PRACTICE GUIDE

for youth engagement

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Queensland Government

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Introduction

Ensuring that all children and young people remain engaged in schooling, and then make a strong transition to further education, training or employment, is a priority for the Queensland Government.

This practice guide is a companion document to the *Framework for maximising engagement and re-engagement in education.* The framework outlines an evidence-based approach to meeting the needs of children and young people who are at risk of disengaging, or who are disengaged from their schooling. It reinforces the Department of Education and Training's commitment to helping all students succeed and outlines the key components of a strong and inclusive schooling system.

This youth engagement practice guide provides schools and other staff with resources to support their high-quality and inclusive practice.

While the use of this guide's resources is not mandatory, we hope it will help schools and their staff to support young people to remain in, or return to, education, training or employment.

The guide consists of:

▶ practice guide for entry and exit – in-school approaches

▶ practice guide for entry and exit – alternative settings

▶ practice guide for entry and exit – positive learning centres

▶ data sources for measuring outcomes of education and training programs

▶ strong responses to students who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging.

We will continue to develop tools and guides to support engagement practices. This practice guide and its downloadable resources will be regularly updated. Go to www.qld.gov.au/youthengagement to see the latest information.

In-school approaches

IDENTIFYING SIGNS A STUDENT IS AT-RISK OF DISENGAGING FROM EDUCATION

Before considering the transition of a student to an alternative setting, professional conversations should occur with the principal, classroom teachers, behaviour support teacher and/or guidance officer and other relevant staff. The joint analysis should confirm that the student displays a range of behaviours that interfere with their ability to learn in mainstream settings and that may put them at risk of disengaging from school.

The following factors provide a guide only. Professional judgment should be exercised when considering these behavioural and contextual factors.

step 1.

A principal should consult with the classroom teacher, behaviour support teacher/s and/or guidance officer to confirm that a student displays a range of behaviours that interfere with their ability to learn, and the rights of others to learn. Evidence of the following contributing factors may determine further action the school may take.

Contributing factors*	Y/N	Comments
Frequent and intense behaviour at school that interferes with their ability to learn		
Unacceptable and repeated disruption to the learning of others		
Lack of self-awareness skills		
Lack of self-management skills		
Lack of social awareness skills		
Lack of social management skills		
Bullying or being bullied		
Homelessness		
History of suspensions and exclusion		
Mental health issues		
Family difficulties		
In out-of-home care		
History of disengagement		
Diminishing academic effort or not submitting assessment		
A history of poor attendance		
Involvement with the youth justice system		
Substance abuse		

* Where there are behaviours that are accounted for by a disability, the Disability Standards for Education apply.

HOLISTIC REFLECTION

The presence of these factors alone does not justify a decision to transition a student to an alternative setting. Schools should now reflect on their capacity to respond to a student identified as being at risk of disengaging or who has disengaged. Suggested in-school responses are provided in the next section.

step 2.

MAKE IN-SCHOOL ADJUSTMENTS

Once the principal confirms that a student exhibits intense behaviours that disrupt learning, the school should make adjustments to support that student's ability to learn. We expect that schools will have considered a range of contextual factors and used many of the following actions before contemplating the use of an alternative education setting.

Where substantial in-school adjustments have not been made, state school principals are encouraged to consult with their assistant regional director or principal supervisor prior to making a decision to transition a student to an alternative setting, particularly where the evidence is not sufficient or compelling.

Reasonable action	Y/N	Comments
Examined issues of concern		
Identified target behaviours		
Consulted with student's parents/carers		
Made adjustments and taken action in response to consultation with parents/carers		
Undertaken a Functional Behaviour Assessment		
Developed an individual behaviour support plan or a discipline improvement plan based on Functional Behaviour Assessment		
Assigned a case manager to the student		
Worked with the classroom teacher/s to develop different approaches to managing challenging behaviours		
Determined if short- or long-term educational and behavioural support is required to strengthen student participation at school		
Used specialist teachers/guidance officer/school staff to assist the student		
Provided differentiated classroom learning to respond to the learning needs of the student		
Implemented personalised learning plans in response to the skills, knowledge and understanding of the student		
Implemented flexible arrangements for the student's educational program. This may include more individualised tuition etc		
Conducted an audit of classroom practices		
Used flexible approaches, for example, greater timetabling flexibility and a wide range of programs and educational options		
Developed an individual attendance improvement plan to retain the student at school		

Reasonable action (continued)	Y/N	Comments
Implemented targeted initiatives to address the student's needs and risks, for example, arrange a medical appointment		
Consider a change of teacher to improve the student's responses		
Provide access to student support services or other specialised services		
Used school clusters or networks which may offer specialised curriculum or programs that appeal to the student		
Offered out-of-school-time programs		
Assisted the student to address personal obstacles to staying at school		
Engaged community organisations to assist the student in other areas which may be affecting their attendance, learning and development		
Offered approval for two additional semesters to the entitled allocation of 26 semesters		

Additional considerations	Y/N	Comments
Reasonable action has modified student behaviour		
Relocation implications for student and parents/carers		
Social and emotional implication for student		
Required intervention is beyond the capacity of the school		
Suitability for an alternative education setting		

HOLISTIC REFLECTION

Schools should now reflect on the student's response to the reasonable actions and adjustments the school has made. If the student has not exhibited a significant improvement in their engagement, the principal may consider transitioning the student to an alternative education setting.

Alternative settings: entry and exit

Not all young people thrive in a mainstream setting. Once relevant approaches and interventions have been exhausted, the principal may recommend that an alternative setting is more suitable for that young person at that time. This recommendation should be discussed with parents or carers and the young person, and only proceed when everyone is comfortable with the decision, and in-school options have been exhausted. Consideration should be given to establishing this transfer as a temporary measure, with a planned time frame to reintegrate the young person into the mainstream school, when they are assessed as ready and appropriate. State school principals are required to comply with enrolment and other procedures outlined in *Enrolment in state primary, secondary and special schools, Safe, supportive and disciplined school environment*, and the *Parent and Community Engagement Framework.*

step 1.

The school delegate should determine whether an alternative setting is appropriate for the student, with the approval of the principal. This includes careful consideration of issues such as the age of the student, as well as their academic, social and emotional needs.

Determination – referring school principal	Y/N	Comments
Consult and engage the young person and explain what in-school adjustments have occurred and why an alternative setting is being considered		
Discuss with the alternative setting, the young person's suitability to the new environment		
Discuss short- or long-term placement in the alternative setting, including a commitment to accept the student's reintegration into the mainstream school, and commitment to fixed review periods to consider the student's readiness for reintegration		
Consult and engage with student's parents/carers		
Consider the relocation implications on both the student and the family (for example, transport)		
Provide student transfer note*		
Other exchange of information between referring school and destination school, for example, conversations between guidance officers and youth workers		
Determination — alternative school principal#	**Y/N**	**Comments**
Curriculum suits student's needs and provides them with pathways towards reintegration with mainstream education, further education, training or employment		
Consult and engage with the student		
Consult and engage with student's parents/carers		
Share student progression with mainstream school at agreed levels		
Request a student transfer note* on enrolment if not accessible in OneSchool		
Other exchange of information between referring school and destination school, for example, conversations between guidance officers and youth workers		

*If transitioning between a state and non-state school. #Or other decision-maker if non-school setting.

step 2.

When an alternative education setting determines that a student is ready to return to mainstream school, there are aspects of the transition that should be considered.

Transition	Y/N	Comments
Ensure the student will gain a sustained benefit from transition back to a mainstream school		
Seek agreement between both school settings that the student will return to the mainstream school and is ready for that environment		
Work collaboratively to develop plans to support return to school, including curriculum, behaviour support and risk management plans		
Seek agreement by the student and parents/carers for the reintegration strategy		
Seek cooperation between both school settings to continue any necessary support to the student		
Alternative education setting to provide information to assist principal with ensuring the continuity of the student's educational program setting		
Send formal notification to the mainstream school of the proposed destination where student is transitioning to training or employment if student isn't returning to school		

step 3.

The principal responsible for oversight of the alternative setting may deem it appropriate to support a student's exit from the education setting to a destination other than returning to mainstream school.

Other exit destination	Y/N	Comments
Confirmation of enrolment into further education or training, or confirmation of employment secured		
Student has completed their program of learning at the alternative setting		
Parents/carers of the student have been consulted		
Student is determined to exit the alternative setting		

Positive learning centres: entry and exit

Some children and young people require additional support with their learning and behavioural development. Positive learning centres (PLCs) provide the option of an alternative program for students of compulsory school age, enrolled in a state school.

Providing all relevant approaches have been exhausted, the principal may consider a shared placement approach through an alternative setting at a PLC to improve learning and behaviour to reintegrate the student into mainstream schooling, or to transition them to a more appropriate learning setting.

While some schools do not have access to a PLC, there are many in-school adjustments these schools can consider, including:

▶ assigning a case manager to the student

▶ incorporating flexible approaches such as timetable flexibility

▶ seeking approval for additional semesters

▶ developing an individual attendance improvement plan

▶ using school clusters or networks to offer specialised programs

▶ offering student support services or other specialised services

▶ engaging community organisations to assist.

A full list of in-school adjustments is provided on page 8 of this guide.

step 1.

If significant improvement in the student's behaviour is not exhibited as a result of the school taking reasonable action and making adjustments, the principal may consider that either a full-time or part-time shared placement approach at a PLC as the most appropriate context for the young person. To enable a successful transition into a PLC, we expect that both the referring school and PLC staff will collaboratively support the student by implementing appropriate tactics in both settings.

Transition	Y/N	Comments
Conducted discussion between PLC staff and the referring school prior to a formal referral		
Negotiated a flexible arrangement for attendance at both the PLC and the regular school		
Developed learning and behaviour goals in conjunction with the PLC staff and classroom teacher/s		
Conducted a joint consultation with the student's parents/carers by both the referring school and PLC		
Coordinated behavioural and academic plans and strategies where the student is attending both settings		
Engaged in student management discussions regarding goals, progress and future support		
Transport arrangements have been considered		
Undertake regular review of outcomes		

step 2.

If the school principal and the PLC staff have agreed that a student will be referred to the PLC, the referring school and the PLC need to work together to ensure a successful transition between education settings.

Transition	Y/N	Comments
Agree when the transition to the PLC will start		
Determine how long the student will remain at the PLC		
Define what measures will be used to determine when the student is secure in their new environment		
Agree how long the referring school will remain in contact and what support they will continue to provide once the student returns		
Determine what measures will indicate when the student is ready to return to mainstream schooling or into a more appropriate learning or vocational pathway		
Agree all of the above components with the student and their parent/carer		

Data sources for measuring outcomes

Of education and training programs

Education and training settings should implement a systematic plan to collect, analyse and discuss data on academic outcomes, attendance, behaviour and student wellbeing for both formative and summative purposes. Together these data provide:

▸ an overview of the progress of individual students, priority cohorts, whole-school and system levels

▸ insights into the academic, social and behavioural needs of students

▸ insights into the effectiveness of specific approaches.

Evaluation of education and training programs should reflect high expectations for students in terms of strong academic gain and learning, and strong transitions. Evaluations should also include measures of wellbeing. Wellbeing of students can provide important insights into student progress and outcomes of approaches.

Wellbeing data often require subjective and qualitative judgments to be made by personnel on the effectiveness of their program in line with the Department of Education and Training's standards of evidence:

www.det.qld.gov.au/det-publications/ managementandframeworks/Documents/evidence/ standards-of-evidence.pdf.

The following indicators are proposed for evaluating outcomes of alternative settings. The indicators will need to be interpreted as an integrated and multi-layered set of data. Each set of data does not stand in isolation; rather, they work together to provide a holistic picture of distance travelled in the wellbeing, learning and transitions of individual students, as well as overall outcomes for the school:

▸ engagement

▸ achievement and learning

▸ destinations

▸ quality and satisfaction

▸ wellbeing.

The use of current and accurate data to evaluate the evidence indicators is necessary to achieve valid results.

For more information on measuring the success of alternative settings, see the *Framework for maximising engagement and re-engagement in education.*

POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES FOR EVALUATING OUTCOMES OF POSITIVE LEARNING CENTRES

Measure	Aggregated data	Reliability of data	
Engagement			
▶ % attendance ▶ % ‹85% attendance ▶ Rate of suspensions and exclusions	OneSchool	Strong	Systemic data
Where there is relevant Positive Behaviour for Learning data	School data	Strong	PBL data definitions are consistent
Achievement			
Distance travelled per semester in English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy	A-E results	Moderate	Subjective analysis
	Norm-based test instruments such as PAT-M, PAT-R	Strong	Norm-based and objective when correctly administered
Destinations			
Transition to: ▶ mainstream school ▶ further education, training or employment	Record of destination	Moderate	Destination may be temporary

Measure	Aggregated data	Reliability of data	
Quality and satisfaction			
Parent and student satisfaction	School opinion survey Targeted surveys	Weak	High quality survey, but sample sizes too small in PLCs for SOS to provide meaningful insights
Wellbeing			
Wellbeing measured by a purpose-designed tool	For example, wellbeing reported by student through survey tool such as those provided by MindMatters http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/tools-resources/surveys	Moderate – strong	Tool completed by parents or students can provide clear indication of distance travelled
	For example, wellbeing measured by the engagement matrix provided at: https://www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/student_engagement_matrix_guidelines.pdf?v=1455771936	Moderate – strong	Clear indicators can provide a strong frame for measuring improvements While there are clear descriptors, checklist can be subjective
Wellbeing measured by overall data on attendance, achievement, destination, quality and satisfaction		Moderate – strong depending on combination of data	Multiple sets of data provide a comprehensive account of outcomes

POTENTIAL DATA SOURCES FOR EVALUATING OUTCOMES OF ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS – SECONDARY SCHOOL

Measure	Aggregated data (pending age of cohort)	Reliability of data	
Engagement			
▸ % attendance ▸ % ‹85% attendance ▸ Rate of suspensions, exclusions and cancellations	OneSchool or non-state school records	Strong	Systemic data
Achievement			
Distance travelled per semester in English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy	A-E results	Moderate	Subjective analysis
	Norm-based test instruments such as PAT-M, PAT-R	Strong	Norm-based an objective when administered with rigour
Year 12 outcomes ▸ % QCE or QCIA % QCE, IBD, VET or QCIA S % OP 1–15 or IBD ▸ % Cert II or above ▸ % non-OP 1–15 & Cert III or above	Year 12 results	Strong	Systematic data
Achievement of VET qualifications	Certification	Strong	Australian Qualifications Framework
Destinations			
Destination to: ▸ mainstream school ▸ further education, training or employment	Record of destination	Moderate	Destination may be temporary
	Next Steps reports	Moderate – strong	High quality survey, but sample size may be too small in alternative settings

Measure	Aggregated data (pending age of cohort)	Reliability of data	
Quality and satisfaction			
Parent and student satisfaction	School opinion survey Targeted surveys	Weak – moderate	Sample sizes too small in alternative settings
Wellbeing			
Wellbeing measured by:	For example, wellbeing reported by student through survey tool such as those provided by MindMatters http://www.mindmatters. ed.au/tools-resources/ surveys	Moderate – strong	Tool completed by parents or students can provide clear indications of relative gain achieved
	For example, wellbeing measured by the engagement matrix provided at: https://www.decd.sa.gov. au/sites/g/files/net691/f/ student_engagement_ matrix_guidelines. pdf?v=1455771936	Moderate – strong	Clear indicators can provide a strong frame for measuring relative gain achieved While there are clear descriptors, checklist can be subjective. Method would need to be developed to aggregate individual data
Wellbeing measured by overall data on attendance, achievement, destination, quality and satisfaction		Moderate – strong depending on combination of data	Multiple sets of data provide a comprehensive account of outcomes

Strong responses

TO STUDENTS WHO ARE DISENGAGED OR AT RISK OF DISENGAGEMENT

Alignment with the National School Improvement Tool

All schooling sectors aim to achieve high-quality outcomes for their students. There is a good deal of research on what works in schools, including high-quality mainstream schools, as well as other alternative settings such as special assistance schools, flexi-schools, positive learning centres and other approaches.

Based on this research, the National School Improvement Tool (www.acer.org/files/NSIT.pdf) provides an overview of what works to drive school improvement. This research provides an important touchstone for all school settings, including alternative settings.

1. Explicit improvement agenda

The school leadership team or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice, and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Like all schools, alternative settings are determined to continuously focus on improvement. Second chance schools do not have to be "second best".

High aspirations for all students are at the centre of successful and inclusive schools. Research points to the key role played by aspirations and the need to create a climate of achievement through effective leadership and a high level of teacher commitment and expectations for student learning (Lamb & Rice, 2008).

With respect to improving school engagement and completion for at-risk students, "the elements of school culture central to maximising student engagement and retention include … a drive for continuous improvement" (McGregor, Mills & Thomson, 2012).

2. Analysis and discussion of data

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance, as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Inclusive and alternative settings focus on achieving outcomes for their students. They pay attention to academic, attendance, behavioural, wellbeing and transition data. This can support identification of early warning signs and inform timely intervention. Well-compiled data also improves the understanding of the individual students' progress and future needs, and provides insights into the effectiveness of programs and approaches across the student cohort (see, for example, McGregor & Mills, 2012).

Alternative settings consider each of these datasets separately and together in order to gather insights into student gains, and into areas where there is room for improvement.

3. A culture that promotes learning

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders, and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant and inclusive, and that promotes intellectual rigour.

A wide range of researchers report on the importance of providing disengaged and at-risk students with supportive environments that combine a focus on wellbeing with a focus on learning. "Unless the former are being addressed, the latter will not happen" (Wierenga & Taylor, 2015, p. 18).

4. Targeted use of school resources

The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Research shows that students, particularly students who are disengaging, need more individualised attention at school. Teaching strategies, classroom environments and wrap-around support differ according to the circumstances of the at-risk learner. The most effective alternative settings recognise the need to apply their resources appropriately in order to best meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students (see, for example, Lamb & Rice, 2008).

5. An expert teaching team

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Research points to the vital role that "the right kind of teacher" plays in alternative settings. Effective schools rely on committed teachers who can build trustful relationships, as well as being skilful in recognising and responding to the learning and emotional needs of at-risk students (see, for example, Mills & McGregor, 2010).

6. Systematic curriculum delivery

The school has a coherent, plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum, and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Research suggests that diverse and flexible curriculum offerings are essential for student engagement and retention in alternative settings.

"For school programs to engage learners, they need to be challenging, stimulating, involve opportunities for sharing learning tasks, be satisfying as learning experiences, and have clear and demonstrable benefits beyond school" (Lamb et al., 2004).

7. Differentiated teaching and learning

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in its day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students.

Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to different levels of readiness and need.

Like all students, children and young people at risk have a wide variety of different learning needs, interests and learning preferences. Effective teachers have clear academic standards and high expectations for their at-risk students. They provide appropriate scaffolding to support students in their learning, and provide flexible and individualised support (see, for example, Te Riele, 2014).

8. Effective pedagogical practices

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods — including explicit instruction — to maximise student learning.

Children and young people who are at risk of disengagement benefit from clarity about what they are expected to learn, individualised attention to support them to learn, and timely feedback. The highly effective teacher will customise instructional approaches to suit the learning needs of the student — while at the same time using evidence-based teaching strategies that work (Lamb & Rice, 2008).

9. School–community partnerships

The school seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual or physical resources not available within the school.

All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications, and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

There are many examples of flexible learning programs which benefit from strong partnerships with industry and community organisations. The most effective flexible programs foster connectedness between students, parents, school and community (see, for example, Te Riele, 2012).

Students who are at risk of disengagement often face complex and multiple barriers. Authentic engagement with parents and carers can be profoundly effective in supporting vulnerable children and young people and their families, and in maintaining student engagement.

"Effective programs build positive relationships with parents and with community more generally, and with employers, schools, colleges and universities in particular" (Bartlett et al., Unpublished).

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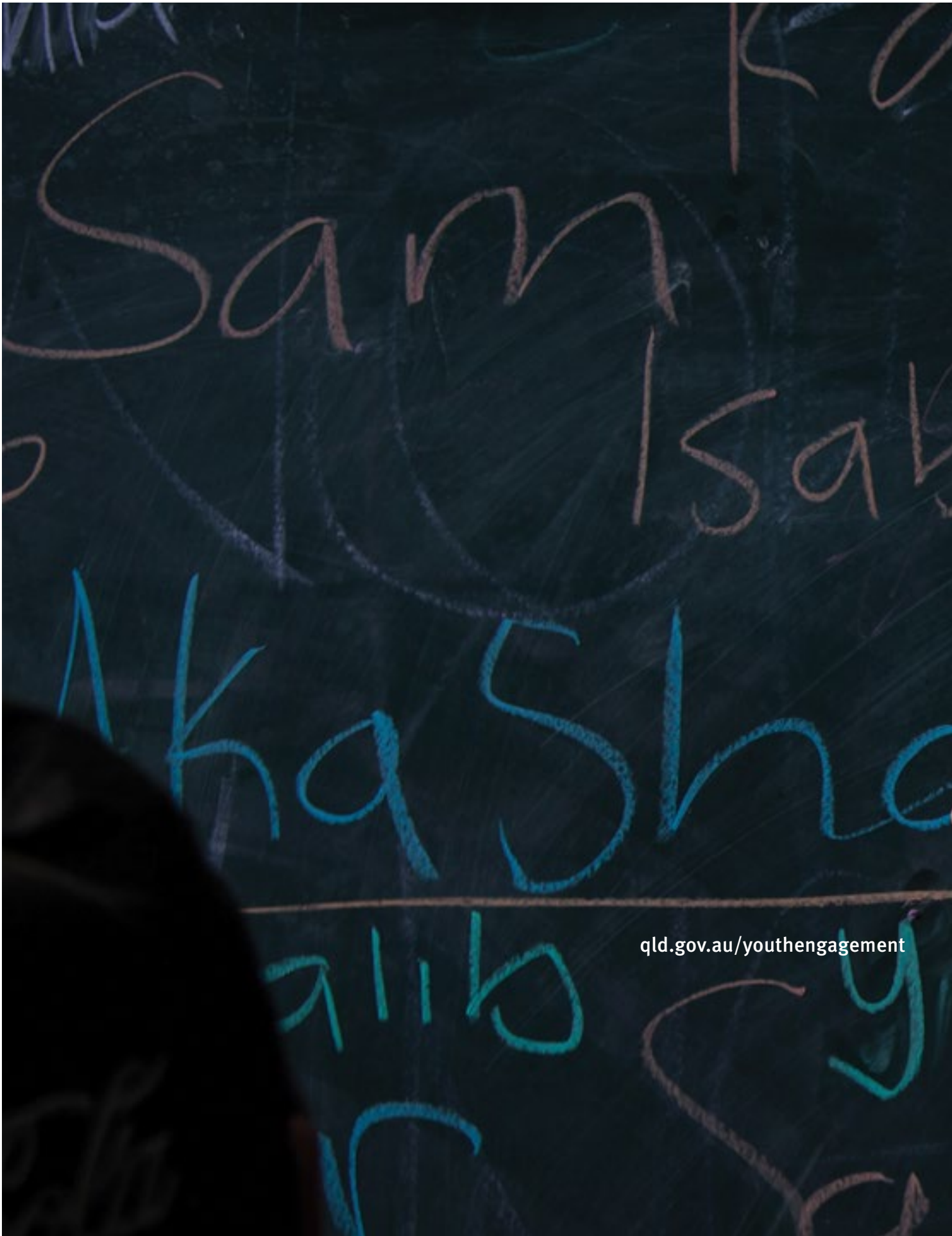
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MORE INFORMATION

The National School Improvement Tool was developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in consultation with states and territories. It is available at www.acer.org/school-improvement/improvement-tools/national-school-improvement-tool.

If you would like to know more about the Queensland State Schools: School Performance Assessment Framework, see: oneportal.deta.qld.gov.au/EducationDelivery/schoolimprovementunit/Documents/national-school-improvement-tool.pdf.

qld.gov.au/youthengagement