspiration can result in major benefits for schools and communities. With stage one of the council's project finished, the Rokeby community already has a more welcoming facility which will continue to be enhanced. TAFE students have gained practical field experience and developed their leadership skills. Rokeby High School students have developed their confidence and work skills. They now have greater understanding of their future career pathways, and have experienced the benefits of giving something back to their community. A win-win situation for all.

There are many examples of communities and schools working together to achieve significant results.

The 'extreme makeover' of **Invermay Primary School** in September 2006 was a unique community-driven project which involved 60 businesses and over 500 volunteers from all walks of life. Launceston's churches coordinated the project as a gift to the city. The whole community came together to offer support through donations of cash, building supplies, in-kind support, and volunteers' time. The makeover included fully redeveloping the kindergarten, landscaping, improving playgrounds, painting inside and outside, upgrading electrics and lighting, and installing a wireless network, bike racks and new floor coverings. The contribution by all was astonishing and the community's evident pride in and commitment to the school is phenomenal.

**Claremont College** has a memorandum of understanding with the University of Tasmania and the Glenorchy, Derwent Valley and Brighton councils to support students at Claremont College to continue to Year 12 and then on to university. This has resulted in a range of initiatives being established to improve access to higher education for students.

**Moonah Primary School**, Chance on Main and Tasmania Police are working together to provide an early intervention program called *Handshake P Plate*. This program is designed to engage young people between the ages of 10 and 12 years to work effectively with others and promote positive behaviour choices.

### *Sheffield School* — community learning hub

With a redevelopment planned for Sheffield's small school library and an upgrade needed for the town's library, the idea of combining resources emerged. Add a vacant school assembly hall to the equation and people began to think creatively. The initial idea of combining resources grew into a vision—to collocate many of the town's resources at the school to create a local 'hub' of learning that would support the learning needs of the whole community. The result of that vision is the Community Learning Centre at Sheffield School which opened in July 2003. Since the opening of the centre, the school has changed its name from Sheffield District High School to Sheffield School, symbolically communicating that it is now a facility where the whole community can participate in learning.

---

The Community Learning Centre is a shared facility between the school and community that extends the operation of the school facilities beyond normal school hours and provides a range of services. The entire Sheffield community can now access the school library, the State Library, the Sheffield Online Access Centre and vocational education and training (VET) under one roof.

The project was six years from concept to completion and involved a committed group of individuals with a shared vision. Leadership was provided by the school council and extensive consultation and research was undertaken to identify needs, explore ideas and investigate best practice.

The Community Learning Centre has been beneficial to the school and the community. The local community has a high quality facility that provides both state government services and government school educational programs in a cooperative environment that really works. There has been a significant culture shift in the community towards learning, and having adult learners within the school community is providing strong role models for school students. Importantly, the retention rate for students from Year 10 to Year 11 has increased.

Through the development of the centre, the community has strengthened ties and relationships, and shares an enormous sense of achievement from realising their vision against all odds. The success of this project has led to new community projects beginning, including the development of a community arts centre and the relocation of the early childhood centre to the school. The Sheffield School is a shining example of a school fully engaging with its community.

With a similar approach, **Glenora District High School** has collocated a number of services at the school. These include the Glenora Online Access Centre, Glenora Family Day Care House, the Aboriginal Students' Homework Centre and a skill centre which provides vocational education and training (VET) opportunities.

**Maydena Primary School** also houses the Maydena Online Access Centre and includes a Heritage Room and community meeting centre. The online access centre has generated community and political interest with a range of initiatives including the development of digitised collections and DVDs of local history and heritage.

### *New Town High School* — opening school facilities to the community

New Town High School's principal has a strong belief in the concept of a community school and is keen to open up the school to the local community. With the recent redevelopment of the gymnasium and other school upgrades, New Town High School has facilities to be proud of. Rather than see them stand idle after school and during school breaks, the principal is encouraging the local community to view the school as more than just an educational facility for its 800 male students, by making its facilities available for use outside of school hours.

The community school concept is in its early stages at New Town High School and is being developed primarily through partnerships. The first of these to be established was a partnership with the Hobart Chargers basketball team. The team uses the gymnasium for training sessions, with the school receiving an agreed rent in return.

This partnership is benefiting all involved. The Chargers have use of an excellent training facility and the rent helps the school maintain the facility. Having the Chargers in the school provides valuable role models for the students and they have agreed to provide coaching for students and run basketball clinics for school teams. The Chargers provide students with a number of free tickets to at-home basketball games. They have also pledged to regularly play exhibition matches at the school which will support interested boys in further developing their skills.

---

In a similar vein, the school has made its grounds available to the Tasmanian Cricket Association (TCA) for junior club cricket. School grounds and the gymnasium are also available to the New Town Eagles Soccer Club and the gymnasium to the Cripps Waratah Netball team—and this is just the beginning. The school has discovered that New Town and its surrounding suburbs are the most widely represented Adult Education user group, and the principal is keen to pursue a partnership with Adult Education to use the school's facilities. The principal is also investigating provision of a community meeting place for the local African community, facilities for a junior theatre and dance group, and use of the school's IT facilities for a disabled group.

New Town High School is well on its way to achieving its vision of becoming a community school. While the school sees challenges in managing and administering the current and future arrangements, it recognises that the benefits are well worth it.

There are many other Tasmanian schools that are opening up their facilities to their communities.

**Penguin Primary School** makes available classrooms and other facilities for outside school hours and vacation care services provided by the Central Coast Council. The University of Tasmania uses the school's facilities for second year education tutorials in art, physical education and music, and the annual North and North West Volunteer Fire Fighting Competitions were held at the school.

At **Mayfield Primary School** the Girl Guides Association uses school facilities free of charge one afternoon a week, with parents supporting the program as leaders/trainee leaders. The school also provides a room for the local Neighbourhood Watch to meet once a month. In return the group actively supports the school and donates awards for community service. An annual Community Fun Day organised by the local churches is also held in the school grounds and supported by the school.

The five primary schools in the Brighton Municipality, **Brighton, Gagebrook, Herdsmans Cove, Green Point** and **Bridgewater**, were each provided with funding through the Department of Health and Human Services to establish early years centres at the schools. These centres coordinate the provision of services to families with young children and facilitate the collocation of health, welfare and education services. The centres have encouraged parents into the schools and have been very successful in establishing networks and promoting community development.

In partnership with the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, **Cooee Primary School** established an early years pre-kinder program for parents and children. Cooee provides the venue and TAFE provides Children's Services Diploma students as staff.

### **School community partnership officers**

The wonderful examples that the taskforce heard about and saw were initiated in a variety of ways, often as a result of an individual's vision or to take advantage of a specific event or opportunity. Some programs in schools are developed using resources that support the establishment of school–community relationships such as the Positive Ageing Consultative Committee's *Partners in Time Resource Kit* highlighted through the Premier's submission to the taskforce. However, many are developed and implemented without the benefit of other's experiences. The taskforce recognised the gains to be realised when schools learn from each other. Accordingly, members identified the need for a strategic approach to expanding the engagement of schools with their communities.

The taskforce believes that at least two school community partnership officers should be trialled. These positions would each be based in a regional learning services group and would work strategically with schools to achieve greater community use of school facilities and closer parent–school relationships. Such officers are used to great effect in other Australian states such as Queensland, as well as internationally.

---

The taskforce believes that officers should report directly to the general manager of the learning services group and work with school principals. It is not the intention for these positions to remove principals from having responsibility for community engagement. Rather, officers would provide principals with information and advice to support them in increasing school community relationships, thereby improving student outcomes.

A position such as this was suggested in submissions to the taskforce by both Penguin Primary School and the Latrobe/Kentish Cluster. The taskforce suggests that the focus of this position be much broader than the school/parent/family focus that these schools have previously had. However, it is clear from their submissions that Penguin Primary School and the Latrobe/Kentish Cluster have had a positive experience of people performing a similar role, with Penguin Primary School valuing it so highly, that the school association is now resourcing the position.

It will be important to evaluate whether these positions have been successful and the taskforce believes this should occur after two years. In evaluating the effectiveness of these positions, the number and type of partnerships and initiatives established as a result of the support of these officers, as well as the perceived benefits from having officers, should be considered.

### **Recommendation 1**

That the Department of Education trial at least two school community partnership officer positions in the 2007 school year. These positions should:

- work across a learning services group
- report directly to the general manager of the learning services group
- work with schools, parent and community organisations, and businesses to develop school relationships with their communities
- be evaluated at the end of 2008.

## Associated terms of reference

- Determine the things that get in the way of parents and the community engaging with schools.
- Review and enhance current structures for parent participation.

## Background

All Tasmanian government schools have structures in place that support the involvement of parents and carers in their child's learning. Parent engagement with the school and involvement in their child's learning, is recognised as having significant positive benefits for the outcomes of the child and also for the school and the parents themselves.

The taskforce heard that the proportion of parents that are actively engaging with schools is in decline. With this subject identified as a key focus area, the taskforce has worked to develop strategies that will support increased parent involvement in schools.

The taskforce understands that through its 2006 election policy document *Learning for Life* the Tasmanian Government affirmed the Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Association as the peak voice for parents. It also acknowledges that the Department of Education will continue to work with the Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends when developing any strategy to improve parent engagement with schools.

## Parent magazine

The taskforce understands that good communication with parents is essential in order for schools to effectively engage with them. The research on school–parent communication identifies that the provision of information to parents in accessible language is essential. Whilst the most important information for parents is about their own child's progress, which they receive through school reports, parent–teacher interviews and informal contact with the school, parents also need and want system-wide information.

In 2005, the Department of Education published the first edition of the annual publication *The Essential Parent Guide*; an information handbook for parents about education in Tasmanian government schools. The guide, however, is published only once per year and is designed as a reference, rather than a provider of news. The taskforce is aware that other Australian states such as Queensland and Victoria publish a parent-friendly twice-yearly magazine which provides information on system changes, upcoming activities and how parents can help their children experience a complete and enriching education. The taskforce believes that a Tasmanian parent magazine will provide a good mechanism for communicating with parents. This is particularly important considering the changes expected within the Tasmanian education system over the next 18 months to two years.

## Recommendation 2

That a twice-yearly, parent-friendly magazine be developed with input from the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends, and distributed by the Department of Education, to support better communication and provide useful information and updates to parents and the community.

---

## Volunteering in schools

During its investigations, the taskforce became very aware of the crucial role that volunteers play in schools—in the classroom, at sports carnivals, in the uniform shop, the canteen, on excursions, and through parents and friends organisations and school associations.

There is no doubt that this support is vital to the successful operation of schools and is the ‘front line’ for the growth and development of effective parent–school relationships. Many parents put years of their own time into making our schools genuinely community-based places.

Unfortunately, the taskforce heard that often there was little formal recognition of the efforts of these volunteers, many of whom had developed significant skills whilst undertaking this unpaid work. These skills should be recognised.

### Recommendation 3

That the Department of Education work with the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, in particular the new TAFE Recognition Centre, and Volunteering Tasmania to enable recognition of skills gained in volunteering in schools towards vocational education and training qualifications.

The taskforce heard that many volunteers would also benefit from training and skills development, particularly in developing and organising volunteers and building skills to effectively act in the interests of the school, parents and students. The taskforce was aware that Volunteering Tasmania has the capability to work with schools to ensure that volunteers are as effective as possible, and that it provides volunteer recruitment and training services. Similarly, the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends has capabilities for providing training for volunteers on school associations and parents and friends groups. The taskforce felt that these roles should be supported to ensure that volunteering is maximised in schools.

### Recommendation 4

That the Department of Education work with Volunteering Tasmania and the Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends to ensure that the training needs of volunteers in schools, including parents, are met.

The taskforce was also made aware of the likely effects of the Australian Government’s *Welfare to Work* reforms on the level of volunteering in schools. The taskforce understands that volunteering in schools does not satisfy the mutual obligation requirements of the *Welfare to Work* reforms. This ruling means that income support arrangements may be affected.

Whilst the Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends is taking up the issue separately, the taskforce suggests that the Minister raise this issue with the Australian Government Ministers for Education and Employment and Workplace Relations as it has the potential to adversely impact on the operation of schools and especially school–community relationships.

### Recommendation 5

That the Tasmanian Minister for Education approach the Australian Government Ministers for Education and Employment and Workplace Relations seeking to ensure that volunteer work in schools is included as approved activity for the purposes of compliance with the mutual obligation requirements of the *Welfare to Work* initiative.

# Recognising and expanding the real-life student learning opportunities that are achievable through school engagement with the community

## Associated terms of reference

- Examine how schools and their facilities may be opened up to connect them with their local communities.
- Determine the things that get in the way of parents and the community engaging with schools.

## Background

All schools to varying degrees use their communities as a learning resource. They use the people, places, structures and businesses around them as sources of information, funding and labour. This interaction benefits the school, the students and the community. Benefits are particularly evident where the partnerships lead to real-life learning opportunities for the students, especially when these are aligned with the curriculum. The taskforce was impressed with the many examples of schools using linkages with their communities, local businesses and other organisations to provide such learning opportunities for students.

Whilst there are a percentage of students who will learn no matter what, there are large numbers of students who require something extra—something to capture and retain their interest that will inspire them to go to school and learn. The taskforce believes that the best way for many schools to achieve this is to link students with the community in which they live or to a career they are interested in. Connecting the requirements of today's workplaces and communities with what is happening in the classroom is vital, especially for those young people who do not have aspirations for themselves.

The taskforce saw many examples of schools using the community in this way and is aware of the possibilities inherent in the Tasmanian curriculum to make these connections. The taskforce is also aware that much of the focus of the *Guaranteeing Futures* strategy is in making linkages between students' learning and their future pathways as well as providing real-life learning opportunities.

The taskforce strongly encourages all of these endeavours and believes the frameworks are already in place to take this work forward. However, through the various consultation processes, a number of specific possibilities to extend school/business/community links were proposed. The taskforce recommends these to the Minister as opportunities to build further school–community links and to learn lessons that can be used in the further expansion of real-life learning opportunities for school students.

## ACL Bearing Company

As a key employer in the northern suburbs of Launceston, ACL Bearing Company is vitally concerned with ensuring it is playing its part in contributing to the health of that community. The company wishes to strengthen its role with local schools as providers of its future workforce and as places of great significance in the lives of its employees.

In support of this, ACL has proposed a number of programs that are focused in two areas. The first area is focused on connecting students with work:

- *'Head Start' to ACL* is a five-day program for rural and city Year 9 school students. This program would provide students with a work placement or internship, the opportunity to investigate a variety of pathways into an identified industry area, and training in areas such as occupational health and safety, job application and interview techniques.
- *Manufacturing Learning Challenges* is a four week program for Year 10 students who would undertake a project or range of mini-projects aligned with the Tasmanian curriculum.
- There is an opportunity for ACL to take a leading role in the national *Australian Business Week* program. This week-long program is designed for high school students and would feature activities with a manufacturing focus.

- An internship program for Year 11 and 12 students would support students in making practical application of subject areas studied at college. Where appropriate, they would undertake paid employment at ACL during the school holidays.

The second area of proposed programs looks at developing broader business–school links to increase opportunities for employees of ACL to interact with their children’s schools and gain a greater understanding of their children’s educational needs. These programs would also provide further support to employees in their parenting. ACL proposes the following programs:

- A *Northern Suburbs Open Day* would open local businesses, community organisations and schools to the community for planned activities. This would require a partnership between local schools, neighbourhood houses, the fire brigade, TAFE, ACL and other key stakeholders.
- *Bring Your Child to Work Day/Take Your Parent to School Day* is a program in which ACL staff who have school-aged children would bring their child to work to participate in a range of planned activities. On another day, the student would take their parent to school to participate in the school day and in planned sessions relating to parenting, adult learning and training opportunities.
- The *Adopt an Employee* program would provide a volunteer teacher from a local primary or secondary school to mentor an ACL employee undertaking part-time study or training at TAFE or university for the first time.
- In the *Adopt a Student* mentoring program, selected students from the northern suburbs who do not have anyone in their family employed would be mentored by an ACL employee. Mentor training and a structured program would be required from the department and would incorporate parent involvement where possible.

ACL believes that these initiatives would have significant benefits for students and also for ACL. The taskforce believes that the implementation of these programs should be investigated and supported. Success should be evaluated after 12 months to assess their application for other employers.

## Recommendation 6

That the programs proposed by the ACL Bearing Company be implemented in conjunction with the Launceston northern suburbs schools and that they be evaluated after 12 months.

### AFL Tasmania

Teachers in Tasmanian schools are well aware of the attraction of sport for young people, particularly Australian Football League (AFL) football. The department’s pathway planning officers report up to 30 percent of Grade 8 and 9 boys express an interest in an AFL pathway.

AFL Tasmania has proposed the *Real-life Learning ‘Reaching Out’* program for Tasmanian government schools which would involve football players from the Tassie Devils, the Tassie Hawks and the Kangaroos. The program would use young peoples’ interest in AFL, and the regard they have for players who have made their way in the sport, to further their understanding of the challenges provided by a real-life career pathway and the need for goal-setting and resilience. *Real-life Learning* is focused on:

- career pathways in sport and sports administration
- the importance of healthy lifestyles, and safe work and school communities.

The program identifies four initiatives:

- In the *Tasmanian Talented Football Player Pathway* program, AFL and VFL players, supported by pathway planning officers, would work with students and their parents to provide an understanding of the talent pathway from junior football to the AFL. The program would also explore the benefits of goal setting both in sport and in future careers.
- The work experience program, *Making Work Experience Come Alive*, would target students interested in sport-specific work experience. It would provide a structured program, introducing students to career pathways in sports development, sports marketing and sports administration through a two-day workshop and one week of work experience. It would also provide students with introductory training in coaching and officiating.
- In the *Adopt the School Mentoring Program* an AFL or VFL player would visit their adopted school three times, as well as feature in video messages to the school and provide the schools with electronic newsletters. The aim is for the players to become role models and to talk to students about what it takes to succeed in professional sport.
- The *Success for Life* program would have four components:
  - 1 *Healthy Steps*—to raise students' awareness of how they can make lifestyle choices and put in place strategies that have positive effects on their physical health
  - 2 *Positive Steps*—to raise students' awareness of how they can make choices and put in place strategies that will have positive effects on their mental health
  - 3 *Bullying*—to initiate the *Bully Free Schools* program in high schools state wide
  - 4 *Road Safety*—forums to raise awareness of the impact of risk-taking behaviour by inexperienced drivers through the real-life experiences of sports people.

The taskforce believes there is significant value in these programs.

## Recommendation 7

That the Department of Education and AFL Tasmania jointly fund, and work together to implement, the programs identified in *Real-life Learning 'Reaching Out'*.

### The Smith Family

Tasmania is fortunate to have a number of not-for-profit organisations currently supporting many of its community-school partnerships. The expansion of these relationships should be encouraged.

The Smith Family approached the taskforce and proposed a policy framework that will extend its work to Tasmanian schools where to date it does not have a presence. The policy framework details how The Smith Family would work with schools in selected communities to support the early learning and development of children aged 0–8 years living in financially disadvantaged families. The framework aims to improve the health, early learning development and wellbeing of these children. Initiatives within the framework include promoting and implementing the *Let's Read* program, implementing supported playgroups, offering parents the opportunity to learn ICT and financial literacy skills, implementing homework clubs and coordinating literacy support programs. The Smith Family would collaborate directly with the local community and work closely with the schools.

The taskforce understands that there are organisations currently engaged in similar work in Tasmania. It believes that the expertise, commitment and resources of The Smith Family would also be of invaluable assistance, particularly in the vital years before children reach school.

---

## Recommendation 8

That the Department of Education and The Smith Family develop a memorandum of understanding that articulates how the department will work with The Smith Family to implement the proposed policy framework.

### Rotary

Rotary International is the largest international service organisation with 1.2 million members in 160 countries. Spread throughout Rotary District 9830 in Tasmania are some 1500 Rotarians in 49 clubs, all of which have a strong focus on youth development.

A survey was undertaken within Rotary District 9830, to evaluate the extent and effectiveness of both club and district support offered to Tasmanian schools. The survey found that there are opportunities to improve communication between Rotary officials and schools, particularly around Rotary's *Structured Youth Development Program*. Support to younger students, although having common characteristics, is appropriately designed at the local level.

It is apparent that Rotary clubs with strong membership of school staff are those where relationships are strongest. Introductory meetings between school principals and senior staff and their local Rotary club would be of great value. Further sharing of contact details would also be beneficial.

An example of a successful partnership with Rotary is the *Youth Driver Awareness* program piloted at Symmons Plains in October 2006 with students from three local schools who found it to be overwhelmingly successful.

The taskforce recognises that the work that Rotary and other service clubs in Tasmania undertake in support of schools is very valuable and that schools should be encouraged to develop relationships with these community organisations.

## Recommendation 9

That the initiatives identified by Rotary District 9830 in developing stronger links between Rotary and schools be endorsed by the Minister.

## Increasing community access to school facilities

### Associated terms of reference

- Examine how schools and their facilities may be opened up to connect them with their local communities.
- Determine the things that get in the way of parents and the community engaging with schools.

### Background

School facilities and resources include the school buildings and the facilities contained within them, the school grounds, recreation areas and associated structures, and parking areas.

It is important that the community recognises schools as being community buildings. This is more likely to occur when schools make as many of their facilities and resources available as is feasible. However, the taskforce believes that school infrastructure is not well utilised. The majority of school facilities are not used outside of school hours, on weekends or in school holidays.

### Improving use of school facilities

In many Tasmanian communities, the local school is the focus of community activity. It is often the only place where the community comes together on a daily basis, even if it is just to drop off and pick up their children.

The taskforce believes that key to its work is maximising the extent to which schools are a part of the community. This means welcoming parents, business leaders and support workers as a vital part of the learning process. Communication between the school and the local council needs to be encouraged to best utilise the facilities for both the school and the community.

One indication of how successful a school has been in becoming central to the life of the community is the extent to which the community uses the school and its facilities. Whilst greater use of school facilities is obviously desirable from a resource perspective, it brings far greater benefits than simply more effective use of buildings or other facilities.

A number of schools shared the view expressed by Riverside Primary School in its submission to the taskforce that "...the problem of public liability insurance and duty of care limits some programs...". The Local Government Association of Tasmania's survey of Tasmanian councils also noted public liability issues as a significant obstacle. The cost of cleaning and maintenance was also identified through submissions as a hindrance to developing access for the community.

The taskforce believes that whilst the risks posed by public liability issues may be more perceived than real (given the low number of incidents that have occurred over the last 10 years) they do act as a barrier to further utilisation of school facilities.

### Recommendation 10

That a set of principles be developed in conjunction with the Treasury that describes what sort of organisations should have the government's public liability coverage extended to them when using school facilities. If the content of these principles cannot be resolved, the matter be referred to the Minister for Education for discussion with the Treasurer.

The taskforce believes that whilst each school needs to be able to respond to its own community in relation to these issues, there is much that schools can learn from each other in seeking to increase the community use of facilities.

---

To this end and taking into account what has been learnt from schools, the taskforce believes that a checklist of matters to be considered by schools to assist in the expansion of community use of their facilities should be developed.

### **Recommendation 11**

That a checklist of matters to be considered in making school facilities available to non-school organisations be developed and made available to schools.

The taskforce was also made aware of inconsistencies in the amount to charge for the use of facilities. Again, each school currently has its own approach to these matters. The taskforce believes that a consistent pricing regime would be of great benefit to schools and potential users of their facilities.

### **Recommendation 12**

That a pricing framework be developed to assist schools hiring out their facilities. This framework should:

- take into account the capacity of the user to pay
- take account of the cost to schools providing access, noting the importance of not confusing price and cost
- be capable of being applied to other Department of Education facilities such as libraries, online access centres and Adult Education facilities.

The taskforce is aware that preparatory work is underway on the construction of a new high school at Kingston. This infrastructure project provides a real opportunity to take an innovative approach to school–community engagement. The building of a new school on a greenfields site is a relatively rare occurrence in Tasmania and the taskforce believes that exciting possibilities exist in conceptualising the role of the school in the Kingston community.

### **Recommendation 13**

That a member of the taskforce be appointed to the Kingston High School Project Advisory Group to provide input on genuine community involvement in planning for the new school.

#### **Literacy support for a school community**

The taskforce saw many examples of the benefits of locating other community services in schools. During its visit to Mayfield Primary School, the taskforce heard of a strong desire for the school to use its facilities to provide library resources to members of the community, many of whom are unable to access the local public library. The school believes that there would be many benefits from such an arrangement, but particularly that children would see their parents and other role models accessing and using the resources and valuing reading.

Following its visit, the taskforce approached the State Library of Tasmania, which is able to assist. Within a new development previously approved to be built at the school, a community area will be established. This will house a small collection of targeted items provided by the State Library and managed by the school. Computers will be installed to support the information needs of the community, and there may be the possibility for users to access books and resources from other libraries through a volunteer courier service.

## Recommendation 14

That the Department of Education ensure the installation and the collection of library resources in the new community facility at Mayfield Primary School is undertaken when it is established, and that use of the materials be evaluated at the end of 2007 with a view to assessing its suitability for expansion to other similar communities.

### Sporting facilities

Schools have substantial community assets in their sporting facilities including ovals, gymnasiums, and basketball and netball courts. The taskforce heard a strong view that a lack of coordination and planning between local government, the Department of Education and the Department of Sport and Recreation led to unnecessary duplication and under-utilisation of these facilities.

Whilst the taskforce is aware of and has highlighted a number of examples of good practice in our schools and colleges, they tend to occur in spite of any real systemic or planned approach to this usage and are heavily dependent on local relationships.

The taskforce believes there is scope to do better in this regard. There is potential for mutual benefit in a broader, more systemic approach to the use of school sporting facilities. However, there does not appear to be a forum where these issues can be raised at a level which imposes some accountability for improved outcomes for all parties. The taskforce believes that such structures should be established. It is aware that the current partnership agreement between the Clarence City Council and the Tasmanian Government includes the following:

"...the parties agree the key issue to be addressed is to promote the efficient use of sharing of school facilities with Council". The agreement lists actions to address the issue:

- "Establish a working group of Department of Education and Clarence Council staff"
- "Establish protocols for sharing of facilities between the Department of Education and council"
- "Council to analyse the use of sports grounds and condition of the assets of both council and schools."

This agreement provides an opportunity to establish the sort of process that could be used in other local government areas. Consequently, the taskforce believes that this agreement should be given a high priority by the Department of Education and that consideration be given to the involvement of Sport and Recreation Tasmania and local supporting clubs in these processes.

## Recommendation 15

That the Department of Education is represented at a high level in the working group established by the Tasmanian Government/Clarence City Council Partnership Agreement. Quarterly reports should be supplied to the Secretary, Department of Education who should ensure that the working group reaches a successful conclusion on these matters within 12 months of the signing of this agreement. Approaches should then be made to include the protocols and arrangements determined by this group, contextualised for the local community, in other state/local government partnership arrangements.

# Supporting school leaders in developing positive relationships with school communities

---

## Associated terms of reference

- Explore the role of school leadership in developing positive relationships between school, home and the community.

## Supporting school leaders

The taskforce acknowledges and recognises that in every school there are a range of leaders including the principal, assistant principal, teaching staff, parent leaders and student leaders. For the purposes of this discussion ‘school leaders’ was interpreted to mean principals. School leaders are crucial to the successful engagement of schools with parents and communities. It is their leadership, willingness, and capacity to provide support through staff and resources to particular programs that enable schools to successfully engage with parents and their communities.

It is usually the school leaders that establish the supporting structures and policies, provide appropriate training and professional development for staff, and identify and negotiate the partnership opportunities for their school. All of the principals the taskforce came into contact with were very conscious of the importance of this aspect of their role. However, many expressed frustration that the intensity of their day-to-day school leadership roles limited their capacity to give this work the emphasis they believed it needed. The taskforce believes that the learnings from the implementation of Recommendation 1 in this report will assist them with this.

The taskforce also heard of the frustrations of principals concerning the lack of coordination which occurs between government agencies working with their students and families. One family could be involved with up to four government agencies—Education, Health, Justice and Police.

The taskforce believes that greater support should be given to school principals in dealing with these inter-agency matters and that the new *Student at the Centre* organisational structure for the department provides an opportunity for a fresh approach.

## Recommendation 16

That the position of operations manager in each of the four new learning services groups in the department be given specific responsibility for supporting schools in improving inter-agency collaboration to improve service provision to families.

# Improving the effectiveness of community involvement in school governance arrangements

## Associated terms of reference

- Review and enhance current structures for parent participation.

## School governance

Effective parent and community participation in school governance arrangements brings a range of benefits to the school and the students. School associations and their committees and sub-committees- which include school parent bodies such as parents and friends groups-are the formal means by which parents and communities can participate in decision making processes in Tasmanian government schools. Tasmanian government schools were required by legislation to establish a school association by 1 January 2005. School associations ensure that every school has a constituted body recognised under the *Education Act 1994* that represents all sectors of the school community and participates in school consultations and decision-making processes.

It is clear, however, from what the taskforce has heard and from the experiences of some of its members, that the implementation of school associations in 2005 has not been universally well received. Penguin Primary School's submission to the taskforce succinctly sums up the concerns expressed:

"... notwithstanding the legal reasons for the implementations of the School Association, it can be used as a beneficial tool for engagement of families and communities in school life. It has forced senior staff to actively consult with, albeit, a very few of their parents and actively seek a community member to complete the association make-up. This exercise in itself has opened doors for parents who seek a higher level of understanding in their schools, and forced schools to seek out community members who have an interest in becoming involved. What it may have done, however, is undermine the many parents who now have no active P&F to participate in. Where schools have taken 'Parent Forums' to mean information sessions conducted by educators once a term, the tuck-shop mum may feel excluded from the decision making."

The taskforce believes these concerns are widely felt, especially by parents. The role of parents and friends organisations in schools has been a vital one for many years. Whilst there is currently insufficient information to make firm recommendations on these matters, the taskforce believes that an appropriate amount of time has now passed to review in detail the success or otherwise of the move to school associations, and whether any changes are necessary.

## Recommendation 17

That the Minister instigate a review of the operations of school associations. This review should take account of the impact of the change to school associations on parents and friends organisations and on the capacity of parents to be meaningfully engaged in the life of their school.

It was also drawn to the attention of the taskforce that the audit process required of incorporated school associations was proving to be a drain on their funds. External audits can cost significant amounts and the taskforce questions whether this is a sensible use of the funds school associations have worked extremely hard to raise.

## Recommendation 18

That the Department of Education investigate the feasibility of using other alternatives to commercial auditors, including the possible use of its own internal audit resources, to undertake the audits of incorporated school associations that are required by law.

## The future

---

The members of the taskforce believe that the implementation of these recommendations will contribute towards making schools even more connected to their communities. The taskforce has confidence that the commitment demonstrated by the Minister will ensure that this work is not wasted and that these recommendations will be acted upon.

However, we believe it prudent that the taskforce is able to provide the Minister with advice on progress and on the learnings gained from the implementation of these recommendations.

### **Recommendation 19**

That the taskforce reconvene in November 2007 to assess the progress of, and learnings from, the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

To evaluate the department's success in this area over the long term it will be important to ensure that appropriate performance measures are identified. The taskforce is aware that the Department of Education collects a range of data that is relevant to parent and community engagement with schools such as hours of usage of school facilities by the community, and parent satisfaction with schools. The taskforce therefore recommends the identification of a set of useful and informative performance measures that can be used to monitor parent and community engagement with schools and assess the impact of strategies that are implemented.

### **Recommendation 20**

That the Department of Education identify a set of key performance measures and use them to monitor parent and community involvement in schools and the impact of strategies established and that these be reported on in the annual report.

## Acknowledgements

---

The Engaging Our School Communities Taskforce would like to publicly acknowledge and thank the many schools that contributed to its work. In particular, thank you to the five schools that hosted meetings of the taskforce for their hospitality, enthusiasm and openness, as well as the six schools that participated in the production of the DVD of shining examples that accompanies this report.

The taskforce would also like to thank all of those individuals and organisations who provided submissions to the taskforce. The information provided was invaluable in supporting the development of strategies and the recommendations.

## Appendix 1 – Submissions received through public consultation process

---

AFS Intercultural Programs

Claremont College

James 'Migloo' Graham

Latrobe Kentish Cluster

Mavis Beattie, Julie Roberts and Sue Livingston

Penguin Primary School

Riverside Primary School

Tasmanian State Schools Parents and Friends

The Hon Paul Lennon MHA, Premier,  
on behalf of the Positive Ageing Consultative Committee

*Engaging Our School Communities*  
**Taskforce Report to the Minister for Education**

