



CHANGING SCHOOLS: ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING



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A research report prepared for the
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and
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Changing Schools: Its impact on student learning

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Executive summary

KPMG Consulting Australia, in association with the Australian Council for Educational Research, has completed a scoping study for the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to assess the impact that frequent family relocation has on learning outcomes of school-aged children from the preparatory years through to Year 12. The purpose of the project has been to investigate issues associated with student mobility, document current policies and practices used to identify and support students who frequently relocate, and develop strategies to reduce any adverse impact on the learning outcomes that may occur as a result of family mobility. The study has focused on the school-aged children of families with high levels of mobility across all States and Territories, including the school-aged children of Australian Defence Organisation personnel.

The project methodology involved extensive consultations in the form of focus groups, face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders in Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory, as well as consultations with education authorities in each of the other States and the Australian Capital Territory. Stakeholders involved in the extensive consultations included representatives from government and non-government education authorities, teachers, principals, parents, students, Australian Defence Organisation representatives and representatives from a range of government and non-government agencies that interact with schools and education systems. In addition to these consultations, a national survey of parents and teachers was undertaken to examine the issues associated with family relocation and to identify effective strategies that have been implemented by schools and school systems to minimise the potential negative impact of mobility. The project concluded with a series of workshops with a sampling of stakeholders designed to provide input into, and validation of, project findings to confirm the benefits and broader applicability of strategies and identify future options to address mobility issues. Throughout the project, the consulting team has benefited from the guidance and support provided by a Project Advisory Committee that has included representation from DEST, the Defence Community Organisation, government and non-government education authorities, parent bodies, principal associations and schools.

Defined as 'more than two moves in a period of three years,' student mobility was found to be a complex issue with multiple causes and effects and interconnected relationships, which are not always easy to determine. Recent surveys published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics during 1999 and 2000 estimated that, within the overall Australian population of 19.28 million, 30 per cent of residents from households with children moved at least once over three years, with an increasing proportion of this relocation being movement between one State or Territory and another. Indeed, in most schools, there is some degree of mobility.

The point at which mobility may have an adverse impact on learning outcomes is, however, not always clear from the research literature. The research suggests in fact that the effects of mobility can be seen as negative, neutral or even beneficial, depending on the circumstances of the move.

The findings from this current study echo this research. Parents and teachers report that family relocation has the potential to impact on learning outcomes and that this impact is not always negative. In fact, the project survey results indicate that, for some students, relocation contributes to higher levels of learning as students build resilience and respond to new challenges and new learning situations. However, in other situations, parents and teachers highlighted the 'multiplier effect' of mobility where frequent relocation compounds other issues that may be having a negative impact on learning outcomes. Furthermore, where the number of moves extended beyond six in a child's primary schooling, no parents reported mobility to have a positive impact on learning.

Where issues related to student learning and frequent relocation have been identified, analysis of the consultations and survey data indicates these issues may be categorised into a number of areas including:

- an overarching consistency in concerns expressed by parents and teachers regarding the potential for social and emotional issues associated with family relocation to impact on student learning;
- difficulties that students in particular, as well as their parents, experience with variations in school starting ages that cause problems in student placement when students relocate from one State or Territory to another;
- variations in curriculum content and teaching methodologies that are apparent in movement between schools, particularly where this movement is interstate;
- the potential for absenteeism associated with mobility to make a significant contribution to the gaps in learning experienced by students through family relocation; and
- issues that impact on specific groups of students, such as:
 - students who are the children of Australian Defence Force personnel;
 - Indigenous students;
 - secondary aged students; and
 - students with special needs.

Although, parents and teachers have been consistent in identifying social and emotional issues and student welfare to be the most important issue, in other areas different emphases were apparent. For parents, a second tier of issues related to work expectations, the content of school work and teaching styles became important, particularly where parents were aware that their child was not learning at a level that aligned with their peers. By contrast, teachers identified the transfer of learning information between school, tracking student movement and variations in funding for students with disabilities and impairments as critical issues related to mobility. At a subsidiary level, issues related to the timing of moves, variations in curriculum content and assessment processes and school starting ages were also considered to be important by teachers.

Through the consultations and survey findings it was apparent that a number of strategies have been implemented at a systemic level or within individual schools to minimise the negative impact of mobility. These strategies include approaches to capturing and transferring student records information; innovative approaches to orientation, induction, and closure; and specific approaches that have been implemented to meet the needs of children of Australian Defence Force personnel and Indigenous students. In addition, in Western Australia and Queensland, student tracking initiatives are evolving to better support schools in minimising 'down time' as a result of relocation.

Promoting and supporting such initiatives is regarded as a clear priority for the future. At present, data gathering mechanisms exist in relation to student enrolments, student absences and student learning. Few, if any, of these databases however, connect in ways to support teachers in providing a seamless transition for students from one school to another. Within this area the potential to foster learning continuity through the transmission of information between schools needs to be further explored, particularly where data may be transferred efficiently through electronic means.

A further priority, raised with great consistency by parents, was the need to build on the changes that have been implemented to meet internal needs in Western Australia and Queensland and develop a national approach to achieving a common school starting age and common transition points for all students across Australia. Feedback from students, parents and teachers during consultations and comments derived from the project survey continually stress the confusion and anxiety experienced by students and their parents as children move up and down year levels as they relocate from one State or Territory to another. This issue will need to be addressed at a national level through cooperative arrangements between the States, Territories and the Commonwealth to work towards achieving commonality. Such initiatives, may also wish to consider the development of a greater consistency in curriculum and the means by which it is assessed across each jurisdiction.

Consistency is seen as a further priority for students with special needs. In particular, students with disabilities that relocate from one State or Territory to

another often experience difficulties in accessing the curriculum in their new location because of delays in processing of ascertainment procedures, as well as variations in the level of resourcing. By establishing agreement between education authorities in each State and Territory to extend the level of resourcing previously allocated to a student for a fixed period, disruption to learning could be significantly reduced. Ultimately, cooperation in this area may lead to common and agreed indicators of funding levels and ascertainment processes.

More research also needs to be done. This project has secured substantial qualitative information about the impact of mobility, which has been generally substantiated by responses derived from the project survey. No data currently exists however, to triangulate student learning outcomes, teacher and parent understandings of student learning and levels of student mobility. For this to be achieved, an intensive program of research will be required in which the learning outcomes of individual students is matched with the students' history of mobility derived from structured interviews with parents and teachers. Further information from parents regarding elements of the child's education, which may also have been influenced by mobility and the teacher's opinion regarding the child's approach to learning as well as learning strengths and difficulties, could then be used to draw together a more accurate 'picture' of the child's experience related to mobility and learning. This picture, repeated across a school and then repeated across all the schools in the study, will greatly assist with furthering understandings of the relationship between student mobility and student learning outcomes enable clear conclusions to be drawn about the relationship between mobility and student learning outcomes.

It is through this additional research that some of the more complex issues related to student mobility will be isolated and addressed. In the interim, initiatives associated with improving data capture and the transference of learning information, combined with a national drive to minimise the inconsistencies evident between State and Territory education authorities, will go a long way to reassuring the increasingly mobile Australian population that major barriers to continuity in student learning that have been evident through relocation in the past are now being addressed.

Recommendations

Recommendation one: In relation to the collection and transmission of student records information and tracking student movement, it is recommended that:

R.1.1 The Commonwealth, in cooperation with government and non-government school authorities, undertake a national exemplary project to identify, document and disseminate information on best practice approaches to gathering and transmitting meaningful student information with a view to minimising the potential negative impact of high levels of student mobility.

R.1.2 In the development of the above project consideration could be given to the feasibility of the following:

- (a) formatting the data returned to schools by State and Territory education authorities in a manner that enables links to be established between student enrolment data and student assessment data, including National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks. This data could be forwarded upon transfer to 'receiving schools' to support transition processes and to inform teaching programs;
- (b) structuring of enrolment data gathering processes to capture information about the previous schools that students have attended; and
- (c) establishment of a national database of schools with electronic contact details to facilitate data transfer.

Recommendation two: In relation to minimising potential disruption to learning and meeting the social and emotional needs of mobile students it is recommended that:

R.2.1 The Commonwealth should:

- (a) seek the commitment of government and non-government school authorities to disseminating advice to parents and school communities on how to minimise any adverse impact of mobility on student learning attributable to student mobility; and
- (b) in cooperation with government and non-government school authorities, identify, document and disseminate best practice approaches to support and facilitate the social and emotional adjustment of mobile students.

Recommendation three: In relation to the transmission of student learning information it is recommended that:

R.3.1 The Commonwealth seeks the commitment of government and non-government school authorities to promote the adoption of best practice approaches to gathering and transmitting meaningful student learning information.

Recommendation four: In relation to addressing the impact of student mobility through greater national consistency in school starting ages, the major points of transition, school curriculum and assessment processes, it is recommended that:

R.4.1 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) refers the consideration of these issues to the relevant taskforce to

determine the practicalities and resource implications of the State and Territory governments adopting a common school starting age.

R.4.2 Through leadership from MCEETYA and collaboration between school authorities, subsequent consideration be given to achieving greater consistency in

- (a) the major transition points in schooling;
- (b) the use of nomenclature (including the first year of formal schooling);
- (c) curriculum structures; and
- (d) assessment processes.

Recommendation five: In relation to maximising consistency in resourcing access to the curriculum for students with a disability, it is recommended that:

R.5.1 Education authorities collaborate to identify comparative funding levels for students with a disability with a view to establishing an agreed position to ensure funding levels are maintained for a period of transition when students relocate.

Recommendation six: In relation to additional research, it is recommended that:

R.6.1 The Commonwealth commissions a follow up research project to quantify the relationship between family relocation, student learning and issues that may impact on learning during family relocation;

R.6.2 The research project should be undertaken in a minimum of 40 schools to develop a cumulative body of data that builds on the learning outcomes of individual students and links this information with insights from parents and teachers;

R.6.3 The findings from the research are used to determine the priority locations or circumstances for the application of specific strategies to overcome the negative impact of mobility; and

R.6.4 The Commonwealth enhances the terms of reference for the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth to ensure that family mobility is identified as an element to be considered as part of the research.

1 Introduction

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)¹ has engaged KPMG Consulting in association with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), to complete a scoping study to assess the impact that frequent family relocation has on learning outcomes of school-aged children from the preparatory years to Year 12. This study focuses on the school-aged children of families that have experienced relocation, including those of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel. The project aims to:

- assess the impact that family relocation and student mobility has on the learning outcomes of school-aged children from the preparatory years to Year 12, in particular, literacy and numeracy achievement in the primary years of schooling;
- review, assess and document student records information which government and non-government schools provide to the families of school-aged children from the preparatory years to Year 12; and
- develop strategies that reduce any adverse impact on the learning outcomes of school-aged children that may occur as the result of family relocation and student mobility.

1.1 Background

The dynamic nature of the Australian labour market presents many opportunities and challenges for families with school-aged children. Many Australians seek new employment and career opportunities by relocating their families in order to secure their financial future and, for others, relocation is an integral component of employment arrangements, such as for the ADF. Other Australian families follow seasonal and itinerant employment opportunities and relocate on a regular basis whilst, for other children, relocation becomes a necessity due to financial pressures or family breakdown. The school-aged children of highly mobile families are the focus of this scoping study.

In addition to determining the extent to which mobility impacts on learning outcomes, the research examines the current practices used by government and non-government schools to minimise any negative impact of mobility. In particular, the project examines the extent to which comprehensive and meaningful student records information, from the preparatory years to Year 12, assists in minimising such negative effects.

¹ Formerly the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA)

1.2 Report overview

The report contains the following key sections:

- a brief description of mobility in Australia that includes a definition of mobility as it relates to students in Australian schools;
- an overview of the key stages of the project methodology including:
 - activity undertaken in the first stage of the project;
 - the structure and scope of the project survey and a summary of the background data derived from the responses to the two questionnaires; and
 - the proceedings from the project workshops;
- a discussion of the major issues to emerge from the project survey and consultations in three States and Territories, as well as consultations with education authorities in the remaining jurisdictions;
- an elaboration of the strategies that have been implemented by schools, school systems and other organisations to address areas where mobility may have a negative impact; and
- a discussion of future directions combined with a set of recommendations to guide future action.

Appendices to the body of the main report include:

- Appendix A – a comprehensive literature review;
- Appendix B – a summary of consultations held in the Northern Territory, Victoria and Queensland;
- Appendix C and D – questionnaires used in the project survey that include a summary description of the responses to each survey question;
- Appendix E – indicative State and Territory year level structures;
- Appendix F – a tabular presentation of school starting ages in international settings; and
- Appendix G – a tabular presentation of arrangements for students with a disability in each State and Territory.

1.3 Project Advisory Committee

The project has benefited from the guidance and support of a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) which has had detailed input into shaping the methodology and evaluating the findings throughout its duration. Membership of the PAC has been drawn from:

- DEST;
- Defence Community Organisation (DCO);
- National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC);
- National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA);
- Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA);
- Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA);
- Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (ACSSO);
- Australian Parents Council (APC); and
- Australian Education Systems Officials Committee.

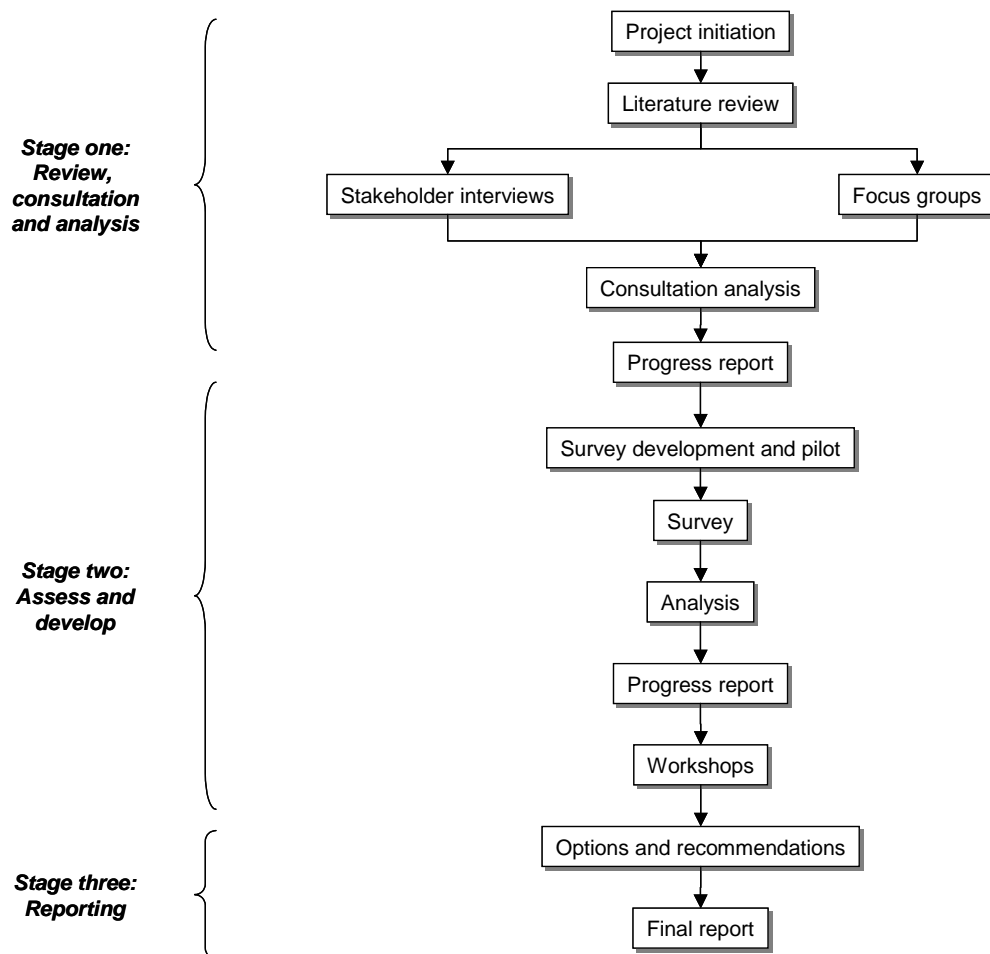
1.4 Acknowledgment

The project team, Chris Eccles, Geoff Noblett, John McCormack, Andrea Cornwell and Jenny Schenk from KPMG Consulting and Michele Lonsdale and Adrian Harvey-Beavis from ACER extend our appreciation to members of the PAC, nominated contact officers in State and Territory education authorities and principals and teachers in schools who have assisted with the organisation of our consultations and with the administration of the project survey. We are equally appreciative of the contributions from the range of stakeholders across Australia who freely gave of their time to contribute to our research and the parents, principals and teachers who responded to the project survey during one of the busiest periods of the school year.

2 Project methodology

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the project methodology. This is followed by a description of the salient features of each of the major stages in the project.

Figure 2.1: Project methodology



2.1 Review, consultations and analysis

During July – September 2001, ACER undertook a comprehensive review of recent national and international research related to student mobility. At the same time, extensive consultations and focus groups were completed with a range of stakeholders across Australia to gain first-hand insights into the issues that may be associated with high levels of mobility.

2.1.1 Literature review

The literature review provides an overview of national and international research of student mobility and its outcomes. The review is organised around the following themes:

- analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on mobility in Australia;
- discussion of methodological issues, particularly those related to defining mobility;
- findings from contemporary research literature related to:
 - reasons for mobility;
 - impact on learning outcomes;
 - Australian Defence Force mobility;
 - Indigenous mobility;
 - other categories of mobility;
- strategies; and
- conclusions.

The literature review has contributed to the identification of issues related to student mobility, and the strategies that have been adopted by schools and schools systems to address these issues are discussed more fully in Sections 4 and 5. The complete text of the literature review is included as Appendix A..

2.1.2 Consultations

Consultations were held with key stakeholder groups in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Victoria to identify key issues related to student mobility and the nature of student records information transfer that may be evident in each jurisdiction. Key stakeholder groups included State and Territory education authorities, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA), the Australian Defence Organisation personnel and their families as well as parents, principals, teachers and secondary aged students from government and non-government schools.

In total, 237 stakeholders were involved in consultations that occurred through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews or focus group discussions. Table 2.1

provides a summary of the stakeholders consulted during the first stage of the project.

Table 2.1: Student mobility project consultations

Consultations by sector	Participants²
Catholic Education sector	28
Australian Defence Organisation personnel	10
Government school sector	185
Independent school sector	7
Other	7
Total	237
Consultations by role	
Parents	33
Principals and assistant principals	30
Students	20
Teachers	75
Education authorities	36
Other	43
Total	237

As with the literature review, the findings from the consultations have contributed to the identification of issues related to student mobility. The consultation reports, which have been documented as three separate case studies, are included as Appendix B.

² Total participants involved in consultations through interviews or focus groups

2.2 Assess and develop – project survey and workshops

The data collected through the literature review and the State and Territory consultations informed the development of questionnaires for parents and teachers to quantify issues that are pertinent to the project. The focus of the questionnaires has been to investigate:

- the perceptions of parents and teachers on the effects of relocation on students, both generally and on learning outcomes in particular; and
- the nature of information records transfer and the extent to which it minimises potential negative impact of mobility.

Education authorities in each State and Territory were contacted to seek approval for conducting research in schools. At the same time, information was sought from education authorities, members of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and other stakeholders regarding primary schools with high levels of student mobility. Once this process was completed, over 75 primary schools were contacted to seek their involvement in the survey in order to achieve the target of 40 schools across Australia. Ultimately, 68³ schools agreed to participate although half of these schools ultimately did not respond to the survey. However, a further 68 schools are represented in the analysis through responses from parents or teachers who accessed the survey from other sources. A sample of government and non-government schools that were reported by respective education authorities to have high levels of student mobility was utilised in the survey sample, as illustrated in Table 2.2.⁴

Table 2.2: Survey schools

School type	Target school	Additional schools	Total schools
Government	32* (56)	45	77
Catholic	1* (7)	16	17
Independent	1* (5)	7	8

³ This number of schools is well in excess of the 40 schools that were originally nominated as the target figure for engagement in the survey thereby allowing for some attrition, with schools agreeing to take part in, but not actually completing a parent questionnaire or teacher questionnaire.

⁴ As such, the sample is not necessarily representative of the number of students enrolled in government and non-government schools. The priority for involvement in the survey was 'noted high levels of student mobility.' After which, every effort was made to achieve representation from all sectors with the final sample being based on the willingness of schools to contribute to the research.

Total	34* (68)	68	102
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Source: Project survey

* Actual participants

Survey design

In the design of the questionnaires, content was included to complement and further explore findings and key issues derived from the literature review and consultations. At the same time, the questionnaires were developed with a view to maximising accessibility and reliability.

For the most part, the design of both questionnaires featured a series of questions or statements to which parents and teachers were requested to respond by rating statements in areas, such as 'importance' or 'degrees of difficulty'. Other questions required the input of specific data, such as number of schools attended (in the parent questionnaire) or year level taught (in the teacher questionnaire). The questionnaires also provided the option for additional comments to enable teachers and parents to add or to qualify their responses.

Parent Questionnaire

The parent questionnaire⁵ was developed to quantify parent responses in areas such as:

- family and home background as an indicator of literacy and numeracy development;
- parent employment status;
- information about the eldest child, such as year level and frequency of relocations;
- assessment of the impact of relocation and ratings of support services provided by schools, education authorities and other agencies; and
- additional questions for second and subsequent children for parents interested in making additional responses.

⁵ See Appendix C for a summary of responses to the parent questionnaire.

Teacher Questionnaire

The teachers and principals questionnaire⁶ asked for a reflection on experience related to student mobility. The questionnaire was developed to encompass both positive and negative considerations in areas such as:

- teacher background;
- generalised assessments of the extent of impact of mobility in the areas of literacy and numeracy;
- rating of factors that contribute to identified positive and negative impacts of mobility;
- assessment of importance and value of approaches for transferring information about student learning from one school to another;
- ratings of student induction processes; and
- rating support services provided by education authorities or, for the children of the ADF, by the Australian Defence Organisation.

2.2.1 Student learning data

Target schools were also invited to provide summary data of student performance against National Benchmarks in years 3 and 5.⁷ Data for the last three years was sought to ensure that conclusions made about student learning was referenced against a longitudinal trend. Only eight schools responded to this request.

2.2.2 Survey administration

Survey pilot

In order to maximise the validity of the questionnaires, a survey pilot was completed in two schools in Victoria. The schools, Puckapunyal Primary School and Sunshine North Primary School, both have high levels of student mobility within the project definition but draw their students from vastly different population demographics. Puckapunyal Primary School students are almost exclusively the children of the ADF, with mobility being the by-product of a parental posting, whereas Sunshine North Primary School has a high proportion of students from non-English speaking

⁶ See Appendix D for a summary of responses to the teacher questionnaire.

⁷ The 'national benchmarks', are minimum achievement levels that students need have in order to progress in school at a particular year level. The benchmarks have been agreed between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers for Education for Years 3, 5 and 7 Reading, Writing, Spelling and Numeracy.

and low socio-economic backgrounds. In this instance, student mobility may be triggered by a number of causes, including parent(s) employment status, changes in family circumstances or financial issues within the family.

As part of the pilot process, respondents were requested to complete a brief meta evaluation of the survey instruments to determine:

- the ease of use;
- areas of ambiguity; and
- areas in which the questionnaires may be improved.

Survey implementation

As a result of the meta evaluation and feedback from the PAC, the survey instruments were revised. On completion, a hyperlink was provided to each of the target schools to enable online access to the questionnaires. This was supplemented with the distribution of paper-based versions of the questionnaires to enable potential respondents that did not have access to the online version to complete a written version of the questionnaire. Of the total respondents, 116 parents and 62 teachers took advantage of this alternative.

The survey was made available during the period 7 – 30 of November 2001. During this period, contact was made on at least two occasions with all schools to check on implementation and respond to queries. Also during this timeframe, a number of schools withdrew from the survey citing teacher workload and clashes with other activity as the key reasons for withdrawal, leaving 34 schools as the final survey sample.

Survey responses

Parent questionnaire

A total of 369 responses were received for the parent questionnaire. High levels of response were achieved in Queensland and Victoria, as illustrated in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: State and Territory responses to parent questionnaire

State/Territory	Respondents
Australian Capital Territory	49
New South Wales	35
Northern Territory	36
Queensland	95
South Australia	14
Tasmania	2
Victoria	95
Western Australia	34
State/Territory not identified	9

Source: Parent questionnaire – Appendix C

A total of 208 responses were received from parents who indicated that a member of the family was an employee of the Australian Defence Organisation.

Teacher questionnaire

A total of 312 responses were received for the teacher questionnaire. Again, high levels of response were achieved in Queensland, with a more even spread of responses through New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, as illustrated in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: State and Territory responses to teacher questionnaire

State/Territory	Respondents
Australian Capital Territory	2
New South Wales	54
Northern Territory	32
Queensland	92
South Australia	17
Tasmania	1
Victoria	43
Western Australia	40
State/Territory not identified	27

Source: Teacher questionnaire – Appendix D

A total of 130 responses were received from teachers who indicated that they have taught students at their current school whose parent(s) are members of the ADF.

Missing data

Generally, the level of missing data was quite low⁸ (around 10 per cent). There is less data for the second child; which in turn declines substantially for the third child. There is no data for the fourth child. Readers are reminded that, when examining the frequencies shown in Appendices C and D, many of the tables with low levels of response are derived from forks in the survey instrument, which direct respondents away from some questions. For example, despite the targeting of schools with high proportions of students with Indigenous backgrounds there are low levels of response on all items to be answered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because there were only a handful of such respondents.

2.2.3 Validity, reliability and evidence of bias

Feedback from the meta evaluation indicated that, for the most part, participants responded to the survey questions with ease. Respondents confirmed the validity of the survey instrument by indicating that there were few ambiguities and the purpose of each question was easily understood. Where confusion became evident, particularly in the case of parents from non-English speaking backgrounds responding to the parent questionnaire, advice was developed to guide schools in supporting parental involvement. Eliminating incomplete responses from the data set prior to undertaking analysis has also enhanced validity.

Confidence in the reliability of the data can be derived from the overall consistency between the survey findings and the findings from the consultations and literature review undertaken during stage one of the project. Where the survey data does not align with the consultation findings, the relative elements of the analysis are highlighted in the discussion.

Whilst the overall sample size also contributes to validity and reliability, this does not necessarily follow when data is disaggregated by sub group. For example, with a total of only 12 responses from Indigenous parents, the size of this element of the sample is insufficient to complete reliable analysis of data by this sub set of parents.

Confidence in the reliability of the data can also be assured by the consistency in responses from parents who entered data for more than one child. That is, although some variations exist from the reported experience of one child to another within a given family, the overall cumulative pattern of responses was consistent for both the eldest child and those for other siblings.

Given that 62.8 per cent of parent respondents declared an employment relationship with the Australian Defence Organisation, there is potential for a bias towards the experience of ADF families in the interpretation of the data. For this reason, the analysis has been completed in the first instance by disaggregating responses from

⁸ As noted through the experience of the Australian Council for Educational Research

parents with ADF backgrounds from the response of other parents. The survey data listed in Appendices C and D quantifies the overall response, as well as providing a breakdown of responses from the ADF. The subsequent description of the data identifies where variations are apparent between the reported experience of ADF families and the overall experience of the survey respondents.

A similar process of disaggregation has been achieved in the analysis of the teacher questionnaire. Disaggregation of teacher perspectives is based on the response to the question, *“At this school have you taught students whose parent(s) are Australian Defence Force personnel?”* This disaggregation is not as precise as for the parent survey as it does not quantify the number of students from an ADF background or the frequency of contact that teachers have with mobile students.

2.2.4 Summary of background data

Parent background

The parent questionnaire sought to investigate parent opinion regarding the impact of student relocation on learning outcomes, while controlling for other factors known to be associated with learning, such as family background.

Apart from the potential bias for ADF families described in Section 4.4, the responses for family background indicate that the respondents are representative of Australian demographics, with factors such as employment status, qualifications and country of birth falling within the range of general experience.

Family and home background

Questions in this area sought information about the number of children in each family and the level of support that exists for each child’s education within the home. Key findings in relation to this data include:

- there is an average of 1.69 children per respondent family, with 89 per cent of respondents either having one or two children attending primary school;
- 58.8 per cent of respondents indicated that their eldest child is a boy. The proportion of boys is higher for ADF respondents (62.7 per cent);
- 70.9 per cent of respondents indicated that their child read at home every night. Parents with a ADF background indicated that this occurred in 75.7 per cent of households; and
- 92.7 per cent of respondents indicated that they assist their child with schoolwork that is brought home. The rate is slightly higher for ADF respondents (94.7 per cent), with 4.4 per cent more indicating that they help without waiting to be asked.

Teacher background

The teacher questionnaire sought to investigate teacher opinion regarding the impact of student relocation on learning outcomes and issues associated with the transfer of learning information from one school to another. The questionnaire controlled for other factors, such as differentiating between experience related to mobility for the children of the ADF and mobility for other children.

The majority of respondents (66.3 per cent) identified their role as a classroom teacher. The remainder of respondents were principals (10.5 per cent), specialist teachers (12.7 per cent) or other employees of schools not covered by these categories.

A range of year level responsibilities is apparent across the respondents, with a significant proportion (39.5 per cent) of classroom teachers indicating that they have responsibilities for combined grade levels, such as Grade 3/4 or Grade 4/5.

2.2.5 Workshops

As a transitional step between the analysis of the project survey and the completion of the final draft report, three workshops were conducted to seek contributions from a sample of stakeholders in the following areas:

1. to test, challenge and validate the project findings;
2. to review the relative merits of strategies adopted by schools and school systems to minimise any potential negative impact of high levels of student mobility; and
3. to review, refine and further develop options for the future.

The workshops were conducted in three locations:

- Melbourne with a total of 15 participants;
- Perth with a total of 34 participants; and
- Townsville with a total of 15 participants.

3 The nature of mobility in Australia

The resident population of Australia is currently 19.28 million. Based on the results of the 1996 Census, it is estimated that 40 per cent of the resident population moved at least once during the period 1991 to 1996. Recent surveys published by the ABS during 1999 and 2000 estimate that 34 per cent of the resident population moved at least once during three years. It is estimated that 30 per cent of residents from households with children moved at least once over three years — this compares with 38 per cent of residents from households without children. Households with children are therefore less likely to move than households without children.

The majority of household movement comprises intrastate mobility, such as moving between suburbs within a city. Self evidently, intrastate movement is less likely to result in children changing schools when compared to interstate migration. When considered over time, intrastate mobility has continued to increase. ABS census data indicate that relocations within States and Territories increased from 5.8 million households in the census period 1986–1991 to 6.5 million in the census period 1991–1996.

3.1 Interstate mobility

According to the ABS, an estimated 2 per cent of the resident population moved interstate during the year ending June 2001. On this basis, 367,400 residents moved interstate during that year. Children 0 to 14 years accounted for 20 per cent (or 75,800) of interstate migration. Table 3.1 below indicates that, while children 0 to 4 years represented 6.6 per cent of the total population, they accounted for 8.2 per cent of interstate mobility. In other words, younger children are more likely to be involved in interstate migration than older children. Since children usually move because their parents move, it is reasonable to assume that families with younger children are more likely to move than those with older children. These findings are summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Australian population movement 2000/01

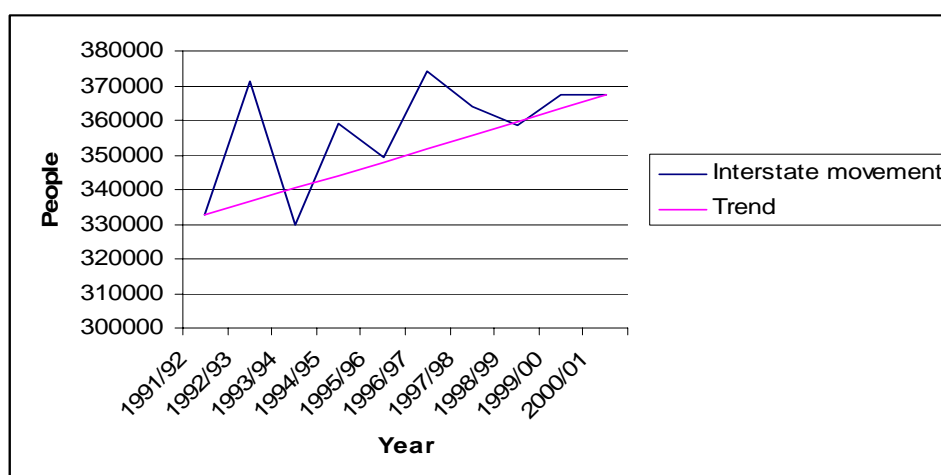
Age	Population	Interstate migration per cent
0-4	6.6 per cent	8.2 per cent
5-9	6.9 per cent	7.1 per cent
10-14	6.9 per cent	5.4 per cent
Children 0-14	20.5 per cent	20.8 per cent

Age	Population	Interstate migration per cent
Balance	79.5 per cent	79.2 per cent
Total	100 per cent	100 per cent

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)

Figure 3.1 illustrates that interstate movement from one year to the next is quite volatile, peaking at over 370,000 people per annum twice within the last decade. However, within this volatility, there is an overall trend of increased interstate mobility for the last 10 years.

Figure 3.1: Interstate mobility in Australia during the period 1991/92 – 2000/01



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001)

A census of ADF in 1991 indicated that 11 per cent of ADF children who attended primary school had attended five or more schools, while at the secondary level, one in five students had attended three or more schools.

Survey data – family relocation

Parent respondents to the project survey indicated that their eldest child had attended an average of three schools (statistically 3.16 schools). The number of schools in which respondents' children have enrolled ranged from 1 to 34, a range that was consistent across the eldest child and other siblings. The majority of respondents reported that their eldest child has attended between 1 and 5 schools (92.9 per cent in total and 95.1 per cent for ADF families). Twenty-one children are

reported to have attended six or more schools, nine of which are the eldest child of ADF families. Respondents indicated that the majority (91.2 per cent) of other children (second and third eldest primary school aged) have attended between one and five schools. The rate for ADF children is 87.8 per cent. Six of the other siblings are reported to have attended six or more schools, of which five have an ADF background.

In contrast to trends determined by the ABS, the majority of survey respondents reported interstate mobility, with a frequency of 49.8 per cent of the relocations for the eldest child. A further 9.1 per cent of relocations were a combination of interstate and intrastate movement. As expected, with this level of interstate movement, the majority of respondents (80.4 per cent) reported moving house at the same time as enrolling at a new school, with a higher proportion of ADF (89.0 per cent) personnel reporting the same experience.

Through the literature review and the State and Territory consultations in the first stage of the project, various reasons for mobility were identified to enable a broad classification to be achieved. From the consultations and literature review, student mobility has been described as an outcome of family relocation through:

- employment related movement where one or either parent moves as a result of:
 - a new posting, as is experienced by personnel in the ADF;
 - securing contract employment for a defined time period in industries, such as construction or mining;
 - seeking seasonal employment in meatworks or fruit picking;
 - other employment related movement, such as travelling as part of the rural show circuit; or
 - movement through an absence of employment caused by company failure or low demand in labour markets;
- lifestyle related movement where a family makes a conscious decision to relocate to a larger home or perceived better climate;
- family related movement brought about by death, divorce, separation, disharmony or conflict;
- movement related to an absence of family of family dysfunction that leads to children becoming state wards or placed in foster care;⁹

⁹ A Victorian Government Audit Report (2001), for example, reports that more than 53 per cent of the Victorian State wards had been in their present placement for less than six months and, on average,

- movement related to financial or social difficulties impacting on the family; and
- movement related to cultural ceremonies, family business or recreational activities in Indigenous families.

Each of the categories is not mutually exclusive. Often there is a linkage between more than one category for a particular move or, in a series of moves; one category may contribute to another in a subsequent move.

From the project survey, factors associated with parental employment are the key trigger for relocation, with 74.5 per cent of respondents indicating that moving house is largely related to employment (a change in jobs or relocation as a requirement of an employer). Similarly, 71.2 per cent of ADF families responded in the same way. Table 3.2 provides a breakdown of reasons for relocation based on the criteria identified through the project consultations.

Table 3.2: Reasons for moving house

Category	Sub category	Total	Per cent	Defence	Per cent
Employment	Change of jobs	34	15	21	14.2
	Required by employer	135	59.5	90	61.2
	Looking for work	1	0.4	0	0
Lifestyle	Liked the area	8	3.5	4	2.7
	Close to school	2	0.8	1	0.6
Family	Separation or illness	15	6.6	13	8.8
Financial	Rent or other costs	5	2.2	4	2.7
Other		27	11.9	14	9.5

Source: Project survey

The recent nature of the family relocations is evidenced by the fact that 77.8 per cent of respondents report an enrolment at the current school within the last three years (1999 – 2001). The experience of the children of the ADF is slightly higher at 82.8 per cent.

The majority of students (60.2 per cent) enrolled at their new school at the beginning of the school year (term 1), with the experience of the children of the ADF being higher at 71.1 per cent. We regard this as a positive finding. Consultations in stage one of the project revealed that the Australian Defence Organisation has, in recent years, endeavoured to align relocations with the school calendar. The higher proportion of students from ADF backgrounds enrolling during term one suggests that this approach is making a positive impact with most ADF transfers occurring over the Christmas vacation period.

had at least four homes during their present stint in the protection system. This figure, according to the audit, is an underestimate.

Seventy-six respondents reported student absence as a result of the move, with 47.3 per cent of respondents having an ADF background. Of the reported absences that occurred as a result of relocation, 27.6 per cent were less than seven days. Another 57.8 per cent of respondents reported absences between 7 and 21 days. Ten respondents reported absence in excess of 28 days, of which half were the children of ADF personnel.

3.2 Defining student mobility and its relationship with learning

Within the literature review, it was found the most common definition of student mobility identifies a specific number of moves within a prescribed period, though the exact number of moves and the length of time involved varies from study to study.¹⁰ It is from the analysis of this literature that a working definition of a mobile student was established at the beginning of the project to be:

“ ... a student who moves school more than twice in a three year period.”

The definition was deemed to be acceptable by most stakeholders. Challenges to this definition however, have arisen in two areas.

The first relates to movement between educational settings at points of transition – pre-school to school and primary school to secondary school. Many stakeholders stressed that, where this transition is coupled with other recent mobility, it has the same impact as might occur through interstate or intrastate relocation.

The second challenge arises from the application of the definition in the context of a large proportion of Indigenous student mobility. In this instance, mobility often blurs with absenteeism or the student may have a base school as a focus around which patterns of travel, absenteeism and transfer to other schools may occur. McCrae et al (2000) reported on three Commonwealth funded projects that focused specifically on Indigenous mobility. Of the 793 Indigenous students from the 76 schools participating in the projects, there were 1039 movements (both in and out and including transition from primary to secondary school) in a nine-month period. The report concluded that the mobility experiences of Indigenous students are not necessarily representative, nor can they be generalised, in terms of other mobile student groups.¹¹ Consequently, a student who only moves school twice in a three year period, but travels to cultural ceremonies where no schooling is available and also visits relatives in the second location, and is an irregular attendee in the second setting, would not be captured as part of the current definition.

This scenario is not necessarily confined to Indigenous families. Other stakeholders report instances where students refuse to go to school as a by-product of mobility, particularly in circumstances where the mobility is linked to family trauma. In

¹⁰ See literature review, Section A.2.1: Definition of Mobility

¹¹ See literature review, Section A.8: Indigenous Mobility

addition, other stakeholders, particularly the ADF, have made links between interstate mobility and absenteeism due to leave requirements that necessitate family holidays in the intervening period between leaving one school and enrolling in another.¹²

In addition to these challenges from stakeholders, there is also the need to place the definition of mobility within the context of student learning. In particular, analysis of data related to student learning suggests that the definition needs to reflect the potential for both positive and negative outcomes in relation to learning outcomes as a result of mobility, particularly where the level of mobility remains below six moves during the course of a child's primary education.¹³ Discussion and graphical representation of the responses to the project survey in Section 5.1 illustrates the extent to which the learning outcomes for some students are perceived to have improved as a result of moving from one school to another. These findings also highlight the extent of resilience that is apparent for many students as part of the mobility experience.

As a result, a revised definition centres on the following statement:

Mobility has the potential to impact either positively or negatively on student learning outcomes where:

- *a student has more than two moves in three years; or*
- *patterns of family movement involve students in relocating school or periods of time when they do not attend school.*

Within this defining statement, movement associated with transition points, such as pre-school to school and primary school to secondary school, is included only where this involves relocation to another setting. Where movement occurs from pre-schools located on the same site as a primary school or involving transition in a K-12 school, this would not be included.

¹² ADF personnel are often required to take leave entitlements from one posting prior to taking up a position at another posting.

¹³ Within the limitations of the survey sample, more than six moves is identified as a watershed beyond which no parent respondents identified student mobility as having a positive impact. Below six moves the impact of mobility was viewed by parents to have both positive and negative impacts depending on the child and the circumstances surrounding the move.

4 Major issues

This section of the report provides a link between the project survey, the findings from our consultations and the literature review. It highlights the key issues that have been consistently reported by stakeholders as having either a positive or negative impact on student learning outcomes. These issues include:

- the nature and extent of the impact of mobility on learning outcomes including the relationship between the social and emotional aspects of family relocation and student learning;
- challenges presented through the apparent inconsistencies in the structure and delivery of education in Australian schools systems including:
 - variations in school starting ages that cause difficulties in student placement when students relocate from one State or Territory to another; and
 - variations in curriculum content and teaching methodologies that are apparent in movement between schools, particularly where this movement is interstate;
- that impact of relocation on specific groups of students, such as:
 - students who are the children of the ADF;
 - Indigenous students;
 - secondary aged students; and
 - students with special needs.

4.1 The impact of mobility on learning

“To help children manage, learn from and build on change is one of the most important gifts that parents can give their child.”¹⁴

This issue is pivotal to the project. From the consultations with stakeholders across Australia, it is apparent that frequent relocation has the potential to compound other issues that impact on learning outcomes and that, where high levels of mobility are apparent, the mobility itself has a negative impact on student learning. The findings from the project survey however, do not provide conclusive evidence to support this position. Although some supportive trends are apparent, anomalies and counter intuitive findings are also evident.

¹⁴ Linke (2000) *Home is where the family is: Moving house with children* AECA

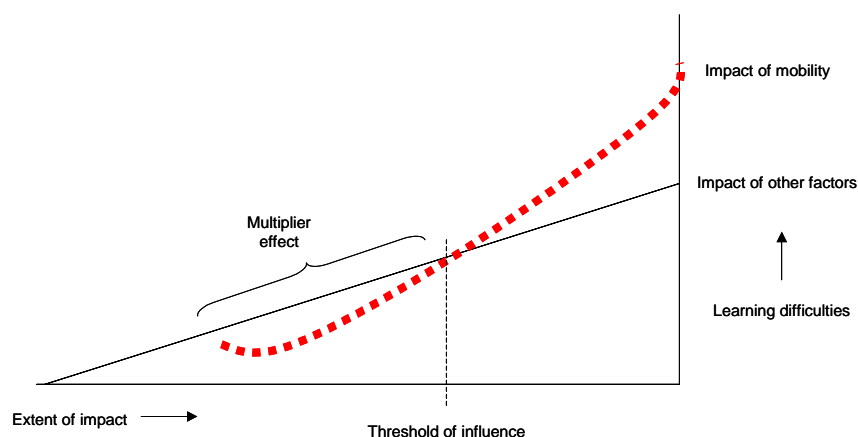
Central to our reservations regarding research evidence are the apparent inconsistencies in the views held in some areas by teachers and parents. For example, a consistent response is apparent in the views reported by parents and teachers regarding difficulties caused by 'gaps in learning' and difficulties in learning caused by variations in 'work expectations', 'the content of school work' and 'teaching style.' The same level of alignment is not apparent in considerations of the impact of absenteeism associated with moving from one school to another. Whilst teachers rate absenteeism associated with mobility as an important factor in contributing to learning difficulties, the same levels of concern are not apparent with parents.

4.1.1 Consultations analysis

As a result of the findings derived from the consultations in the first stage of the project, conclusions were drawn regarding the positive impact of mobility experienced by many children. For such children, moving school presents as an opportunity to be enriched by new experiences in new environments. Personal growth is achieved as students move 'beyond their comfort zone' to meet and overcome the challenges of finding new friends, becoming attuned to new ways of doing things and learning in new contexts. Other students, who may, for one reason or another, be experiencing learning difficulties can often benefit from a fresh start, where past history, conflicts or anxieties are left behind.

For other students, we also concluded that mobility is a factor that compounds existing factors that contribute to learning difficulties. Where issues such as family breakdown or emotional trauma may reduce a student's level of engagement in learning, movement from one school to another further compromises student learning. Furthermore, we also concluded from the consultations that, if mobility occurs in significantly high levels, it might itself become the major cause of learning difficulties. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1, which provides a diagrammatic summary of stakeholder insights regarding the impact of student mobility.

Figure 4.1: The relationship between mobility and other factors that impact on learning



Stakeholders consistently reported that, where low levels of mobility are evident, there is no perceptible impact on learning and that, for some students, there are clear benefits in moving from one school to another. As mobility increases and other factors that contribute to learning difficulties become apparent, mobility acts as a multiplier, compounding learning difficulties. Where mobility increases further, a threshold exists beyond which mobility becomes the major cause of learning difficulties.

Whilst the threshold of influence for mobility will vary from student to student and from school to school, a clear message that has been consistently reported in consultations across Australia stressed that:

High levels of mobility compound other factors (such as social and emotional concerns or an existing learning difficulty) that have a negative impact on learning outcomes, and student learning has an inverse relationship with mobility, with the higher the mobility the less likely that learning at age appropriate levels is expected to occur.

The literature review provides some evidence to substantiate this position in that, where previous studies, such as Fields (1997), have found a negative correlation between mobility and student learning, it was often in relation to those students who were ‘highly’ mobile.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Literature review: Section A.6, Impact on learning outcomes

4.1.2 Survey findings

Parent questionnaire

Analysis of the parent survey data does not, however, fully substantiate this message. On average, the children of respondent parents have attended between three and four schools; however, the range of schools attended within the sample allows for analysis of the responses of a sub group of parents whose children have relocated with a greater frequency than the average. According to the findings from the consultations, it would be reasonably expected that these students would be experiencing greater difficulties in learning than students who have moved schools on fewer occasions.

Whilst parent responses to the project survey demonstrate a trend that broadly supports this position, the trend is not as consistent or as pronounced as might be expected. Similarly, based on the survey responses, higher levels of mobility do not necessarily diminish a student's capacity to achieve at levels above their peers.

Analysis of the survey data by ACER illustrates this finding. The data in Table 4.1 shows comparative information from the parent questionnaire in areas related to:

- the number of schools attended by their eldest child;
- the parent's perception of the relative standing of their child's literacy learning expressed as whether the child is achieving at a level that is:
 - better than others in their age group;
 - about the same as others in their age group; and
 - worse than others in their age group; and
- the parent's perception of the relative standing of their child's numeracy learning according to the same criteria.

Table 4.1: Number of schools attended - by how well the eldest child is learning

	Mean schools (Literacy)	Mean (Numeracy school)
Better	3.18	3.58
About the same	3.20	2.88
Worse	3.30	3.54
Overall	3.21	3.18

Source: Project survey (ACER analysis)

Table 4.1 shows that, in literacy, there is a slight increase in the number of schools¹⁶ attended when parents have rated their child’s learning from ‘better’ (3.18 schools), ‘about the same’ (3.20 schools) and ‘worse’ (3.30 schools). This trend is not consistent however, with the analysis of parent responses in relation to numeracy learning. With numeracy learning, parents have indicated that a higher number of schools (3.58) equates to children learning at levels that are better than their peers, with slightly fewer schools (3.54) causing students to achieve at levels that are worse than their peers. The low number of schools in the ‘about the same’ category for numeracy (2.88) cannot be explained.¹⁷

A more definite trend is apparent when the responses for literacy and numeracy are combined and only the extremes, ‘better’ or ‘worse’, are considered.

Even allowing for this consideration however, the frequency of response to the ‘doing better’ category in relocations above the average is quite compelling. This analysis is summarised in Table 4.2, which lists the response frequencies of parents that indicated that either their child was learning at a level that was ‘better’ than others in their age group or ‘worse’ than others in their age group in either literacy or numeracy.

Table 4.2: Frequency of relocation by parent responses to the perceived level of student learning

Number of schools	Total	Better		Worse	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
1	34	4	11.8	2	5.9
2	100	32	32.0	20	20.0
3	82	24	29.3	19	23.2
4	41	16	39.0	7	17.1
5	20	8	40.0	5	25.0
6	10	3	30.0	3	30.0
7+	11	0	0.0	5	45.5
	298	87		61	

Source: Project survey

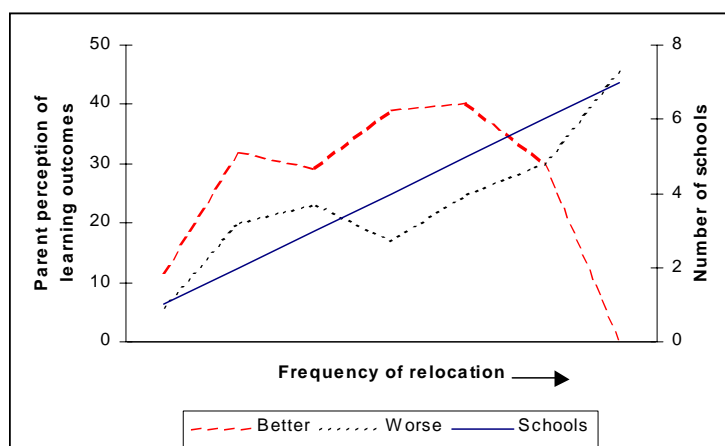
¹⁶ Assumes a statistical perspective

¹⁷ Analysis of this data by ACER supports this view. *“An examination of the means for the three groups, shows that those student’s doing ‘About the same’, have a mean of 2.88 previous schools, compared with a mean of 3.58 for those doing better, and a mean of 3.54 for those doing worse. These results are difficult to interpret. There is little difference between the ‘Better’ and ‘Worse’ groups, and it is not clear why the ‘About the Same’ group should differ. There seems to be no linear relationship here.”*

The table shows that the percentage of students reported to be 'doing better' in literacy or numeracy increases from 32.0 per cent for two schools to 40 per cent for five schools. The trend for 'doing better' declines beyond five schools, and no parent reported their child 'doing better' than their peers for more than six schools. By contrast, the trend for parents indicating that their child is achieving in literacy or numeracy at a level that is 'worse' than peers is not as consistent. As the number of school moves increases beyond four however, a consistent trend is apparent with an increasing number of parents indicating lower levels of learning aligning directly with the increase in relocations.

The trends that are evident in Table 4.2 are more easily determined through a graphical representation as evidenced in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Frequency of relocation by parent responses to the perceived level of student learning



Source: Project survey

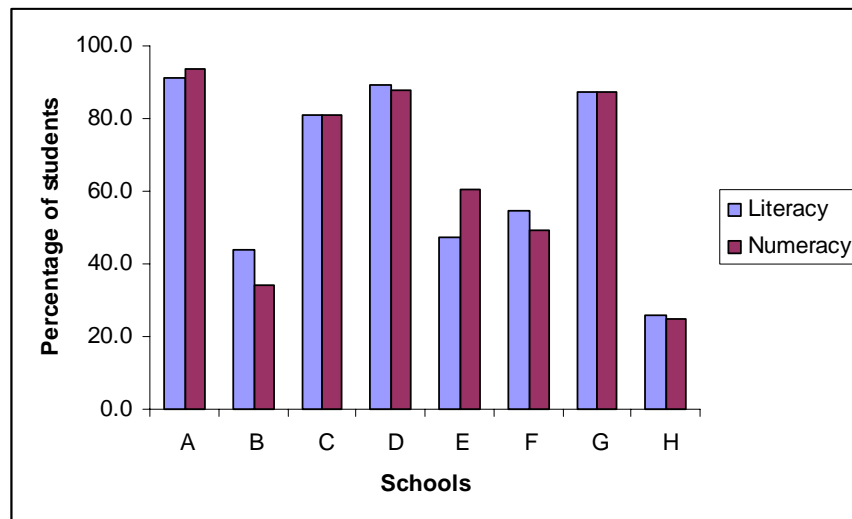
Caution needs to be exercised in drawing substantive conclusions from this data for two reasons. Firstly, the sample size for the higher frequencies of mobility reduces markedly after six schools, with 11 parents being the total number of respondents for seven or more schools. Secondly, the analysis is based on parent impressions that alone are not strong measures of student outcomes.¹⁸ Furthermore, the point of reference for parents in making their judgement is also unclear. Through the experience of frequent mobility, parents may be referencing their impressions against a generalised view of the learning of their child's age cohort, whereas others may have referenced their impressions against other students in their child's class where the level of learning may potentially be well above or well below the standardised level for their child's age cohort.

¹⁸ As noted through the ACER analysis

Schools data

This latter point becomes particularly apparent in the light of the student learning data provided by some of the schools that participated in the project survey. As illustrated in Figure 4.3, a range of learning achievement is apparent across the survey schools. For example, Schools A and D, in comparison with Schools B and H, would provide parents with a markedly different point of reference in responding to the parent questionnaire.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of students achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks



Source: School respondents to the project survey

Teacher questionnaire

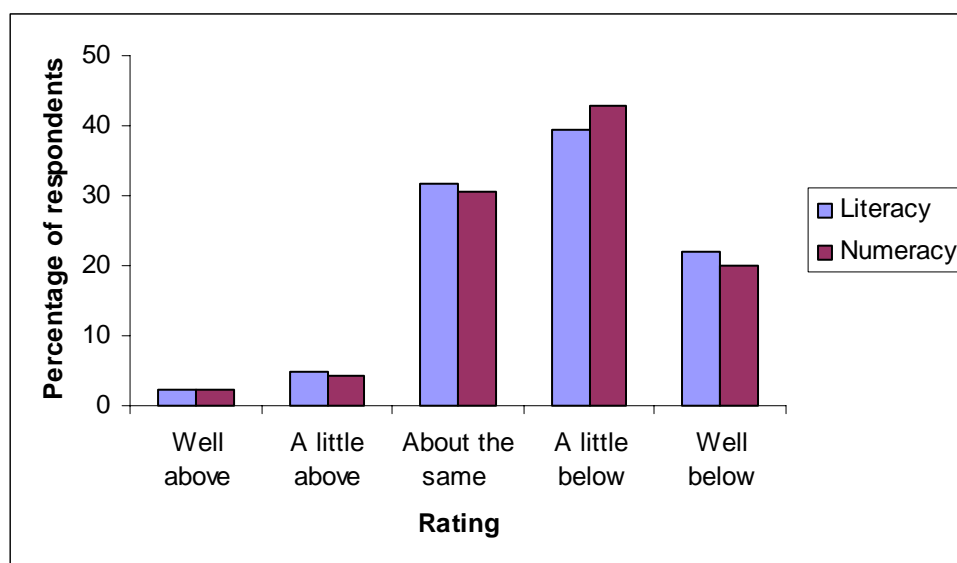
In contrast with the parent response, teachers consistently reported a negative impact of mobility on learning outcomes. In response to questions regarding *In relation to mobile students in your current (or most recent) class, how would you rate their overall achievement in literacy and numeracy?* a full range of responses was received according to the following rating criteria:

- Well above their peers;
- A little above their peers;
- About the same as their peers;
- A little below their peers; and

- Well below their peers.

Within the full range of responses however, there was a clear weighting towards the ‘about the same as their peers’ or below, in both literacy and numeracy. This response is illustrated in Figure 4.4

Figure 4.4: Teacher response to the achievement levels of mobile students in literacy and numeracy



Source: Project survey

As with responses to the parent questionnaire, caution needs to be exercised in drawing conclusions from this data. Whilst teachers may be more informed about student learning than parents, the responses are still generalisations of experience and, as such, are open to bias based on a range of factors, such as the frequency of interaction with students with high mobility. It is worth noting however, that the rating by teachers for mobile students of ADF backgrounds was more positive than the overall rating in both literacy and numeracy achievement. This response is summarised in Table 4.3. It is also worth noting that the review of international literature revealed that teacher perceptions regarding mobile students were generally more positive than the survey findings of this project.

Table 4.3: Comparative literacy and numeracy achievement ratings – overall response and response according to student with ADF backgrounds

Rating	Literacy		Numeracy	
	Overall response	Defence schools	Overall response	Defence schools
Well above	2.2	2.5	2.2	3.3
A little above	4.8	5.9	4.3	5.7
About the same	31.6	42.4	30.7	45.9
A little below	39.5	41.5	42.9	40.2
Well below	21.9	7.6	19.9	4.9

Teachers were also requested to rate the level of achievement of mobile students against literacy and numeracy curriculum standards in their jurisdiction. The pattern of response is consistent with the generalised response in that higher levels of response were evident in the 'little below' and 'well below' categories, as well as a more positive rating by the teachers of mobile students with an ADF background.

4.1.3 Factors that contribute to learning difficulties

Where teachers responded to questions regarding student learning in literacy and numeracy by either indicating 'a little below their peers' or 'well below peers', follow-up questions were prompted seeking teachers' ratings of factors that may contribute to lower levels of learning. Responses in the area of literacy suggest that 'gaps in learning' (63.7 per cent) and 'poor attendance'¹⁹ (60.2 per cent) is most critical. In numeracy, the same criteria were rated as the most important - gaps in learning (70.6 per cent) and poor attendance (66 per cent).

Responses from the parent survey support the view that gaps in learning have the potential to compound learning difficulties when children move from one school to another. Whilst there was not a direct question related to 'gaps in learning' in the parent questionnaire, analysis of additional responses, made by parents who rated their child's learning at levels below their peers, indicates a higher proportion of concern in most categories in comparison with the overall response. Moreover, the responses of this sub group of parents indicate proportionally higher levels of concern in areas, which relate more closely to learning, such as 'expectations', 'the content of school work' and 'teaching style'. The findings from this analysis are presented in Table 4.4.

¹⁹ Absenteeism attributed to or caused by family relocation

Table 4.4: Difficulties for children when moving school (Overall response and by parents indicating lower levels of achievement in literacy)

Criteria	Overall	Lower learning levels
Work expectations	29.5	57.8
Content of school work	26.7	62.2
Teaching style	26.7	44.4
Leaving friends	57.5	71.1
Leaving family	46.1	51.1
School and class organisation	31.0	28.9

Source: Project survey

For all children, parents reported that leaving friends is the greatest difficulty in moving from one school to another (being rated as very difficult by 57.5 per cent of respondents).²⁰ When the same criteria are considered in relation to parents who report lower levels of student learning however, leaving friends is reported to still present as the greatest difficulty for students (rated as 'very difficult' by 71.1 per cent of respondents) but other criteria, such as 'work expectations', 'content of school work' and 'teaching style', are more prominent for this sub group of respondents.

This finding aligns with the findings from the consultations stage of the project where mobility is regarded as having a multiplier effect by compounding issues that contribute to learning difficulties. That is, where teachers highlight gaps in learning as a key contributor to learning difficulties, parents cite difficulties with work expectations, content and teaching style. When high levels of mobility are added to the mix, each element fuels the other and compounds learning difficulties.

By contrast, a comparative analysis of the responses where parents indicated high levels of absenteeism in relation to mobility revealed no alignment with concerns regarding learning outcomes. Analysis of the survey data by two variables, 'levels of absenteeism associated with mobility' and 'indication of achievement in literacy and numeracy at levels that are lower than others of the same age group', reveals that the strongest areas of concern do not align with high levels of absenteeism. This finding is illustrated in Figure 4.5 where the parent responses to learning levels in literacy and numeracy are plotted against the reported higher levels of absenteeism. Figure 4.5 shows a concentration of reported lower levels of learning (with a rating of 3) around lower levels of absenteeism (10 days or less).

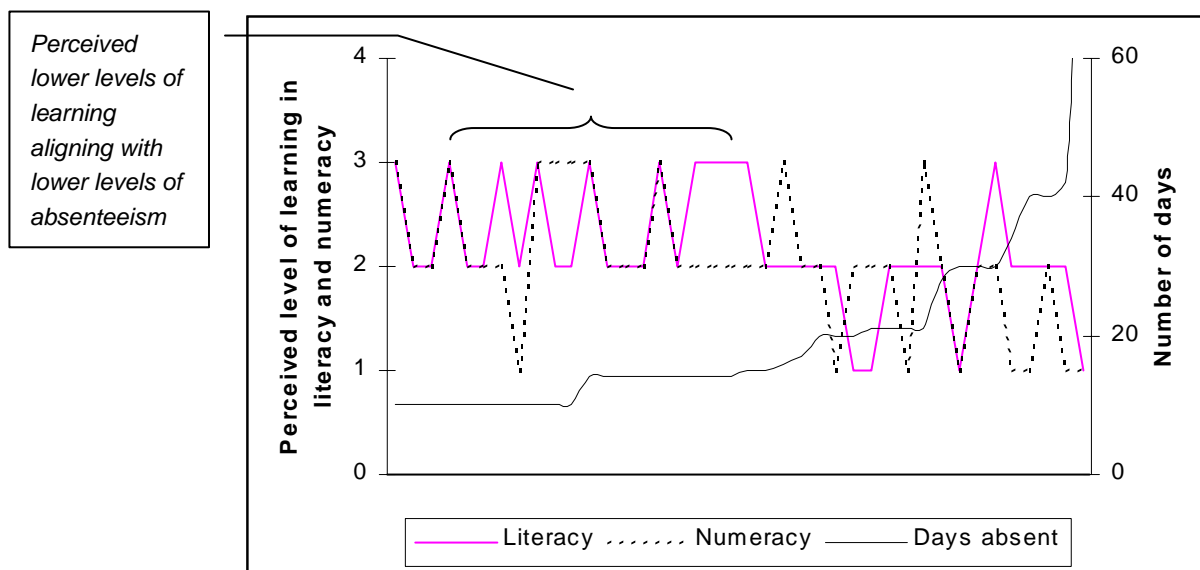
This finding is counter-intuitive to contemporary educational theory, which stresses that time-on-task is critical to sustaining positive leaning outcomes. Recent research²¹ suggests that high levels of absenteeism that is in the order of that

²⁰ This issue is discussed more fully in Section 5.1.4.

²¹ See Hill and Crevola (1999) *The Early Years Literacy Program* and Crevola and Hill (1998). *Children's literacy success strategy*

reported by parents in the project survey would have a clear negative impact on student learning outcomes.

Figure 4.5: Relationship between perceived levels of learning and absenteeism associated with student mobility



Source: Project survey

This position is supported by teacher respondents to project survey who rated 'gaps learning' and 'poor attendance' as key contributory factors where mobile students were not achieving at age appropriate levels in literacy and numeracy.²²

4.1.4 The social and emotional impact of mobility

Parents' impressions of the difficulties associated with moving highlight that leaving friends and family are key challenges faced by children when they move from one school to another.²³ As Figure 4.6 illustrates, parents' responses to the project survey indicate that, with a rating of 'difficult' or 'very difficult' by 56.7 per cent of parents, leaving friends is the most difficult aspect of moving and that this is closely followed by leaving family (with 46.7 per cent of parents rating this element as 'difficult' or 'very difficult'). When considered in the context of learning, the difficulty associated with leaving friends is even more profound. The 71.1 per cent of parents that expressed a concern about the level of their child's learning also highlighted that leaving friends was a difficulty in relocation. The multiplier effect of mobility is clearly apparent in this instance. Unhappy children with learning difficulties that are

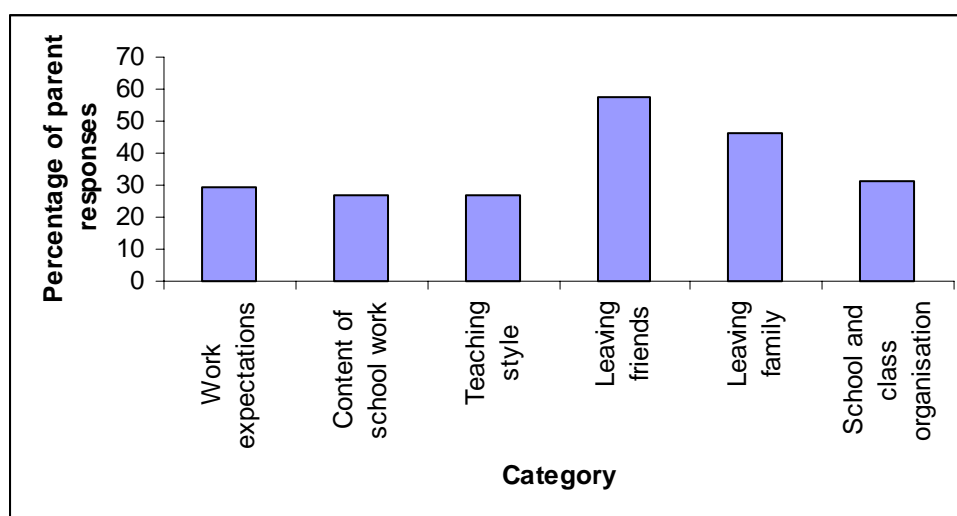
²² See Table 4.6

²³ See also Section 5.1.1 and Table 5.6 in Section 5.4

missing their friends are unlikely to engage in classroom activity, thereby accelerating growth in the gap between their own learning and that of their peers.

As the literature review reveals, it is not only the individual students who can suffer adverse effects from frequent relocations. Some studies have reasoned that children left behind may also suffer emotionally as friendship ties are severed. However, to date, this view is not supported with empirical data.²⁴

Figure 4.6: Parent rating of difficulties for children associated with moving



Source: Project survey

Teachers too have identified social and emotional issues associated with student mobility. Student welfare and appropriate support was rated by teachers as the most important issue impacting on learning outcomes for students experiencing high levels of mobility. This finding is illustrated in Table 4.5, which lists the overall ranking of issues related to student mobility by the percentage of teacher respondents that rated the issues as either 'important' or 'very important'.

²⁴ See literature review: Section A.6, Impact on learning outcomes

Table 4.5: Relative importance of issues impacting on learning outcomes for students experiencing high levels of mobility

Issue	Percentage	Ranking
<i>Student welfare and appropriate support</i>	96.1	1
<i>Transfer of student learning information between schools</i>	95.2	2
<i>Tracking students between schools</i>	94.3	3
<i>Variations in funding for disabilities and impairments</i>	90.8	4
<i>Method of transferring student learning information between schools</i>	90.4	5
<i>Time of year that student arrives</i>	86.5	6
<i>Different curriculum content and assessment processes</i>	86.1	7
<i>Different school starting ages across States and Territories</i>	84.4	8
<i>Different number of years at primary and secondary school</i>	73.6	9
<i>Different names for year levels</i>	50.3	10

Source: Project survey (Teacher responses)

Responses to follow-up questions in the project survey to elicit teacher opinion regarding students with high levels of mobility who are not learning at a level that is appropriate for their age group indicate a cluster of contributory factors that include 'gaps in learning', 'issues from within the family', 'poor attendance' and 'social and emotional' difficulties.

Table 4.6: Key factors where lower than age appropriate learning is apparent

Criterion	Important	Very important	Combined	Ranking
<i>Gaps in learning</i>	21.6	67.2	88.8	1
<i>Family issues</i>	38.7	46.6	85.3	2
<i>Poor attendance</i>	20.4	63.1	83.5	3
<i>Emotional</i>	39.7	43.7	83.4	4
<i>Social</i>	40.2	40.6	80.9	5
<i>Language background</i>	32.0	39.5	71.5	6
<i>Teaching style</i>	36.9	17.3	54.2	7

Source: Project survey (Teacher responses)

The interplay between the elements evident in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 cannot be underestimated. At a fundamental level the provision of student welfare and support may be viewed as both a positive step to ensure students are welcomed into their new school and to foster the continuation of learning. It may also be viewed as direct intervention strategy where, as a result of relocation, or a combination of other

factors associated with the relocation, such as family trauma, grieving over lost friendships student learning has become compromised as a result of the social and emotional issues confronting the child.

The clear links between 'poor attendance' and 'gaps in learning' may be further compounded where students seek to withdraw from school as a result of social or emotional concerns. Equally, anxiety derived from placement in the 'wrong' year level (in the case of an interstate relocation) or the inability to access levels of support similar to those experienced in the past (as a result of relocation by a student with special needs), has the potential to trigger poor attendance and exacerbate social and emotional concerns.

This position supports the view that student mobility has a compounding effect on negative issues associated with student learning replicating a similar finding achieved through the consultations during the first stage of the project. Furthermore, it is the inextricable links between student mobility and issues that are encompassed under the banner, 'social/emotional/welfare' that are recognised by both parents and teachers as having the potential to impact negatively on student learning.

4.1.5 Positive insights

Where teachers responded positively in the project survey to the question, "Are there differences, either positive or negative, between mobile students and their peers?", follow up questions sought ratings regarding student attitude, engagement with learning, levels of confidence and motivation.

Table 4.7 provides a summary of teacher responses in this area. The overall response indicates that teachers view mobility as having a negative impact in each area. When the analysis is disaggregated to identify the response by teachers interacting with the children of the ADF personnel however, the pattern of response becomes less clear.

Table 4.7: Variations in social and emotional characteristics for mobile children

Criteria	Rating	Total	Percentage	Defence	Percentage
General attitude	No difference	69	33.8	49	48.0
	More positive	13	6.4	10	9.8
	Less positive	122	59.8	43	42.2
Engagement with learning	No difference	58	28.3	45	43.7
	Better than peers	11	5.4	7	6.8
	Not a good as peers	136	66.3	51	49.5
Confidence	No difference	53	26.4	38	38.4
	Higher than peers	15	7.5	9	9.1
	Lower than peers	133	66.2	52	52.5
Motivation	No difference	75	36.9	57	55.3
	Higher than peers	10	4.9	5	4.9
	Lower than peers	118	58.1	41	39.8

Source: Project survey

Teachers of children from an ADF background suggest through their survey responses, that these children have higher levels of motivation and a more positive attitude than is experienced with the overall survey sample.

This finding is significant as it contrasts markedly with the responses of ADF parents, which consistently indicate a more negative response, than that of the remaining parents, to the experience of their children in changing schools.²⁵ Whilst caution should be exercised in drawing too much of a definitive conclusion from teachers students with an ADF background²⁶, it does suggest some polarisation of the views of parents and the views of teachers as they relate to student mobility caused by ADF family relocations. Teachers of students with an ADF background are much more positive about the experience of these students than their peers are about the relocation experience of the general population and equally more positive about the experience than the parents of ADF children.

4.2 Starting ages and year level placements

Where mobility involves relocation to another State or Territory, stakeholders, particularly parents, consistently report a sense of frustration with the variations in starting ages in each of the States and Territories and the impact that this has on the placement of students throughout the remaining year levels.²⁷ These variations are illustrated in Appendix E, which shows both the differences in starting ages and the variations evident from one State or Territory to another in terms of transition points between primary and secondary education.

Canada²⁸ and Australia seem to be the only countries where this issue may potentially arise as a review of contemporary literature and consultations with education authority representatives in other countries indicates an overall consistency in starting ages and transition points within educational jurisdictions.²⁹ In fact, only one other piece of research, MacKay and Spicer's 1975 study of Australian Defence Force children, nominates differences experienced across and

²⁵ See Section 4.4

²⁶ As discussed in Section 2.2.3

²⁷ Starting ages has been raised by parents in every forum (focus groups, interviews and workshops) where one or more parents had experienced an interstate move. Approximately 40 per cent of the parents who took the opportunity to make additional comments in the survey, drew attention to difficulties in placing one or more children as a result of the variations in starting ages across Australia.

²⁸ Depending on the province, children in Canada begin school when they reach the age of six or seven and transition to secondary school or junior high occurs at the end of Year 6, Year 7 or Year 8.

²⁹ Based on research of other OECD countries.

within States and Territories in relation to starting ages, as a commonly reported disadvantage.³⁰

A scan of OECD countries reveals that whilst there is uniformity in each country regarding school starting ages. Most Western European countries, including Sweden, Germany, France and Spain, start formal schooling at age six or seven. Likewise, in the USA the first year of formal schooling is for children who are five to six years old. Children in Britain are in fulltime schooling by five, and although some countries, such as Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands, cater for an optional earlier starting age, the actual amount of years a child attends school is consistent, and in no way impacts on a child's schooling if they change schools within a particular country.

Similarly, the latter years of formal education also remain consistent in their structure within each country, unlike the different structures facing students who relocate interstate in Years 10, 11 and 12 in Australia. The impact on the schooling of a student who relocates from one country to another, however, is not clear, although, as previously stated, despite some variations, there is generally consistency in compulsory school starting ages from country to country in Western Europe particularly.³¹

Throughout the consultation stage of the project and again through comments derived from the project survey, the mismatch between year levels evident in the Australian States and Territories is an issue that consistently raises a passionate response.

"It's a throw back from our colonial past. We couldn't get it right with railway gauges and we can't get it right with education."

"Of our 3 elder children ... all have had to undergo tutoring following interstate moves because of differences in the State education systems. All 3 suffered a change of year levels (up or down) when moved from State to State. Australia is a mobile society, particularly within defence. It is essential that the States get together and develop one consistent schooling system."

This issue has the potential to impact on learning in a number of ways. Students often become upset when placement according to age necessitates that they repeat a year level, as is the case when a nine-year-old child moves from Western Australia to South Australia with the child exiting from year 5 and being placed in year 4. Regardless of how well adults may rationalise with the child, the sense of being 'put down' a year level can lead to disengagement with class programs or the

³⁰ See literature review: Section A.7, ADF Mobility. See also Appendix F which provides an overview of starting ages in key OECD countries.

³¹ A tabular presentation of school starting ages is located at Appendix F

compounding of existing social and emotional issues which in turn also impact on learning.

The issue becomes critical at the point of transition from primary to secondary school where, depending on the direction of the move, a student may be required to return to primary school or, potentially, miss the first year of secondary school and by default, miss out on the orientation processes that are normally evident at this time.

Whilst the issue of school starting ages is largely an interstate concern, consultations in the Northern Territory reveal that student movement between Darwin and southern locations within the Northern Territory, such as Alice Springs, presents the same circumstance of variations in transition points from primary to secondary schooling. In Darwin, transition to secondary education occurs between year 7 and year 8, and in Alice Springs, it occurs between year 6 and year 7.

4.2.1 Recent developments

As a result of public consultation in 1996, the Western Australian Government has changed the eligibility age for entry into government schools from the beginning of the 2001 school year.

Until the end of 2000, children were eligible to enter kindergarten in government schools from the beginning of the year in which they turn four years of age. From the beginning of 2001, children who turn four by 30 June were able to start kindergarten from the beginning of that school year. Children who turn four in the second half of the calendar year have been required to start kindergarten at the beginning of 2002, effectively increasing the average age of children starting primary school in Western Australia by six months.

In Queensland a trial of a full-time preparatory year for children before they enter Year 1 will be introduced as part of a suite of educational reforms in 2003. As with Western Australia, should this trial lead to a full scale implementation, the school starting ages for children in Queensland will move closer to those experienced by children in other parts of Australia.³² Although both these reforms may bring entry to schooling in Western Australia and Queensland closer into line with entry ages in other States and Territories, significant variations still exist between Western Australia and Queensland and other States and Territories such as the Northern Territory and South Australia and, to a lesser extent, with Tasmania and Victoria.³³

³² Government of Queensland (2002) [Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future](#)

³³ As illustrated in Appendix E

4.3 Curriculum issues

Teachers, parents and students consulted during the first stage of the project raised a number of issues in relation to variations in curriculum, particularly across State and Territory boundaries with some issues, such as variations in approaches to handwriting, generating a strong emotive responses particularly from parents.

At the secondary school level, the impact of student mobility is evident in terms of subject choice available to students. In focus groups with students, we received a consistent message of frustration when students moved from one location to another (within and across State and Territory boundaries) and were unable to continue with a preferred subject or to enrol in a preferred elective.³⁴

Additional curriculum concerns exist in relation to:

- nomenclature, where subjects are named and structured in different ways;
- content of areas of learning that are not consistent across year levels where mobility is both within States and Territories or across jurisdictions. Given that teaching and learning programs are built around the assumption of prior knowledge, highly mobile children are at a distinct disadvantage where relocation causes gaps in their learning as a result of missed elements of the curriculum;
- variations in approaches to teaching literacy and the use of key literacy resources. For example, the case study reports highlight the confusion that confronts highly mobile Indigenous students through the spectrum of approaches to teaching literacy in community schools;
- inconsistent access to specialised programs such as Reading Recovery; and
- variations in the manner by which learning is assessed and reported.

Of all the curriculum issues presented, parents are most vocal about the variations in approaches to teaching handwriting.

'... [State and Territory education authorities] need to have a common writing style that does not differ from State to State, as it is very difficult for young children learning to write to change their handwriting every time they move'.

As well as being a tangible indicator of more deep seated curriculum issues, there is also a widely held view that variations in approaches to teaching handwriting often

³⁴ Although reported by students to be mainly an issue when moving interstate, subject continuity may be equally problematic when changing schools within the same jurisdiction.

cause primary aged children to become stressed, and this then impacts on their capacity to learn in other areas.

The recognition of this issue can be traced back to 1989 where the members of the Australian Education Council³⁵ accepted a recommendation that:

' ... systems accept differences in handwriting styles and that this information be distributed to teachers showing accepted styles'

and that:

*'All Australian government school systems will now accept that a child taught a handwriting style in one State will not have to change it on transfer to another State which teaches in a different style.'*³⁶

The sense of concern regarding variations in the approach to teaching handwriting reported by parents who have relocated from one State or Territory to another would suggest that the Australian Education Council message has not informed teaching practice in many classrooms across Australia.

Whilst these handwriting issues are confirmed again and again across a range of settings, there is minimal evidence from teacher responses to the project survey of the extent to which handwriting and broader issues related to variations in curriculum impact on learning outcomes. By contrast, where parents believe that their child is learning at a level that is lower than their peers, 'the content of schoolwork' is rated as a significant difficulty (66.2 per cent of respondents) for children when moving school.³⁷

4.3.1 Data capture

Systemic data collected by education authorities does not capture the relationship between the impact of mobility and student learning outcomes that may be indicated through performance in statewide testing programs. This issue takes a prominent position in the 'directions for action' that are listed in Section 7 of this report. That is, given the evidence that learning may be affected either positively or negatively by high levels of mobility, combined with the concerns expressed by teachers regarding the tracking of student movement and the transfer of learning information,³⁸ it is imperative that education authorities across Australia take steps to track the

³⁵ State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the Australian Education Council in April 1989. This body then was subsumed into the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 1993

³⁶ Australian Education Council proceedings Hobart 1989

³⁷ As illustrated in Table 4.4 where 62.2 per cent of the parents who indicated that their child was experiencing lower levels of learning rated content of school work as an area of difficulty in relocation.

³⁸ See Table 4.5

movement of students and establish linkages between this data and the outputs of system wide testing regimes. Furthermore, given the propensity for growth in interstate mobility, it may be reasonably concluded that parents and recipient schools may benefit from access to data related to student performance against National Benchmarks.³⁹ This information would be achieved through supplementation of reported performance in statewide testing programs in year 3 and year 5. When combined with meaningful student data between 'sending school' and 'receiving school' a significant body of information would be available to reduce any negative impact of the move.

4.4 Children of Australian Defence Force personnel

The children with an ADF background are a readily identifiable group that experience mobility on a regular basis. The ADF often have a regular cycle of postings that necessitate relocating every 2-3 years. Many ADF members and their families are highly attuned to the nature of regular movement. These families are conscious of the potential negative impact that mobility may have and, accordingly, place a great deal of effort into collecting information, visiting schools and speaking with principals and teachers about student learning and appropriate placements.

"We have a lot of mobility – mostly at the end of the year. Defence families are very conscious of the educational needs of their children."

Unlike many other families in the community, ADF families are able to relocate without worrying about the transportation of family possessions. Housing, too, is less of an issue as the Defence Housing Authority provides approximately 20,000 houses for the ADF throughout Australia, as well as assistance with accessing private rental through commercial lease back arrangements with private investors. However, unlike other families considered in this project, there is an employer - employee relationship that exists between ADF personnel and the Australian Defence Organisation that has the potential to influence parent responses regarding the impact of employment related relocations on the educational outcomes for their children. That is, their responses may be conditioned by the fact that they are commenting and passing judgement on support arrangements provided by their employer.⁴⁰

The Australian Defence Organisation has implemented a number of strategies to support families in new postings, many of which have an educational focus. This includes assistance through Regional Education Liaison Officers (REDLOs) and support services and networks, such as the Defence Special Needs Support Group.

³⁹ Although information regarding literacy and numeracy skills derived from data internal to the school remains the priority for student records transfer, the provision of complementary information to inform the recipient school whether or not the student has achieved minimum literacy and numeracy standards will also be useful for supporting the transition from one school to another.

⁴⁰ Anecdotal feedback derived from the project workshops supports this assertion.

Given this assistance, it might reasonably be expected that few, if any, issues would arise from the experience of the ADF. However, our consultations in the first stage of the project revealed a different scenario. Whilst many ADF families provided positive feedback about mobility and children's learning, others did not. These parents, and the teachers of their children, articulated examples of mobility impacting on learning through a range of issues, such as starting ages, curriculum concerns and difficulties for students with special needs.

“ ... defence families are different! We move 2 out of every 3 Christmases and our 'holidays' are nothing but 2-3 weeks of emotional and physical stress. This is then compounded by our children's stress and trauma about being accepted into another community/school and trying to break into cliques of existing children.”

Similar concerns are evident in parent responses to the project survey. On a scale of one (Not difficult at all) to four (Very difficult), parents responded to a range of criteria that may potentially cause difficulty in moving from school to school. Analysis reveals that, in each instance, the mean response for parents who are in the ADF was higher (More difficult) than the responses by parents from other backgrounds. This analysis is illustrated in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Mean responses by parents to questions related to difficulties in changing schools

Criteria	Category	Number	Mean
Different expectations about how much work they have to do for school	<i>Defence</i>	142	2.13
	<i>Non defence</i>	86	1.70
	<i>Total</i>	228	1.97
The content of the school work is different	<i>Defence</i>	141	2.26
	<i>Non defence</i>	85	1.76
	<i>Total</i>	226	2.08
The way the teacher teaches is different	<i>Defence</i>	141	2.06
	<i>Non defence</i>	86	1.74
	<i>Total</i>	227	1.94
The way the school is run in general	<i>Defence</i>	141	1.74
	<i>Non defence</i>	90	1.42
	<i>Total</i>	231	1.62
Moving away from their friends	<i>Defence</i>	142	3.11
	<i>Non defence</i>	89	2.28
	<i>Total</i>	231	2.79
Moving away from other members of the family	<i>Defence</i>	133	2.74
	<i>Non defence</i>	84	1.93
	<i>Total</i>	217	2.43
Having to learn about their local community resources, eg. sporting clubs	<i>Defence</i>	141	2.00
	<i>Non defence</i>	84	1.46
	<i>Total</i>	225	1.80
Adjusting to different school rules	<i>Defence</i>	139	1.78
	<i>Non defence</i>	86	1.67
	<i>Total</i>	225	1.74
Differences in school and class organisation (eg composite classes, multi-age grouping)	<i>Defence</i>	139	2.32
	<i>Non defence</i>	84	1.69
	<i>Total</i>	223	2.08
Other, please specify	<i>Defence</i>	11	2.45
	<i>Non defence</i>	3	2.00
	<i>Total</i>	14	2.36

Source: Project survey (ACER Analysis)

This finding is quite profound. It suggests that the experience of the children of the ADF, as reported by parents in relation to mobility, causes greater difficulties in changing schools from that experienced by the children of mobile families in the general population.

Survey responses by teachers shed a different light to that provided by parents on relocation for ADF families by indicating the propensity for children with ADF backgrounds to be more positive in their attitude to school, more engaged with learning, more confident and more highly motivated than students from other backgrounds.⁴¹

The literature reviewed would support this. In an intensive 1975 study of 13,981 ADF children in Grades 3-12,⁴² the authors concluded that the most commonly

⁴¹ See Table 4.7

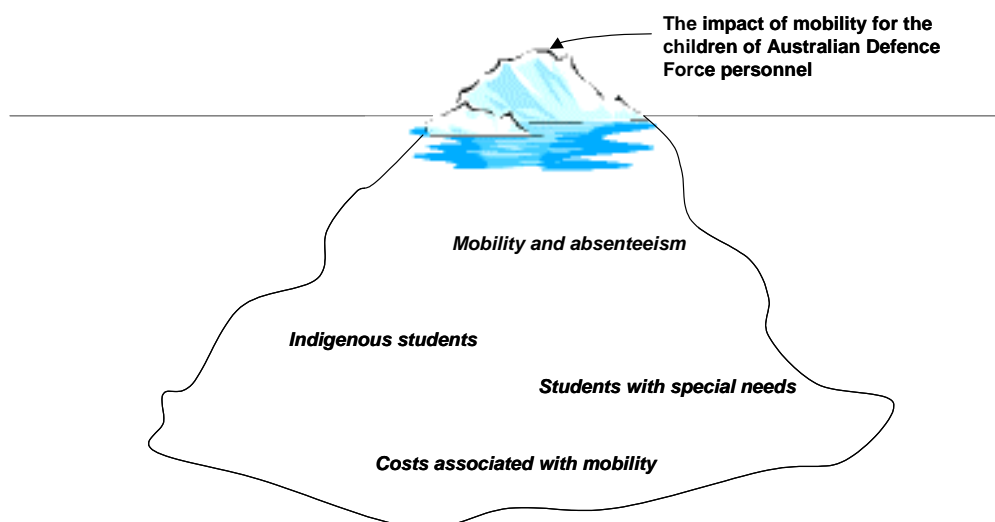
⁴² MacKay and Spicer (1975) See literature review: Section A.7, ADF mobility

reported beneficial effect of mobility was that the children 'acquire an adapting, coping style which may never have developed otherwise'.⁴³

An alternative view regarding the higher levels of difficulty reported by ADF parents relates to their greater awareness of the issues that arise from frequent relocations. That is, due to the extensive networks apparent with the ADF, and the consistency of their experience (with regular posting cycles), ADF parents may be more conscious of the relevant issues and more vocal than others about raising their concerns. Analysis of literature documenting several studies of ADF children supports the view that mobility may have a less negative impact on these children than on the children of non-military families, due to the facilities and support offered by the Australian Defence Organisation. Furthermore, in the 1975 ADF study no noticeable long-term effects of mobility were found, *despite* parental perceptions that changing schools did have a negative impact on children.⁴⁴

Given the absence of comparable networks and indiscriminate patterns of movement for many other families, it is more likely that the vocalism of ADF families represents the 'tip of the iceberg' being an indication of the range of issues that lie beneath the surface of family mobility in Australia, particularly for the more marginalised families that are not necessarily able to identify and articulate their concerns.

Figure 4.7: Mobility issues in Australia



⁴³ See: literature review: Section A.2.1, Definition of mobility

⁴⁴ MacKay and Spicer (1975)

4.5 Indigenous students

Mobility is a significant feature in the lives of many Indigenous students living in each State and Territory, particularly Indigenous families located in remote communities in parts of the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia. Family mobility is driven by strong cultural linkages that necessitate involvement in ceremonial activities, family issues (kin group meetings, funerals and family breakdown), seasonal movement and movement associated with recreational pursuits, such as football.

For many Indigenous students, the pattern of movement is centred on a 'base' school, with intermittent travel to other locations in which enrolment in another school may or may not occur. This pattern of movement blurs the distinction between mobility and absenteeism. Indigenous students can be regular attendees in one location, irregular in another and then not attend school at all in a third.

This pattern of mobility has both a direct and indirect impact on learning. The direct impact relates to the gaps in learning and the variations in approaches to teaching that may be evident from one setting to another. The indirect impact relates to the mobility compromising the level of contact with educational service providers, such as speech therapists and special education teachers.

Learning outcomes are further compromised for Indigenous students in that mobility is often only one of a range of challenges that students face. For many Indigenous students, particularly those living in remote communities, other priorities of safety, shelter and health take precedence over less immediate needs, such as engaging in educational activities.

These findings are supported by the research literature which reports that, where mobility interplays with cultural expectations that are valued more highly than mainstream educational experiences, its impact is 'qualitatively different' from the experience of other demographic groups, and is, in fact, only one of a number of factors that affect the learning outcomes of Indigenous students.⁴⁵ How much mobility contributes to, or is a consequence of, such variables as absenteeism, exclusion and early school leaving, is as yet undetermined.⁴⁶ However, both the literature review and the findings from the project consultations point to mobility being part of a complex set of interconnected issues that have a combined effect of minimising regular and sustained interaction with school programs. This, in turn, has a direct impact on achievements levels and other educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

⁴⁵ Groome and Hamilton (1995). See literature review: Section A.8, Indigenous Mobility

⁴⁶ See literature review: Section A.8, Indigenous Mobility

4.6 Students with special needs

Students with special needs may include children with learning difficulties, gifted children or children with specific disabilities or impairments. The literature review highlights mixed or inconsistent results for students in these groups as a result of relocation. A consistent pattern of response was evident however, in the consultations regarding disruptions to learning that occur for students with special needs that may be potentially greater than those for mainstream students.

“Our eldest was identified in pre-school as “gifted and talented”, however she has had to readjust repeatedly each year and I believe this has prevented her reaching her potential.”

The key to the disruption relates to the support structures that may exist in one setting for a student with special needs that are not replicated in others. For example, in some States and Territories, schools have established special classes for gifted students. When students in these classes relocate to other settings, such facilities may not exist. Parents, in particular, have expressed concerns that their child’s educational needs will not be met as a result of this situation.

For other students, disruptions to learning is caused by factors, such as:

- delays in the transfer of services;
- time lost through the implementation of ascertainment processes to determine levels of resourcing, particularly where relocation is across State or Territory boundaries;⁴⁷ and
- difficulties associated with different levels of support services that may be provided by schools or by various education authorities.

An examination of the various approaches evident in each State and Territory to supporting students with disabilities to access the curriculum in government schools is indicative of the challenges that confront parents when they relocate to another jurisdiction. These variations fall into a number of common areas including:

- **Eligibility Criteria** The means by which States or Territories define each category of disability and the varying degrees of severity evidenced, is an initial

⁴⁷ Issues relating to differences in assessment processes and levels of funding support across States/Territories and systems have been raised by a number of stakeholders in submissions to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities. Key issues to be examined by the Inquiry are the adequacy of current policies and programmes for students with disabilities and the respective roles of the Commonwealth and the States and Territories in supporting the education of students with disabilities. The Inquiry is due to report in October 2002.

inconsistency students with disabilities face when they relocate interstate. The lack of uniformity in eligibility 'gateways' and educational needs indices aligned to resource allocation can result in significant variations in the types and levels of educational support these students are able to access.

- **Allocation Mechanisms** All States and Territories apply variations of two different mechanisms to their funding process. While some educational sectors determine cash or credit allocations to a school's annual budget to provide all the educational needs of students with disabilities, the majority disaggregate human resource allocation from other aspects. The application processes required to access teacher or aide time to specifically support students with disabilities, and in some jurisdictions, students with learning difficulties, is linked with a range of eligibility criteria that varies across each of the States and Territories.
- **Support Infrastructure** Variations in the provision of facilities and specialist settings is another major inconsistency across jurisdictions. Although parents of students with disabilities often seek to have their children educated in regular school settings, other parents appreciate the maintenance of schools, centres and units for students with disabilities. Some jurisdictions provide a fuller continuum of services and placements than others, particularly in certain categories of disability.
- **Right of Choice** In some States and Territories, different settings for students with disabilities can attract different levels of funding. The families of students with disabilities may find their right to exercise choice regarding their child's placement compromised in endeavouring to best meet their individual needs when relocating from one State or Territory to another. This is particularly apparent when parents are not provided with a choice between mainstream and specialised settings as a result of relocating.⁴⁸

Whilst it is apparent that each State and Territory's approach to supporting students with disabilities has evolved to meet local needs, the different resourcing models in each jurisdiction can create difficult choices or frustration over a lack of choice for families relocating from one State or Territory to another.

Of equal concern is the apparent attrition rate of students with disabilities that 'disappear' from education systems from one year to the next. Education authorities in some States and Territories have cautiously cited figures as high as 30 per cent of students in receipt of disabilities and impairments funding that have exited from one school but not registered with another.⁴⁹ Whilst the actual proportion of students may vary from this figure, this does not diminish the fact that a significant

⁴⁸ A tabular presentation of the varying approaches to enabling students with disabilities to access the school curriculum in government schools across Australia is listed as Appendix G.

⁴⁹ The caution arises due to the absence of definitive data.

proportion of students are 'disappearing' from education systems each year. This presents a significant cost that needs to be addressed.

Primarily, the 'cost' is in terms of the student's own learning; however, other costs are also apparent, such as:

- costs associated with the provision of resources that are no longer required, including:
 - human resources – teaching aides and specialists;
 - equipment;
 - the provision of transport services; and
- costs incurred at the point where a student may reappear in another sector or another State or Territory.

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that mobility in these instances is often linked with other causal factors, such as family breakdown or financial difficulties. Invariably, relocation and withdrawal from education is not a matter of choice but necessity.

“Transience for students with disabilities in our district is not about families or caregivers voting with their feet to access a better service. It is about poverty and social dislocation and the intersection with disability. It is about aggregate disadvantage. The parents concerned often are the most disempowered, the least able to advocate for their child and the least able to crack the code of the school system. They don't have strong family or community networks, or don't have access to information, resources and relationships to establish new networks.”

5 Strategies

The consultations and project survey reveal a number of strategies that may be evident at a State and Territory systemic level or operating in individual schools to minimise the negative impact of mobility. These include:

- student records information;
- orientation, induction, curriculum structures and closure;
- specific approaches that have been implemented to meet the needs of children of the ADF;
- specific approaches that have been implemented to meet the needs of Indigenous students;
- student tracking initiatives; and
- other school based initiatives.

These strategies are outlined in the sections that follow, with an associated commentary based on analysis of the consultations undertaken in the first stage of the project, including the literature review and project survey.

5.1 Student records information

The project objectives place a strong emphasis on student records information as a key to minimising the potential impact of mobility on student learning outcomes. The research literature also highlights the important role record-keeping plays in minimising the 'dislocation' of students as they transfer from school to school.⁵⁰

Information records for school students may be classified into three distinct levels:

- personal data – name, date of birth, aliases, medical condition;
- achievement data - grades, marks and examination results as featured in reports; and
- learning analysis - input from teachers regarding the student's approach to given tasks, how outcomes are achieved, gaps in learning and learning styles as featured in reports, work samples or portfolios.

⁵⁰ CSIS (2001) See literature review: Section A.10.1, Systems

Each of these sets of information carries assumptions regarding the capacity of the 'audience' to interpret the data. Each also presents issues in relation to the means by which information can be efficiently and effectively transferred from one location to another. Regardless of whether the move is across town or interstate, the information that is transferred from one school to another can range from nothing, to copies of student files, annotated work samples, reports and student portfolios and verbal information between teaching staff.

Through the project consultations, it was found that the transfer of information is only one of the ways in which schools seek to address mobility concerns. Indeed, for many schools there is a strong sense of ambivalence about the effectiveness of information transfer, with teachers suggesting that the information:

- is often incomplete or inaccurate;
- arrives too late;
- is out of date; or
- is too difficult to interpret, particularly where the student has arrived from interstate.

Even with the relocation of the ADF personnel where future postings may be known well in advance, because the exact timing of the posting and the location of a destination school are not necessarily known until the family has actually relocated, significant delays in the transfer of information are a regular occurrence.

Despite these difficulties, insights from the project survey confirm that teachers value information pertaining to the special needs of children, including medical, specialist programs in which the child is involved, and confidential reports written by the classroom teacher. Table 5.1 provides a summary of teachers' responses in this area.

Table 5.1: Teachers' rating of information received from previous school

Information source	Helpful				Very helpful			
	Total	Percentage	Defence	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Defence	Percentage
<i>Information about the previous school (organisation, programs, methods of instruction)</i>	90	44.7	43	38.1	27	12.3	16	14.2
<i>Literacy/numeracy ability of the child</i>	105	47.7	54	47.4	90	40.9	43	37.7
<i>Special needs of the child, including medical</i>	56	25.2	25	21.9	149	67.1	80	70.2
<i>Specialist programs the child has been involved in</i>	80	35.7	42	35.9	121	54.0	64	54.7
<i>Topics/themes covered at the previous school</i>	93	42.9	52	46.8	9	4.1	6	5.4
<i>The child's interests, likes and dislikes</i>	131	60.4	66	58.4	50	23.0	26	23.0
<i>Learning assessments (checklists, observation scales, etc)</i>	108	48.6	55	47.8	87	39.2	45	39.1
<i>Confidential report written by the classroom teacher</i>	82	36.9	43	37.1	118	53.2	58	50.0

Source: Project survey

With a combined rating for 'helpful' and 'very helpful' of 92.3 per cent, teachers identified special needs information as the most helpful type of information received from the previous school. The results from teachers of children of the ADF also reflect this overall response.

Further analysis of the responses to the project survey however, reveal that accessing information provided by the previous school is only one of the ways that teachers collect educational information about new students entering their class. Indeed, contact with the previous school is clearly not the prime source of information, with other sources such as talking with the parents and students predominating. These findings are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Teachers' ratings of strategies for collection of educational information about new students

Information source	Helpful				Very helpful			
	Total	%	Defence	%	Total	%	Defence	%
<i>Talk with parents</i>	104	46.6	57	49.1	106	47.5	56	48.3
<i>Talk with the student</i>	104	46.4	50	42.7	106	47.3	59	50.4
<i>Contact the previous teacher/school</i>	117	53.9	64	57.1	56	25.8	21	18.8
<i>Use of formal standardised assessments</i>	126	57.3	60	53.1	55	25.0	35	31.0
<i>Use of informal criterion-referenced assessments (checklists, structured questionnaires, observations)</i>	137	68.0	70	60.9	60	29.8	35	30.4
<i>Refer to a specialist (special education teacher, psychologist, special resource teacher)</i>	113	44.7	61	54.5	70	32.7	36	32.1
<i>Use of student's work samples</i>	98	44.7	44	38.3	106	48.4	61	53.0

Source: Project survey

Of these information sources, respondents to the project survey indicated that use of their own assessments was the key element in the process of gathering information about a new student, with an overall 'helpfulness' (combined 'helpful and 'very helpful') rating of 97.8 per cent. By contrast, disaggregated information from the responses of teachers of children from ADF backgrounds indicates that 'talking with parents' is the most preferred information source (combined rating of 97.4 per cent).

Teachers also provided responses to questions in the project survey about information records they pass on to other schools. In this instance, there is a clear tradition of teachers working with children from ADF backgrounds gathering information together and forwarding it on to the next school; particularly where they know in advance that the student is moving. Table 5.3 provides a summary of responses to the question "When you know in advance that a student will be exiting your class to move to a new school, which of the following information records do you pass on to the new school?" The responses show that, where records such as summary of student learning outcomes, assessments from specialists, samples of student work, and confidential reports are forwarded onto the next school, this practice is predominantly carried out by teachers working with students from ADF backgrounds.

Table 5.3: Information records passed on to the new school

Information records	Total	Percentage	Defence	Percentage	Defence percentage of total
<i>Information about the school (organisation, programs, methods of instruction)</i>	26	2.8	26	2.9	100
<i>A summary of student learning outcomes</i>	161	17.8	156	17.8	96.8
<i>Assessments from specialists</i>	155	17.2	155	17.7	100
<i>Samples of a student's work</i>	177	19.6	177	20.1	100
<i>Annotated samples of a student's work</i>	123	13.6	117	13.3	95.1
<i>Examples of specialist programs</i>	87	9.6	76	8.6	87.3
<i>Topics / themes covered</i>	37	4.1	37	4.2	100
<i>A sample of a teacher's work program / teacher's planning journal</i>	4	0.4	4	0.4	100
<i>Class / co-ordinator's confidential report</i>	98	10.8	98	11.2	100
<i>Other, please specify :</i>	37	4.1	30	3.4	81

Source: Project survey

Parent respondents to the project survey ranked information about their child's respective strengths and weaknesses and reports written by the class teacher as the most useful sources of information when enrolling their child at a new school. This data is presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Rating and ranking of information records by parent respondents

Information source	Very useful	Useful	Combined rating	Ranking
<i>Information about what your child has difficulty with</i>	58.3	29.1	87.4	1
<i>Information about what your child is good at</i>	46.1	37.4	83.5	2
<i>Reports written by the classroom teacher</i>	50.7	30.3	81.0	3
<i>Programs that your child has been involved in</i>	40.4	39.4	79.8	4
<i>School reports</i>	47.2	32.4	79.6	5
<i>Work samples</i>	37.8	36.5	74.3	6
<i>Assessments for special needs</i>	46.1	23.9	70.0	7
<i>The results of any statewide tests that your child has done</i>	30.6	33.2	63.8	8

Source: Project survey

5.2 Orientation, induction and curriculum structures

As a generalisation, the higher the level of mobility experienced by the student population as a whole, the greater the propensity for schools to adopt extensive and innovative approaches to 'ease' new students into life at a new school. Many of these approaches extend beyond the student to include activity designed to make the whole family feel welcome and part of the school community. Some schools have also noted that closure is of equal importance to induction and have introduced strategies to support the transition out of one school prior to enrolment with another.

Principals of schools with mobile students that responded to the project survey indicate contacting the previous school, gathering and summarising information about student learning records and offering an inclusive welfare policy with regular review are the most important strategies in supporting mobile students. In addition, principals of schools with children of the ADF rated the setting up of processes to involve families in the school community as important (58.8 per cent).

Within classrooms, teachers that responded to the project survey identified the two most effective induction processes to be attending to peer support needs and the monitoring of progress more closely than for other students in the class. As with principals, teachers of children with an ADF background also highlighted the linking of parents into the school community as a very helpful induction process.

Other school-based initiatives relate to changes in curriculum structures where, for example, students in secondary schools may be provided with a number of pathways in order to meet their learning needs. This may include elements of distance education to enable continuity in learning where specific courses are not available in a new location. Where schools are implementing these strategies, both parents and students have acknowledged the benefits that have accrued in minimising disruptions to learning. Similar findings are observed in the literature review where a demonstrated commitment to minimising any negative impact of relocation is valued as much as the specific strategies that may be implemented in a given setting.⁵¹

5.3 Community Agency Support - School Focused Youth Service

The School Focused Youth Service is a joint Victorian initiative between the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Department of Human Services (DHS). The focus of the initiative is the co-ordination of preventative and early intervention strategies for young people, to be delivered through school and community clusters. A number of projects have been funded under the auspice of this initiative, with the Prevention of Transience Project implemented to specifically address the needs of highly mobile youth at risk.

⁵¹ See literature review: Section A.10.3, Schools

The project links principals, assistant principals and school psychologists from approximately 10 schools in the Western Metropolitan Region – Furlong Local Area Network (FLAN). It was developed in response to a survey of network schools that indicated an average of 20 per cent school transience.⁵² As a result of the School Focused Youth Services funding, a part-time intensive family worker was appointed in 2000 to provide support to transient families by establishing links between the family, school and community. The project has achieved a strengthening of school and community connectedness and enhanced resilience amongst families with children who are disadvantaged as a result of repeatedly moving from school to school. Preliminary findings indicate a significant reduction in the transience of families within the schools network. As stated by the family worker:

“By giving them (families) that extra support, they’re not as likely to grab their child and turn to another school, thinking that they will find the answer there.”

A similar example is found in Wangaratta where collaboration between district schools, DET, DHS and community agencies has led to the development of a ‘School Engagement Project’ which aims to have all children at risk, under the age of 15, supported to remain at school or participate in an appropriate educational alternative. Students with a history of frequent relocation are included within this target cohort. The reconnection of socially isolated families to schools and their community is another of the project’s aims, and a number of schools are trialing the program and targeting families of newly enrolled students to establish a positive rapport. The schools utilise local identities in supporting classroom activities and aim to integrate community resources within overall education programs, thereby providing links and appropriate role models for highly mobile students and their families.

5.4 Approaches to meeting the needs of the ADF and their families

The Australian Defence Organisation provides a range of assistance measures for families as they move across Australia to take up new postings. Educational assistance includes:

- the support provided through the auspices of REDLOs;
- the *Family Support Funding Program*, a grant program which aims to fund programs or projects that operate in support of ADF families; and
- the establishment of support networks, such as the National Consultative Group of Service Families and the Defence Special Needs Support Group.

⁵² As defined by school transfer data (enrolments in and out).

REDLOs provide advice on minimising the impact of relocation and the collection of student records information in portfolios. REDLOs are able to bridge the information gap between parents and schools through their knowledge in areas such as:

- year level equivalents in other States and Territories;
- highlighting assistance measures for families with recognised special needs:
 - special needs pre-posting visits;
 - therapy assistance;
 - respite assistance;
 - equipment assistance;
 - housing assistance;
- informing families of support services that are available, including:
 - a tutor allowance, which is available to address gaps in learning that have occurred due to relocation. These funds are available within the first year after the relocation and in subjects where the school identifies gaps in learning. Currently the rate of the tutoring allowance is \$44.00 per week per subject for 14 weeks;
 - contact with networks, such as the Defence Special Needs Support Group and the National Consultative Group of Service Families;
- understanding of the other stresses in the lives of ADF families, such as:
 - high levels of separation through manoeuvres and active duty; and
 - difficulties associated with housing; and
- information for schools and school systems on postings as it becomes available.

In May 2002, the Australian Defence Organisation introduced a new initiative, Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) to support the transition of children of ADF personnel when they relocate to a new school. DSTAs will be employed in 68 schools where there are high numbers of ADF families enrolled.

The DSTAs role will be to facilitate the best educational outcomes for ADF children through onsite, direct and flexible assistance to children, parents, teachers and other pre-existing support services. The smooth transition of mobile ADF children from school to school will be a desired outcome.

The DSTA's role is expected to include:

- organising activities which welcome and farewell ADF families and help them settle in to the new community;
- providing some support in the playground when children first start at the new school;
- assisting families collect samples of work and academic reports for the next school;
- creating opportunities for ADF families to meet;
- helping families with special needs;
- acting as a point of contact for ADF families in the new school; and
- contributing to newsletters.

The school will make the selection of the DSTA with the DSTAs being employed as part of the school staff with responsibility to the school principal. The Australian Defence Organisation will maintain a link with each of the DSTA positions through ongoing support from the REDLO in each State or Territory.

Responses from the ADF regarding the services provided by the Australian Defence Organisation indicate that parents find REDLO support to be the most helpful. This finding is illustrated in Table 5.5, where 53.2 per cent of respondents have rated REDLO support as being 'helpful' or 'very helpful'.

Table 5.5: Helpfulness of Australian Defence Organisation services

Service	Very Helpful		Helpful		Not very helpful		Not at all helpful		Not applicable	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Department of Defence advice and information	12	7.7	53	34.0	44	28.2	26	16.7	21	13.5
Regional Education Liaison Officer (REDLO)	35	22.2	49	31.0	29	18.4	27	17.1	18	11.4
Education Assistance Scheme	21	13.9	20	13.2	27	17.9	24	15.9	59	39.1
Special Needs Assistance	14	9.6	16	11.0	21	14.4	16	11.0	79	54.1
Liaison Workers	10	6.7	33	22.2	19	12.7	35	23.3	53	35.3

Source: Project survey

For the other services provided by the Australian Defence Organisation, there are a relatively large number of responses from parents in the 'non applicable' category, as well as a relatively large number of responses by parents in the 'not very helpful' and 'not at all helpful' categories,

This situation adds weight to the alternative conclusion regarding the consistently higher levels of difficulty in relocating for the children with an ADF background, as reported in Section 5.4. That is, despite having access to a range of services that are not available to the general population, ADF respondents indicate that their children experience greater difficulty in moving from one school to another. Given this situation, it may be concluded that other broader issues around the posting of service personnel and the relationship between the Australian Defence Organisation and its employees may be caught up in the assessment by parents of the impact of relocation on children.

Of equal concern is the number of ADF families that are not making use of the services available, particularly where parents have expressed a view that their child is learning at a level lower than their peers. For example, of the 48 ADF parents that perceive their eldest child to be at a level lower than their peers in literacy or numeracy (See section 4.1.2, Table 4.3), 11 parents regard the Education Assistance Scheme to be 'not applicable' to assisting with supporting their child's learning through changing school. Seventeen parents regard Special Needs Assistance in the same way.

By contrast, teachers of the children with an ADF background find that the services offered by the Australian Defence Organisation are helpful in meeting the needs of mobile children. Of these services, Special Needs Assistance (69.1 per cent of respondents), tutoring outside of school (59.6 per cent of respondents) and Family Support Funding Program (59.0 per cent of respondents) were rated the most helpful by teacher respondents to the project survey.⁵³

5.5 Supporting highly mobile Indigenous students

Through the coordination of policy at the national level by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and funding initiatives, such as the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS), the Commonwealth is playing a key role in implementing strategies to address the learning needs of Indigenous students throughout Australia.

At a State and Territory level, Queensland and the Northern Territory have established school-based positions, such as Community Participation Officers and Home Liaison Officers for government schools. The roles for both Community Participation Officers and Home Liaison Officers are very similar in that they undertake a number of school and community based activities in order to track student movement and minimise absenteeism. A key part of the role relates to knowledge of extended family networks in order to sustain communication with students and link students with schools in new locations.

⁵³ Ratings based on combined 'helpful' and 'very helpful' responses

5.6 Student tracking initiatives

Statistical data from the ABS indicates that the Australian population is becoming more mobile, with increases in both intrastate and interstate mobility evident over the last 10 years. Anecdotal evidence from the consultations in States and Territories supports this position. The current capacity for schools and education authorities to track this movement is limited however. Few education authorities collect system wide data related to mobility and, even where this occurs, it is based on a narrow definition of mobility that reflects student movement during non-peak periods of the school year.⁵⁴

Where high levels of mobility have been identified, projects to track student movement and minimise the disruption to learning have been recently initiated. However, these tracking projects occur in isolation from systemic data collection. As a result, education authorities are, at present, still unable to quantify the nature and extent of mobility.

“We know it is an issue, we just don’t know how big”.

The Student Tracking System (STS), which has been piloted in three regions of Western Australia, is an example of an initiative designed to address this issue. The project has been particularly successful in monitoring student movement and minimising absenteeism. An allied project that seeks to make teaching and learning a more seamless process, regardless of the setting, is also being trialled.

Queensland, has a system of allocating a number to students on enrolment that potentially provides Education Queensland (EQ) with the means by which to monitor the movement of students across the state. To date however, concerns regarding the integrity of data, and the fact that for the most part the data are housed at 1300 individual school sites, has prevented a systemic tracking of student movement.

An additional reform initiative outlined in EQ’s *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future*, proposes as one of its strategies - *Schools as the local coordinator for learning and youth support* - that schools will be accountable for actively following up any student until he or she turns 16 or 17, including vocational education and training, or transfers to another school in Queensland or interstate.

5.7 The Queensland School for Travelling Show Children

The Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (QSTSC) provides an innovative model of educational service delivery. The school provides P-7 education to approximately 70 children of the families of the Showman’s Guild of

⁵⁴ As is the case in Victoria and South Australia

Australasia. These families travel the nation attending the agricultural shows and other activities found in capital cities, provincial towns and the more remote areas.

The school has been established through a joint venture between the Queensland Government and the Commonwealth. The joint venture provided funding for the construction of two mobile classrooms in a pantechicon style that are pulled behind prime movers. The mobile classrooms cater for a full class and provide most amenities that are evident in a 'normal' classroom, including access to information and communications technologies through a roof mounted satellite dish, which provides links to the outside world irrespective of location.

Education Queensland provides funds for the recurrent costs for the school, including the staffing provision of four teachers (two per mobile classroom), a school principal who manages and leads the school, as well as teaching to support families on the circuit, and two unit support officers. The unit support officers drive the prime movers and deploy the classrooms, as well as providing in class support to the staff and students. The school is administratively attached to the Mt Gravatt District Office of Education Queensland and follows show circuits agreed through the Guild. In a typical year, the school will travel from Adelaide through the eastern seaboard to Darwin and a number of other locations in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

Using the Queensland syllabus materials, the school has developed a curriculum relevant to the needs of its students in partnership with a very supportive community. Now in its second year of a three-year trial, it is reported that the school is making a real difference to the lives and educational experience of the students through the regular, consistent and *in situ* provision of schooling. This provision mitigates the issues of mobility and the challenges that are commonly experienced through distance education.

6 Conclusion

This project was established to investigate the relationship between student mobility and student learning outcomes. The project has explored the scope of student mobility and documented a set of findings related to key issues and strategies that have been adopted to overcome the negative consequences for student learning. These findings will enable future research and project activity to be more focussed and strategic – examining areas where further understandings are required and implementing strategies or initiatives that have been shown through this project to make a difference in supporting the continuation of student learning through family relocation.

The original aims for the scoping study provide a useful point of reference for drawing together some concluding remarks regarding the project findings. These aims were established across three broad areas:

- assessing the impact of family relocation and student mobility on learning outcomes;
- reviewing and assessing the student records information provided by government and non-government schools; and
- developing strategies to reduce any adverse impact on learning outcomes as a result of family relocation and student mobility.

It is important to note that as a scoping study this project has covered these three areas in a comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, further work needs to be done to measure and quantify a number of specific aspects of the relationship between family relocation, student mobility and student learning.

The sections that follow provide a summary of the findings in relation to each of the project aims. This is then followed by the final section of the report, which documents the directions for action and recommendations for the future.

6.1 Assessing the impact

Assess the impact that family relocation and student mobility has on the learning outcomes of school-aged children from the preparatory years to Year 12, in particular, literacy and numeracy achievement in the primary years of schooling.

Parents and teachers have highlighted the potential for high levels of family relocation to impact on learning outcomes. They have also stressed the importance of managing the social and emotional aspects of relocation in order to minimise any potential disruption to learning.

Throughout the consultations in the first stage of the project and again through comments included with responses to the project survey, parents continually expressed their frustration with their children being placed in different year levels (as a result of different school starting ages), and variations in curriculum content and work expectations that are experienced through interstate relocation. Teachers, too, expressed concerns in these areas, as well as highlighting other issues of importance in relation to student mobility. Apart from the highest ranking of student welfare and support, approaches to tracking students and transferring student learning information, together with issues associated with absenteeism related to mobility and variations experienced in the funding for students with disabilities and impairments, were identified as important issues by teachers.

At the same time, the project findings also highlight the importance of not making a direct pejorative link between mobility and student learning outcomes. Through the consultations and survey findings it is apparent that family relocation potentially impacts in different ways on various sub groups of students such as children from ADF backgrounds, Indigenous students and students with special needs as well as variations that are apparent for students of different ages. In addition, parents reported through the project survey that student learning outcomes often improved as a result of moderate levels of mobility.⁵⁵ Equally, parents, teachers and the students themselves pointed to a range of coping strategies that students develop as a result of family relocation that foster resilience, a sense of independence and a willingness to meet new challenges.

The overarching conclusion of this scoping study is therefore, that family relocation impacts on student learning in a range of different ways. For many children, relocation can be a positive experience; whereas for others, particularly the children of marginalised families or where the relocation was not a matter of real choice, a range of school related and non school related factors come into play that, in turn, contribute to students not learning at levels that might normally be expected. This study has provided sufficient evidence for these issues to be explored in greater detail. Without such an examination, opportunities for intervention may not be identified and adopted. Equally there is also a risk that education authorities may embark on a course of action to support students through relocation and transition processes where this support may not be necessarily required.

6.2 Review, assess and document student records information

Review, assess and document student records information, which government and non-government schools provide to the families of school-aged children from the preparatory years to Year 12.

The findings from the consultations and project survey confirm that it is not only the student records information that schools provide to parents that plays an important

⁵⁵ Less than six moves during a child's primary schooling (See Section 4.1.2 for details).

role in student mobility. In many instances it is also the records that transfer from teacher to teacher that assist in conveying information about the student. Information about a child's relative strengths and weaknesses and reports written by the classroom teacher have been identified as the major sources of information that are valued by parents when students transfer, with other records such as special needs information also being highly valued by recipient teachers.

Whilst the findings indicate that most parents wish to continue to receive information about their children to assist with enrolment and placement processes at their child's new school, it is the information that can be transferred with immediacy between teachers that offers the most potential for the future. In particular, the potential for electronic portfolios to become the optimal means for teachers to retain student-learning records needs to be more fully explored.

6.3 Develop strategies that reduce any adverse impact on learning outcomes

Develop strategies that reduce any adverse impact on the learning outcomes of school-aged children that may occur as the result of family relocation and student mobility.

Where high levels of student mobility are seen to be having a negative impact on students (either as a direct impact on learning or as a by product of social and emotional issues that, in turn, impact on learning) schools and other agencies are already applying resources to minimise this impact. The recent appointment of Transition Aides by the Australian Defence Organisation, the long standing role of Community Participation Officers and Home Liaison Officers in schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students and the School Focussed Youth Service in Victoria are examples of the application of resources in recognition of a direct need in this area.

The current project has identified the nature of student mobility in Australia and confirmed that a range of issues is apparent in relation to this mobility. Given that not all students find relocation to be a negative experience, education authorities will be naturally circumspect in the allocation of additional resources to reduce the negative impact of relocation. Enhanced approaches to data gathering and further research are now required in order to quantify these issues and support planning decisions to overcome them.

As previously suggested, the timely and accurate transfer of student records information will provide the most effective means for minimising any negative impact on learning. By connecting a student's new teacher with their former teacher, information about the student and the student's learning may be conveyed and used by the new teacher in planning and delivering the teaching and learning program.

Other strategies related to orientation, induction and closure for students as well as strategies to support the child, via support to the family and connecting families with other support agencies, are recorded in the report as proven approaches to minimising the risk of a negative impact on learning as a result of family relocation. Schools, school systems and organisations, such as the Australian Defence Organisation, have also introduced a range of strategies to address the potential negative impact of mobility. Many of these strategies are reported to be highly effective.

A dissemination strategy to convey these better practices to a broader audience may be adopted with some immediacy by education authorities as a practical step in reducing the adverse impact of student mobility.

In other areas, either more work needs to be done or the opportunities for new approaches needs to be encouraged. In relation to the latter, the tracking of student movement and monitoring its relationship with learning is paramount. It is through the collection of accurate data, connecting relocation with learning outcomes, that education authorities will be able to target resource allocation to support students through mobility and minimise disruptions to learning.

7 Directions for action and recommendations

As the key output of the student mobility scoping study, it is critical that this report provides a clear sense of direction for DEST regarding 'what needs to be done next'. This section of the report therefore discusses the directions for future action and provides a set of recommendations to guide future activity.

Feedback from stakeholders throughout our consultations suggested that recommendations arising from this project need to be grounded in the reality of the experience of schools which have high levels of student mobility and in the knowledge and experience of stakeholders who interact with families that frequently relocate, including families within specific demographic groups.

For this reason, three workshops were conducted to determine:

- the optimal means to build on existing good practice;
- approaches to address the key issues identified during the course of the project; and
- test the emerging future directions prior to finalising the recommendations for the project report.

7.1 Future directions

Given the clear finding that mobility has the potential to impact on student learning outcomes both positively and negatively the future directions have been framed within the context of some key guiding principles:

- setting a course of action to maximise the benefits (either existing or potential) of:
 - making better use of existing data sets;
 - the efficient transfer of student learning information; and
 - the dissemination of better school and classroom management practices to support students through family relocation;
- undertaking further research to give more precision to determining areas in which the allocation of additional resources may alleviate the negative impact of student mobility;

- promoting cooperative arrangements between the Commonwealth and education authorities in each State and Territory to alleviate the inconsistencies experienced by families through interstate relocation.

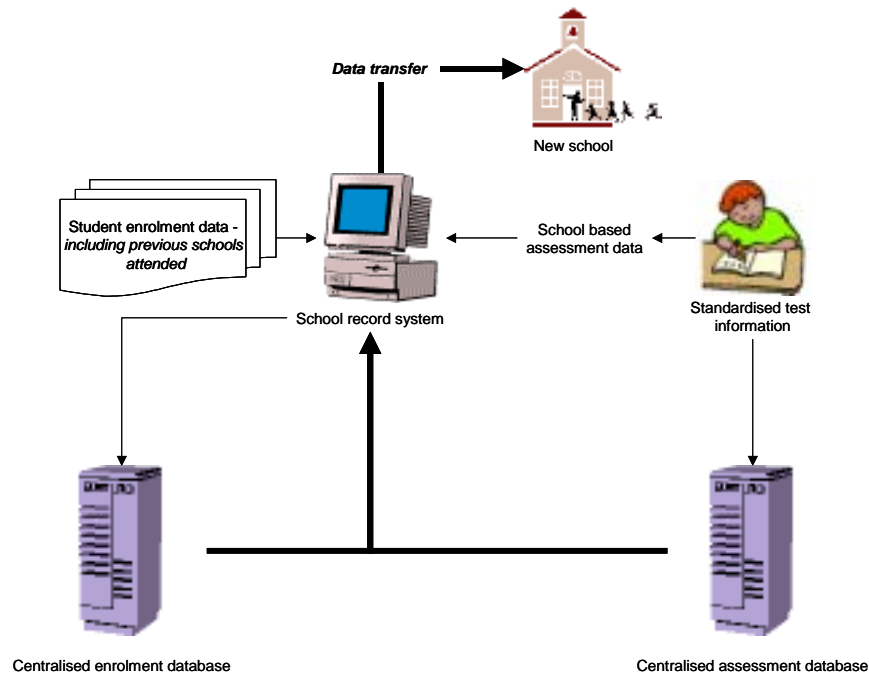
Based on these guiding principles the future directions in relation to student mobility are grouped into a number of projects, strategies or initiatives in six key areas listed below. This list is followed by a description of each project or strategy and a set of recommendations to guide future action.

1. To assist schools in managing student mobility and to enable teachers to be informed about individual student learning, data related to student enrolments and student learning needs to be connected and made accessible to all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, to ensure that better practice becomes widely known and utilised in supporting students through their relocation and in minimising any potential disruption to learning, a dissemination strategy needs to be adopted. Within this strategy, a specific emphasis on approaches to supporting the students from marginalised families will be most beneficial as students from such backgrounds are the most susceptible to the negative impact of frequent relocation.
2. To ensure teachers are in the best possible position to sustain continuity in student learning, further research needs to be undertaken to assess the optimum means for transferring student learning information from school to school.
3. To remove the confusion and frustration experienced by students and parents who relocate from one State or Territory to another, education authorities from each jurisdiction need to reach agreement on a common school starting age and common transition points for major stages of schooling. This reform could also pave the way for greater consistency in State and Territory curriculum and a common approach to assessing and reporting student learning.
4. To sustain access to the curriculum for students with disabilities, similar national agreement is required to maintain, for a prescribed period, the level of resourcing allocated for individual students with a disability that may relocate from one State or Territory to another or from one system (government or non government) to another.
5. To further refine our understanding of the impact of student mobility on learning outcomes, as well as confirming the experience of specific groups of highly mobile students, further detailed research is required to triangulate the links between the impact of frequent relocation, the insights of parents regarding their child's learning and teacher input regarding learning outcomes.

7.1.1 Linking data and disseminating better practices

At present, all school systems keep track of student numbers and student learning through data collection on enrolment and student learning outcomes data derived from statewide standardised testing programs. At present however, there is no direct link between these databases within each State and Territory to enable student learning to be tracked across schools over time. To enable this to occur, the data capture process at the point of enrolment will need to be upgraded to ensure that the history of enrolments is recorded (allowing for sensitivities where confidentiality of former locations needs to be maintained). At the same time, centralised databases related to student learning (derived from statewide standardised tests) will need to be structured to enable the data to 'connect' with enrolment data when returned to the school. These linkages will enable the generation of information that connects the enrolment history and the assessment history for individual students.⁵⁶ This concept is illustrated in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Linking student learning information with enrolment data to assist with tracking students and their learning



⁵⁶ Clearly, only the assessment data for statewide testing at Year 3 and Year 5 will be captured in this way. The local collection and storage of learning data through electronic portfolios however, (as described in Section 7.1.2), will enable a complete 'picture' of the child and their learning to be transferred to the new school.

With both databases returning data to schools in a manner that enables the school to link the data, a 'transfer report' could then be generated when a student exits the school and sent electronically to the receiving school. This report would contain:

- the student's enrolment history;
- the individual student's assessment records derived from statewide testing and referenced against National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks; and
- school based assessment data.

On receipt of this information the 'receiving school' would enrol the student and update the centralised database or create a new record in the case of an interstate enrolment. The updated information would in turn, enable absenteeism between the point of departure and the point of enrolment to be recorded and monitored at a systemic level.

Once established, this approach offers enhancements to the student tracking system that is being piloted in Western Australia and considered for implementation in Queensland.

Whilst the logistics of linking the centralised databases is understood to be a straightforward exercise, it must also be stressed that, in the short term, not all student learning information or student movement will be captured in this way. Some students miss testing programs through illness. In other instances, families arrive at a new school under a different name or do not wish contact to be made with a previous location. The success however, of the pilot student tracking program in Western Australia would suggest that these issues can be largely resolved over time, particularly where protocols can be established to ensure that privacy of personnel information is protected.⁵⁷

Further considerations in relation to this strategy include:

- the need to provide a consistent approach to reporting student learning across Australia. That is, to enable teachers in recipient schools to make informed judgments about student assessment information derived from statewide testing programs, it will be necessary for education authorities to report the outcomes of these tests in a manner that illustrates the performance of an individual student against the National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks,⁵⁸ and

⁵⁷ Concern has been expressed by a number of stakeholders during the course of the project regarding the records information for socially disadvantaged students with high levels of mobility. Whilst the sharing of this information will be imperative to complete the profile of a newly transferred student, collaboration with agencies at the local level will require cross-agency agreements and protocols for the transfer of information to ensure that appropriate levels of confidentiality are maintained.

⁵⁸ Whilst still retaining existing confidentiality protocols.

- the need to ensure all schools are able to interact electronically. For this to be achieved a national database of school websites and email addresses will need to be maintained. In the short term, this may be achieved by enhancing the existing links to the relevant sections of the websites maintained by education authorities that is currently available on the DEST website.⁵⁹ The ultimate aim is for a complete register of schools by type and location to be ideally housed in a national portal such as the DEST website.

Electronic data capture could also provide education authorities with trend data to support the analysis of the relationship between family relocation, absenteeism and student learning outcomes. Through the course of the project, teachers have identified this as a critical issue, however, the level of concern is not as apparent with parents. Data gathering in this area is therefore critical for determining the extent to which parents should be informed of the potential risks to learning associated with long absences from school during the course of a family relocation.

A project of this nature will need to be undertaken by State or Territory education authorities in cooperation with non-government systems. Therefore, it will be critical to the success of the strategy the current and future positions of State and Territory education authorities in relation to the electronic transfer of information be considered prior to embarking on national initiatives in this area.

Ultimately, the data captured in this way will contribute a significant body of knowledge about student movement and student learning, providing education authorities with data to identify circumstances where mobility has a consistently negative impact on student learning. Through this process, education authorities will be in a position to prioritise resourcing according to need. The timeframe however, in which informative data will become available is long term, as it will take a number of years before a sufficient history of mobility is developed in order to identify patterns of student movement and the relationship this has with student learning.⁶⁰

In addition to linking information about mobility and learning, schools and school systems may also have an interest in adopting a similar approach to tracking the costs associated with mobility. That is, by monitoring mobility levels and specific recurrent expenditure (such as purchases of student supplies), schools and school systems will be able to complete an accurate assessment of the costs associated with high levels of student mobility.

⁵⁹ See <http://www.education.gov.au/cgi-bin/ednabrowsemap.cgi?sector=15922> Currently, this service does not contain links to all government schools and non-government schools in each State and Territory and, in some instances, there are a number of steps required prior to accessing a schools list.

⁶⁰ It is for this reason we are recommending further detailed research to quantify the relationship between family relocation and student learning (See Section 7.1.5).

Dissemination strategy

Throughout this project, it has become apparent that, in many schools and classrooms across Australia, good practice prevails in minimising the potential negative impact that may be caused by high levels of student mobility. Of these strategies, initiatives undertaken by schools using seed funding from government agencies, or on partnership with other organisations are reportedly making a significant difference in meeting the needs of highly marginalised families.

In many respects, these strategies replicate the more structured interventions that are evident in schools with high levels of Defence Force backgrounds. Clearly, in both instances key stakeholders are seeking to build on the positive aspects of mobility as well as to minimise any negative impact. In both types of settings (Defence and schools with high proportions of marginalised families), strategies that are most valued include those which:

- target support for the whole family in order to maximise the support for the child;
- establish links between the school, the family and community organisations; and
- connect families with support services to assist with meeting the social and emotional needs of children and their parents.

In other instances, it is the strategies of an individual classroom teacher making curriculum links with the previous school, or a whole school initiative, that are proclaimed by parents, students and other teachers to be making a difference for students who have recently moved.

In order to make these practices more widespread, a dissemination strategy needs to be planned and implemented. Such a strategy will need to encompass information dissemination at a number of levels, such as formal professional development, facilitation of teacher networks and showcasing better practice through publications and websites. It also needs to take into account the outcomes of further activity that will be initiated in response to the project recommendations. In particular the outcomes of the research projects and national approaches to enhance consistency between each of the States and Territories will need to be reported to the broadest possible audiences.

Recommendations

Recommendation one: In relation to the collection and transmission of student records information and tracking student movement, it is recommended that:

R.1.1 The Commonwealth, in cooperation with government and non-government school authorities, undertake a national exemplary project to identify, document and disseminate information on best practice approaches to gathering and transmitting

meaningful student information with a view to minimising the potential negative impact of high levels of student mobility.

R.1.2 In the development of the above project consideration could be given to the feasibility of the following:

- (a) formatting the data returned to schools by State and Territory education authorities in a manner that enables links to be established between student enrolment data and student assessment data, including National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks. This data could be forwarded upon transfer to 'receiving schools' to support transition processes and to inform teaching programs;
- (b) structuring of enrolment data gathering processes to capture information about the previous schools that students have attended; and
- (c) establishment of a national database of schools with electronic contact details to facilitate data transfer.

Recommendation two: In relation to minimising potential disruption to learning and meeting the social and emotional needs of mobile students it is recommended that:

R.2.1 The Commonwealth should:

- (a) seek the commitment of government and non-government school authorities to disseminating advice to parents and school communities on how to minimise any adverse impact of mobility on student learning attributable to student mobility; and
- (b) in cooperation with government and non-government school authorities, identify, document and disseminate best practice approaches to support and facilitate the social and emotional adjustment of mobile students.

7.1.2 Transmission of student learning information

Through the consultations and project survey, teachers have indicated the value they ascribe to relevant, accurate and timely information regarding student learning. If these three criteria are met, the information is used. If not, teachers tend to make their own judgements or assessments of student learning and proceed with their own programs knowing that gaps in learning may not be covered or that content may be unnecessarily duplicated.

The literature review identified the value of 'portable' student portfolios that, while used primarily as learning tools, have the potential to provide a useful source of

information for staff at a subsequent school. McCrae et al (2000) described electronic student portfolios that were developed as part of a Commonwealth funded Indigenous project on student mobility. The portfolios, containing records of the students' educational history, could be sent by post or electronically.

As part of the project workshops, consideration was given to the means by which student learning information can be most efficiently and effectively transferred from one school to another. Future work will need to involve testing the usefulness and feasibility of various approaches to transferring learning information. Whilst this research should encompass a range of alternatives for information transfer, the level of interest generated by discussion about electronic portfolios would suggest that an investigation of the optimum means by which student learning information may be transferred electronically should be a central element of the research.

Workshop participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the potential benefits of electronic portfolios, particularly in regard to the contribution that locally generated data may make to provide highly valuable information to teachers when students relocate to a new school.

“Electronic portfolios would provide a simple and highly accessible means for one teacher to connect with another to reduce ‘downtime’ in learning.”

Essentially, electronic (or digital) student portfolios are an extension of the portfolios many schools already keep – individual compilations of work collected throughout the year that can be used for assessment and reporting purposes and to show progress in student learning over time.

Electronic portfolios take this a step further by recording and storing student's work on a computer, and involving students in the selection of the best and most relevant pieces for their portfolio at various times during the school year. Continuous editing of the information contained in the portfolios ensures that they retain currency as records of each student's achievement. Schools would then be able to forward this information electronically, or by CD, as part of the transfer process as illustrated in Figure 7.1.

The electronic portfolio can also aid the transition process from primary to secondary school, provide parents with records of their child's work through their primary and/or secondary years and, in the case of a student transferring from one school to another, provide an effective and efficient means of forwarding relevant information about the student's achievements.

There are many software programs that can be used to create electronic portfolios, and images, while sounds and movies can be inserted to enhance the presentation of the student's learning.

There are a variety of ways in which a digital portfolio can reflect student learning and the assessment of progress by teachers. It may contain any of the following:

- Digital Photo/movie of the student;
- Writing Samples – draft and/or completed copy;
- Reading Sample – sound recording of student reading;
- Handwriting – digital photo and image of pen grip;
- Sample of artwork – scanned, digital image or computer generated;
- Mathematics – sound or movie files of children manipulating materials, explaining understandings and annotated work samples;
- Learning journals;
- Projects;
- Music – recording some of the student’s music, singing or playing of an instrument, and
- School reports.

Even a well-presented electronic portfolio however, may be devalued by its intended audience unless each sample of student work is clearly annotated in terms of:

- the context in which the sample was produced;
- teacher observations about achievement recorded against the sample; and
- relevant State and Territory curriculum outcomes, against which the sample is assessed.

Feedback from educators involved in the project workshop suggests that there is a strong potential for a more general application of electronic portfolios in data collection and reporting student learning – not just for students who relocate from one school to another. Electronic portfolios can become an integral part of ‘student led’ conferences, which, in some schools, are replacing the traditional ‘parent - teacher’ interviews as a way of communicating student progress to parents. They have the potential to redefine the ways in which schools and teachers assess academic achievement, and in the way information about student learning is transferred from teacher to teacher as students progress through a given school and as a means to aid transition when students move from primary to secondary schooling.

We regard the establishment of an action research project as an effective means to further explore and document the optimum means of transferring accurate and relevant student records information from one school/teacher to another. It is envisaged that such a project could involve a number of schools working in collaboration with a project consultant, to develop information transfer processes from the 'ground up'. For the most part we envisage that the project would focus on the development of electronic portfolios, however given that the priority is in the transference of student learning information rather than on the means by which it occurs, some project schools may wish to explore other ways of connecting teachers (such as by facsimile or paper based file transfer).

The participating schools would be required to engage in the development of transfer mechanisms and recorded feedback from recipient schools regarding the usefulness of the information transferred. The project outcomes could then be documented for dissemination to a wider audience.

Specific details of the project design are suggested as follows:

Project title	Action research to develop optimum methods of transferring student records information
Target participants	Small teams of teachers from government and non-government schools across Australia (Approximately 20 sites)
Purpose	To record insights related to the development and use of electronic portfolios and other means of transferring student learning information.
Duration	Approximately 18 months based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 1 – 2 months introductory phase to enable professional development for team members■ 12 months (a full school year) to develop and refine approaches to transferring learning information■ 1 – 2 months for each team to analyse feedback from intended 'audiences' and document their experience■ a further 2 months for the project consultant to analyse the project findings and document a final draft report.
Resources	Consultant fees and travel costs <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Professional development program

- Team support
- Analysis
- Reporting
- Team resourcing
- Teacher release
- ICT Hardware (Digital camera and scanner where required)

Outputs

A detailed report that outlines best practice models of the development and application of electronic portfolios and other approaches to transferring student records information derived from the experience of practitioners in a range of settings across Australia. The report would also provide specific advice regarding the future mainstreaming of electronic portfolios.

Recommendation

Recommendation three: In relation to the transmission of student learning information it is recommended that:

R.3.1. The Commonwealth seeks the commitment of government and non-government school authorities to promote the adoption of best practice approaches to gathering and transmitting meaningful student learning information.

7.1.3 Aligning school starting ages and transition points

School starting ages, and subsequent challenges to student placement in later years, is a key issue that has been raised throughout the project. Feedback from parents and teachers during consultations and comments derived from the project survey, continually stress the confusion and anxiety experienced by students and their parents as children move up and down year levels as they relocate from one State or Territory to another. With the apparent upward trend in interstate mobility, this issue will not go away.

This issue has been recognised at various times by education authorities in each jurisdiction. Most recently, Western Australia and Queensland have initiated policies to address specific needs within each State which have also enabled the respective school starting ages to align more closely with the other States and Territories. This

demonstrates that where the need is apparent, policy in this area can be changed. Ideally, the momentum established by two States and the findings of this project will not be lost and that, through collaboration at the MCEETYA level, a common starting age and a common transition point from primary to secondary school can be achieved.

It is recognised that there will be clear cost implications for State and Territory education authorities as a result of aligning school starting ages and transition points. The States/Territories that have seven primary - five secondary year levels would face capital costs in changing to six primary and six or seven secondary year levels. There may also be a cost to the Commonwealth in the restructuring of funding to States and Territories based on changes to the number of students enrolled at each year level.

The recent changes however, that have taken place in Western Australia and Queensland would suggest that these costs are not insurmountable, nor will they be ongoing. Furthermore, these costs must also be balanced by the 'costs' of inaction. With rising interstate mobility and the importance of social and emotional considerations being clearly prioritised by parents and teachers, this is one negative aspect of student mobility that may be resolved by action at a national level. Through collaboration between State and Territory education authorities a future date for common starting ages and transition points may be determined. From there each education authority will need to work backwards from this point to the present, to enable resource issues to be identified and costed.

As part of the collaboration on school starting ages and transition points, consideration may also be given to rationalising the terminology to describe the first year of formal schooling. At present, Kindergarten, Preparatory, Transition and Reception are all evident in various States and Territories as descriptors of the first year of schooling.

A similar approach may also be adopted for developing a greater consistency in relation to school curriculum and the manner in which it is assessed. It is not our intention for a curriculum 'straightjacket' to be imposed on education systems and schools across Australia. Rather, a common curriculum framework, derived from existing best practice across Australia, could provide the direction from which local (systems and schools) content could be developed. The first step in this process relates to developing consistency in nomenclature. Parents, students and teachers would all benefit from the application of consistent terminology where the names of curriculum programs and year levels carry the same meaning regardless of location.

In this sense, what is required is the next level of detail below the eight key learning areas identified through national agreement as listed in The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century:⁶¹

⁶¹ See <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/adelaide/adelaide.htm>

- the arts;
- English;
- health and physical education;
- languages other than English;
- mathematics;
- science;
- studies of society and environment; and
- technology.

Initially this may be achieved by building on existing commonalities to determine where consistencies already exist. It is only after this exercise has been completed that education authorities will need to collaborate on reducing the inconsistencies that may be apparent between each jurisdiction.

At the same time, a similar approach to achieving consistency is the means by which student learning is assessed, particularly in the latter years of schooling would be of great benefit to students. This approach would be particularly beneficial for students whose choices of further education, training or employment are, at present, potentially compromised through relocation.

Recommendations

Recommendation four: In relation to addressing the impact of student mobility through greater national consistency in school starting ages, the major points of transition, school curriculum and assessment processes, it is recommended that:

R.4.1 MCEETYA refers the consideration of these issues to the relevant taskforce to determine the practicalities and resource implications of the State and Territory governments adopting a common school starting age.

R.4.2 Through leadership from MCEETYA and collaboration between school authorities, subsequent consideration be given to achieving greater consistency in:

- (a) the major transition points in schooling;
- (b) the use of nomenclature (including the first year of formal schooling);
- (c) curriculum structures; and

(d) assessment processes.

7.1.4 Disabilities and impairments funding

The need for greater consistency is also apparent in the application of funding to support students with disabilities in accessing school curriculum. Although variations are particularly apparent in the level of resourcing applied to various disabilities across State and Territory boundaries, parents also reported inconsistencies within States and Territories where students move between different education systems, or across regions within the same system.

In order to foster greater continuity of learning for children in receipt of funding for disabilities and impairments, a two-staged process is proposed. Firstly, research is required to identify the costs and constraints of moving towards a more integrated national model. Education authorities need to understand comparative funding levels before consensus can be reached across each State and Territory. Again, the starting point in this research is a determination of existing commonality rather than a focus on the apparent differences.

By implication, education authorities will need to collaborate closely on approaches to funding disabilities and impairments in order to minimise variations that may exist from one State or Territory to another. Ideally, this will lead to a consensus view where agreement may be established between education authorities that will assure a period of transition in which the level of funding determined by one jurisdiction is matched to the same level by an education authority in another.

Agreement will also be required to determine the timeframe in which resourcing will be maintained, prior to a reassessment of a student's needs. This timeframe may be informed by determining a mid point within the existing national context. That is, although some education authorities reassess disabilities resourcing for individual students every year, others make determinations through cycles that extend up to three years. Consequently, a mid point determination of between 12 and 15 months may be a reasonable starting position for funding to be maintained after which, the level of resourcing for a given student may be reviewed as part of the normal procedures for the school system in which the student is enrolled.

Recommendation

Recommendation five: In relation to maximising consistency in resourcing access to the curriculum for students with a disability, it is recommended that:

R.5.1 Education authorities collaborate to identify comparative funding levels for students with a disability with a view to establishing an agreed position to ensure funding levels are maintained for a period of transition when students relocate.

7.1.5 Further research

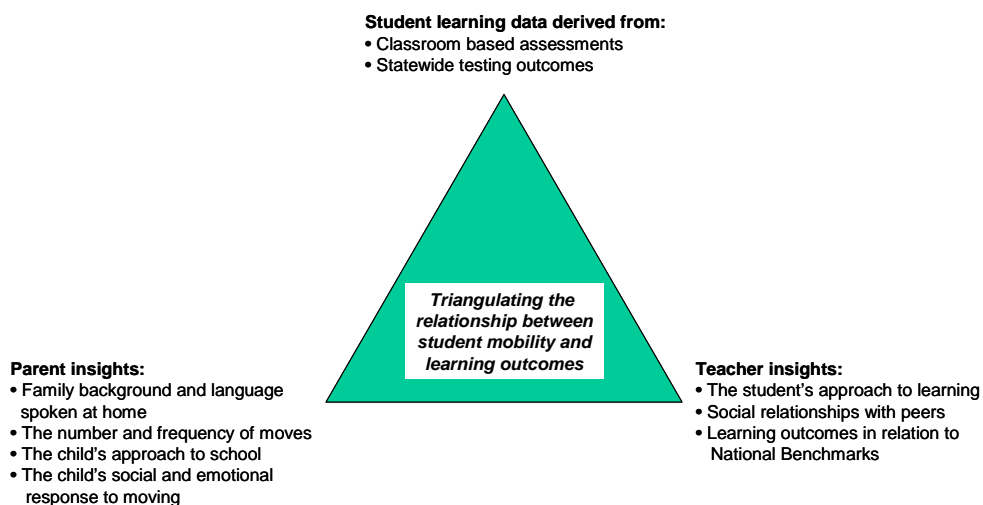
Consultative processes undertaken during the course of this project have secured a substantial body of qualitative information about student mobility and its relationship with student learning. This information has been generally substantiated by responses derived from the project survey. No data however, currently exists to triangulate student learning outcomes, teacher and parent understandings of individual student learning and levels and patterns of student mobility. For this statistical validity and quantification to be achieved, an intensive program of research will be required in which the learning outcomes of individual students (derived from teacher collected data and performance against National Benchmarks) is matched with the students' history of mobility derived from structured interviews with parents and teachers.

Further information from parents regarding elements of the child's education which may also have been influenced by mobility and the teacher's opinion regarding the child's approach to learning as well as learning strengths and difficulties, could then be used to draw together a complete and accurate 'picture' of the child's experience related to mobility and learning.

This approach will also provide the opportunity to examine the interplay between student mobility and other factors, such as language and family socio-economic status that are known to effect student learning. Furthermore, such an approach is more likely to yield data related mobility issues for specific demographic groups such as NESB students and Indigenous students.

This process for undertaking the research is illustrated in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2 Triangulating student mobility with learning outcomes and parent and teacher insights for individual students



The 'picture' of the experience of individual students in relation to mobility and learning, repeated across a whole school and then repeated across a number of schools, will enable clear conclusions to finally be drawn about the impact of mobility on learning outcomes.

Specific details of the research project design are suggested as follows:

Project title	Detailed research to further explore the relationship between student mobility and student learning outcomes
Target participants	Students (learning information), parents and teachers in 40 schools ⁶²
Purpose	To quantify the relationship between family relocation, student learning and issues that may impact on learning during family relocation
Duration	Approximately 12 months based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 1–2 months to make preliminary contact with schools to determine each school's sample (the number of families that have relocated more than twice in three years) and secure participation in the research;■ 6 months to conduct structured interviews with parents and teachers in each setting and track student learning data to correlate with each interview;■ 2 months to complete the data analysis; and■ 1 month to synthesise the project findings and complete a report.
Resources	Consultant fees to cover costs for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Liaison with research sites;■ Project team to conduct interviews and collation of learning data;■ Analysis and reporting;■ Resourcing;

⁶² Approximately five schools in each State and Territory including a mix of government and non-government schools and a variety of socio-economic and metropolitan/non metropolitan locations combined with targeting of specific demographic groups.

- Teacher release; and
- Travel and accommodation costs.

Outputs A detailed report which outlines the cumulative findings of the relationship between mobility, student learning and parental and teacher insights about the learning of individual students and the impact of family relocation.

It is worth noting that an opportunity exists to complement this research by enhancing the scope of an existing study. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth has been established to record an account of the experience 10,000 children in areas such as maternal depression, bullying at school and parental marriage breakdowns.⁶³ With a sample of this size, family relocation is also a factor that will feature as a component of the lives of some children in the study, particularly as one of the existing focus points of the study centres on how children cope with change.

Recommendations

Recommendation six:: In relation to additional research, it is recommended that:

R.6.1 The Commonwealth commissions a follow up research project to quantify the relationship between family relocation, student learning and issues that may impact on learning during family relocation;

R.6.2 The research project should be undertaken in a minimum of 40 schools to develop a cumulative body of data that builds on the learning outcomes of individual students and links this information with insights from parents and teachers;

R.6.3 The findings from the research are used to determine the priority locations or circumstances for the application of specific strategies to overcome the negative impact of mobility; and

R.6.4 The Commonwealth enhances the terms of reference for the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth to ensure that family mobility is identified as an element to be considered as part of the research.

⁶³ <http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minfacs.nsf/>