

Introduction

The impact of transition upon students and families can be shaped by positive and supportive responses of schools and other institutions. Preparation and management will determine whether the transition is a positive experience for students and their families.

The Joining the Dots Transition Guide for Schools aims to be a highly practical digital reference for new Transition Coordinators, as well as a valuable refresher for those who are already in the role. It will emphasise transition as a continuum, but will focus on Year 4 to Year 9 transition – preparation, transfer, induction and consolidation.

This guide was developed as a resource for educators and wellbeing staff that brings together current research, good practice and useful tools into one easily accessible cross-sectoral guide.

Complementing the Guide are a number of other resources developed through the Joining the Dots (JTD) project. More information on the JTD action research project and links to these valuable resources are enclosed.

For maximum benefit, it is recommended that you work your way through each of the sections, following the links where appropriate to deepen your understanding or to access practical tools.



The Nature of Transition

Primary to Secondary School transition occurs during a period of time in a young person's life that coincides with rapid physical, emotional, social and cognitive developments impacting on their connection to school and learning as a whole. An effective transition to and within secondary school is a key factor in determining whether young people remain engaged in education, complete secondary school and transition into positive career pathways.

School transitions can be stressful for many students, particularly for early maturing girls, low achieving boys, and students with more diverse needs. Poor transition can also negatively impact on academic outcomes (NAPLAN writing achievements appear to be negatively impacted by transition, with males being most negatively affected). The Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS) has identified that for numeracy, even when taking Year 3 NAPLAN score, gender, age and Socio-Economic Status (SES) into account, persistent emotional problems in Years 3-5 were associated with almost a year's loss of learning by Year 7. (see [Local Longitudinal Research - Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study \(CATS\)](#))

Dr Andrew Fuller, author of DET's updated [START](#) (Student Transition and Resilience Training) resource, has identified 8 key Predictors of Student Resilience, a key factor in student engagement in their schooling. It is important for both schools and families to have a clear understanding of these during transition:

Key Predictors of Student Resilience

1. **Adult connectedness** (teachers, parents, community members)
2. **Boundaries and expectations**
3. **Empowerment**
4. **School engagement**
5. **Positive values**
6. **Friendship and social skills**
7. **Community engagement**
8. **Identity**

Early adolescence is one of the times of maximal neuroplasticity. For young people, schools and parents, this represents a time of great opportunity. As the brain is already restructuring itself to be able to think in more sophisticated ways, it is a time to embed the habits and routines that will lead young people to maximise their intelligence.

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/VicSRCTransitionsProject_FinalReport.pdf



The Victorian Student Representative Council's Transitions Project 2015 Report identified the following key factors reported by students as best supporting an effective transition into and within secondary school:

- ensure students have access to strong support networks before, during and after transition
- align students' workloads so that the increase in academic expectations post-transition is manageable
- provide formal and informal opportunities that foster collegiality and friendship among students
- reduce the 'unknown' for students prior to transition wherever possible
- provide clear avenues for students to access information about their new school
- implement effective strategies to address bullying

Local Longitudinal Research - Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS)

Dr Lisa Mundy, Research Fellow and Project Manager, Adolescent Health

The middle years, from 8-14 years, have often been described as a phase of 'latency'. However, we now understand that this is not the case and the middle years are in fact a foundational period for development. Indeed, these middle years are a sensitive phase in social and emotional development, and a time when an individual's identity emerges. It is during the middle years that an individual begins to engage very differently with his/her social world beyond the immediate family.¹ These years are also the peak time of onset for emotional and behavioural problems; one half of all adult mental disorders have their onset by the age of 14 years with symptoms often appearing well before then.² We know there is a close connection between health and education during the middle years and particularly in the transition to secondary school. This phase of life also provides second chances for children who have been disadvantaged in their cognitive and emotional development early in life. Much of this new understanding of the importance of the middle years comes from studies looking at the effects of puberty.

Pubertal development commences in late childhood with major physiological development, hormonal cascades, marked physical changes and rapid changes in brain structure and function.³ Most of our understanding of puberty has focused on gonadarche, a process that begins at around 10-11 years of age. Gonadarche is associated with the production of the gonadal steroids (oestrogen and testosterone) and results in the development of secondary sexual characteristics and the ability to reproduce.⁴ Prior to gonadarche, a process known as adrenarche begins (at around 6-8 years of age) and brings a rise in adrenal androgens.⁴ Adrenal androgens lead to the development of axillary and pubic hair, as well as acne, particularly in girls. However, these physical changes may not be clear until well after the initial rise in adrenal hormones, making adrenarche difficult to study. This may be one reason for our lack of understanding of the process of adrenarche.



What is the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS)?

CATS is a unique study following a group of over 1200 children, across Melbourne Australia, through these middle years of school.⁵ The study began in 2012 when children were in Year 3 and approximately 8 years of age. To date, 8 waves of annual data collection have been completed with comprehensive assessments of health, school engagement, emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. The study is identifying which children are most at risk as they pass through puberty and the middle years, as well as identifying those children that manage the transition well. Ultimately, the study will identify factors that can be targeted in future preventive interventions. It is hoped the information collected will lay a foundation for educational and health policy and practice across the middle years.

What's happening for students during these years? ⁶

- 20% of children experience persistent emotional problems (like depression and anxiety) during Years 3-5. These children fall a year behind their peers in numeracy in the four years between Years 3 and 7 with similar, although smaller, trends in reading.
- Over 20% of students in Years 3 to 5 were bullied across two or all three years. These students fall nearly 10 months behind their peers in numeracy by Year 7.
- One in six students disengage from school during the late primary years and have lost a year's progress in numeracy compared with their peers by the start of secondary school.
- In Year 6, the top concerns students had about the transition to secondary school were: losing old friends, getting lost and homework.
- Using a brief 4 item questionnaire, Year 6 teachers are good at predicting which students are likely to encounter problems in secondary school, including losses in their learning progress.

What can schools and teachers do to support students?

- Promote the social and emotional development of students
- Support positive peer relationships
- Maximise and maintain student engagement
- Continue to develop and support parent engagement
- Improve the primary to secondary school transition experience

References

1. Patton GC, Sawyer SM, Santelli JS, Ross DA, Afifi R, Allen NB, et al. Our future: a Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. *The Lancet*. 2016;387(10036):2423-78.
2. Kessler RC, Berglund P, Demler O, Jin R, Merikangas KR, Walters EE. Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2005;62(6):593-602.
3. Patton GC, Viner R. Pubertal transitions in health. *Lancet*. 2007;369(9567):1130-9.
4. Dorn LD, Biro FM. Puberty and Its Measurement: A Decade in Review. *J Res Adolesc*. 2011;21(1):180-95.
5. Mundy LK, Simmons J, Allen NB, Viner R, Bayer JK, Olds TS, et al. Study protocol: the Childhood to Adolescence Transition Study (CATS). *BMC Pediatrics*. 2013;13:160.
6. Evans-Whipp T, Mundy L, Canterford L, Patton G. *Student Wellbeing, Engagement and Learning across the Middle Years*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2018.

For more information on CATS and access to resources, see <https://cats.mcri.edu.au/>

About the Joining the Dots Project

The Joining the Dots project is a long term action research project focused on increasing student engagement in learning across the inner north of Melbourne through improved primary secondary school transition practice. The aim of the project is to identify, implement and evaluate a transition model for young people, their families, the community sector and schools to ensure young people transition effectively from primary to secondary school, remain engaged in education and connected to their learning.

Why?

An effective transition to secondary school (Year 4-Year 9) is a key factor in determining whether young people remain engaged in education, complete secondary school and transition into positive career pathways. The 2010 Yarra Education Forum highlighted serious concerns about the number of young people getting lost in transition between regions and sectors. It was recognised that there was a local need to build the capacity of schools to better support young people and their families in this important phase. It was also identified that this could be best achieved through the establishment of a network where schools and local agencies could share their practice. In 2015, the Victorian Auditor General's Office Report entitled Education Transitions reinforced the dire need for improved primary secondary school transition practice and process.



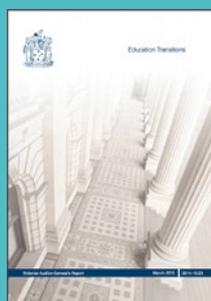
How?

The Project was a key initiative of the Yarra Youth Commitment, with funding support from two 3 year City of Yarra Investing in Community Grants (2012-2017). Satellite projects in Darebin and Moreland from 2015 deepened the work and resources. A strategic focus was maintained to build capability and awareness of the need for a well-supported transition between Year 4 and Year 9. The Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN) continues to coordinate the Project alongside a highly supportive and cross-sectoral Steering Group. Considerable in-kind support from the Steering Group and other key community members has greatly augmented the financial support received from the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET)/ School Focused Youth Service/Merri Health/Berry Street, Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) and the three City Councils of Moreland, Darebin and Yarra.



Education Transitions

<https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150318-Education-transitions.pdf>



What?

This action research project includes data collection, implementation of a number of professional learning opportunities, and development of a range of resources for schools, students and families:

- Transition Model developed incorporating five key dimensions for effective transition
- Transition Review Process (TRP) developed and implemented in 31 schools
- 12 professional learning events with 500+ participants from 130+ cross-sectoral organisations
- Satellite projects in Moreland and Darebin (2015-2019) enabled deeper work with four secondary schools and their communities
- Range of free transition resources developed for schools, students and families
- Development of a regional Transition Network to share practice and build local networks
- Annual collection of key data sets - DET, CEM and schools
- Joining the Dots Reports 1-3



Evaluation

An independent evaluation in 2018 found that the Joining the Dots project has had a number of significant impacts in the City of Yarra. This has been due to a number of interconnecting and highly strategic project elements, each of them playing an important role in raising the profile of transitions and improving the practice of schools and community agencies. The Evaluation Report outlined eight key recommendations, two of which were implemented in 2019 - the development of a digital Transition Guide for Schools, and the JTD Transition Network. The challenge remains scaling up the Project with limited resources.



Learnings from the Joining the Dots Project

While there are many pockets of good practice being delivered by passionate and dedicated educators, there remains a need for systemic improvement in resourcing and capability, as well as commitment to improving transition practice within and between settings and sectors. Without this, young people will continue to fall through the cracks and fail to reach their full potential.

The key areas identified for strengthening resourcing and practice are listed in the following table.

Activity

Before working through this guide, use the following checklist to establish how your school is performing.

Description	Performance rating			
	Emerging	Evolving	Embedding	Excelling
Organisation and Resourcing				
1. Recognition of transition as a whole school continuum including flow into, within and from the school				
2. The role of Transition Coordinator is adequately resourced, supported and embedded				
3. Succession planning is reinforced through continuity of the Transition Coordinator role				
4. Comprehensive transition practice and policy is documented, embedded and clearly communicated				
5. There is an effective structure/process for capturing and disseminating student data within and between settings to identify and support vulnerable students and their families				
6. Rigorous evaluation is conducted by all stakeholders to ensure that evidence is informing practice at all levels				
Sharing knowledge and practice				
1. Relationships between local primary and secondary settings from Government, Catholic and Independent sectors are strong and active				
2. Knowledge and practice is actively shared between settings				
3. Joint transition activities are developed, implemented and evaluated				
4. Opportunities are provided for teachers to gain an understanding of pedagogy and practice in other settings				
Family and Community Engagement				
1. Family and community engagement is a key priority area and is appropriately resourced				
2. Family and community engagement practice recognises the need for genuine engagement rather than involvement				
3. Relationships are built through effective multi-channelled communication between staff, students, families and the broader community				
4. There is a focus on strengthening the capability of the school to develop and work effectively in partnership with families, local community agencies and groups to provide wrap around support for students				



http://inllen.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Activity_School-Performance.pdf

Description	Performance rating			
	Emerging	Evolving	Embedding	Excelling
Student Engagement				
1. A 'Child at Centre' culture is evident				
2. All students vulnerable to disengagement are identified and supported				
3. Transition activities focus on building relationships with and between students and staff				
4. Effective wellbeing support for students across all year levels to address heightened levels of anxiety about transition				
Sharing knowledge and practice				
1. Student feedback is used to guide transition programs				
2. Student Action Teams focus on projects which enhance the transition experience for students				
3. Students reflect on and share their transition experience between year levels, sub schools and settings				
4. Peer support programs implemented within and between settings				

Summary

Utilise the table below to record a summary score for each of the key dimensions listed above.

Summary	Performance rating			
	Emerging	Evolving	Embedding	Excelling
Dimension				
Organisation and Resourcing				
Sharing Knowledge and Practice				
Family and Community Engagement				
Student Engagement				
Student Voice				

Transition Practice Improvement Timeline

Now that you have a sense of which dimensions need further support, the following timeline will help guide you through the process of strengthening transition practice and process in your setting. Note that although linear, out of necessity you will need to move both forwards and backwards in order to achieve your goal.



TPI Timeline

<http://inllen.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Transition-Practice-Improvement-Timeline.pdf>



The Joining the Dots Transition Model

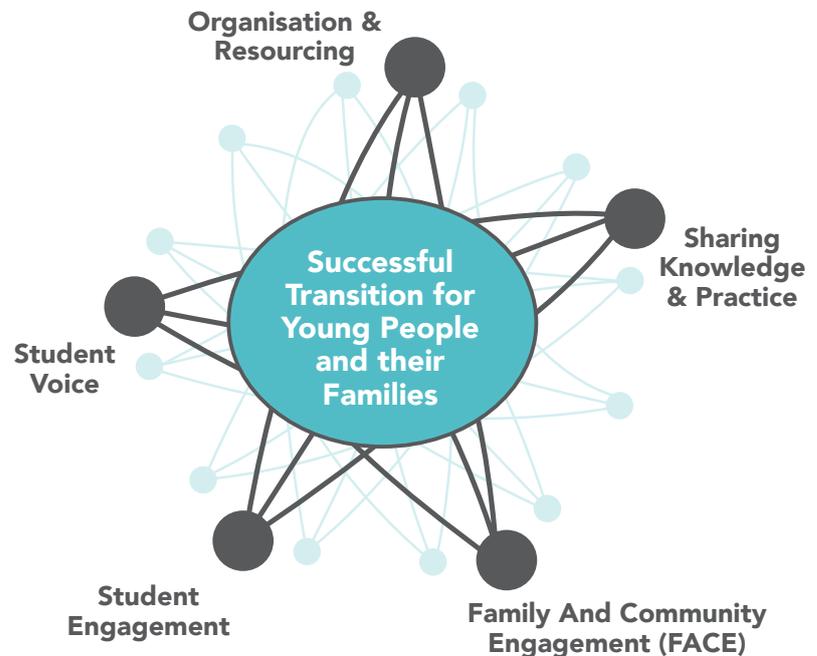
In supporting an effective transition to secondary school (Year 4 – Year 9), educators, wellbeing and other key staff, together with community agency workers, need to work collaboratively to ensure that a student and family centred approach is embedded in school policy and practice.

The Joining the Dots Project in Yarra culminated in the development of a model for transition. This model provides schools, agencies and networks with as useful framework which can be utilised in both evaluation of existing practice and planning for improved practice. The Project identified essential elements for an effective transition and these have been distilled into **five key interrelated dimensions**:



JTD Model

http://inllen.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/JTD-Transition_Model.pdf



Transition Dimensions:

1. **Organisation and Resourcing** - Organisations involved in transition using comprehensive evidence based approaches to embed and communicate effective transition practice, supported by intentional structures, processes and resources.
2. **Sharing Knowledge and Practice** - Primary and secondary schools working collaboratively and cooperatively to improve the transition experience of students and families
3. **Family and Community Engagement** - Student learning is supported by families and the broader community working in partnership with the school
4. **Student Engagement (Behavioural, Emotional & Cognitive)** - Students fully participating in their education. They feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to school, are intrinsically motivated and self-regulating, are well organised and socially competent
5. **Student Voice** - Students contributing to decision making about transition and collectively influencing transition outcomes by putting forward their ideas, views and concerns, and developing resources

Here follows some examples of strategies and actions that fall within each of these key dimensions, noting that they too are often interrelated:

Organisation and Resourcing	Sharing Knowledge and Practice	Family and Community Engagement (FACE)	Student Engagement			Student Voice
			Behavioural Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	
The JTD Transition Review Process implemented including the development of a comprehensive transition and engagement plan and transition improvement strategies embedded in the Annual Implementation Plan/ Annual Action Plan	Active participation in transition cluster / network, strengthening relationships, sharing good practice and working collaboratively on strategic actions	Learning partnerships with parents are developed and maintained	High expectations for attendance and punctuality	Every student has a strong, positive and secure relationship with at least one adult member of the school staff	Authentic student and teacher partnership in learning. A focus on project, organisation and time management skills	Student actively involved with parents/carers in exploration and choice of a good fit secondary school
Recognition by all staff of the importance of an effective transition into, through and out of the school for improved student life outcomes	Identifying, trialing, evaluating and embedding examples of good practice in own setting	Partnerships with appropriate community agencies to support staff, student and families during transition are developed and maintained	Early identification of non-attending students through clear and evident monitoring and follow up of absence	Learning environments promote positive learning & behaviour	Students are enabled to be independent, cooperative and self-regulating learners	Student feedback guides transition practice
A whole school approach with a dedicated Transition Team and Transition Co-ordinator who have sufficient capacity and access to adequate additional resources	Shared professional learning sessions and reciprocal building of knowledge between, within and across primary and secondary settings	Opportunities for parents to actively contribute to school improvement	Student participation in all school activities is actively monitored and followed up on	Social skills development is integrated into the curriculum	Students know and can articulate themselves as learners and take responsibility for their own learning	Student led forums focused on transition topics and discussions
Comprehensive and embedded transition practice that encompasses the four phases and five areas of transition	Reciprocal learning visits between settings	Parent engagement in curriculum activities	Transfer of attendance information between schools/ year levels/sub-schools	Transfer of individual student wellbeing information between schools/ year levels/sub-schools	Transfer of individual student learning needs information between schools/ year levels/sub-schools	Students reflect on and share transition experience between schools/ year levels/sub-schools
Comprehensive transition practice developed in partnership with families & students for support of students with a disability or vulnerable to disengagement	Shared understandings of classroom operation and practice between staff in local primary and secondary schools	Support for parent engagement in home learning	Attendance meetings and improvement plans utilised	Student learning and student wellbeing teams actively work together	Students set aspirational learning goals and they self-monitor and evaluate progress	Student Action Teams focus on projects which enhance the transition experience for students



Organisation and Resourcing	Sharing Knowledge and Practice	Family and Community Engagement (FACE)	Student Engagement			Student Voice
			Behavioural Engagement	Emotional Engagement	Cognitive Engagement	
Dedicated and comprehensive transition program for students and families transitioning part way through the year	Continuity between Year 6 and 7 in curriculum and/or assessment discussed between settings	Effective home school communication on transition	Multi-disciplinary support from within and outside of the school for individual non-attending students and their families	Monitoring of the wellbeing of all transitioning students, particularly those vulnerable to disengagement	Early identification of individual student learning needs and appropriate learning support provided	Student leadership opportunities
A focus on early intervention for transitioning students and their families	Agreements about enrolment and placement protocols	Inclusive transition information and materials	Students receive school and/or community based support if specialised intervention is required	Students receive school and community based support if specialised intervention is required	Building primary student understanding of secondary curriculum, pedagogy and expectations	SRC is active in the organisation of and feedback about transition activities
Build capacity of staff to better support all students and families during transition, with particular focus on vulnerable students	Agreements on student information transfer protocols established	Community conversations about transition are conducted regularly	Re engagement programs utilised	Targeted interventions utilised to prevent anticipated problems, and to respond to identified needs	Flexible learning options provided	Student led media production of transition materials
Documented and well communicated transition policies and procedures	Strategic activities developed between settings providing opportunities for Years 4-6 students to experience a secondary setting	Opportunities for parents to reflect on and share their transition experience with the school	Students know who to approach within the school for support and are confident to do so			Peer support programs implemented
Ongoing evaluation and improvement of transition practice and programs that is inclusive of all stakeholders (school, student, family and broader community)	Strategic activities developed between settings providing opportunities for Years 7-9 students to reflect on their transition journey and share this knowledge with primary students and families	Meaningful opportunities for parent education and upskilling		Primary student visits to experience secondary school in action	Careers and Pathways Programs that extend beyond Year 10 subject selection to Year 7 and primary school	
An effective structure/process for capturing and disseminating student data to identify and support vulnerable students and their families	Strategic activities developed between settings providing opportunities for Years 7-9 families to reflect on their transition journey and share this knowledge with primary students and families	Opportunities are provided for orientation visits with students and their families for students with diverse needs		Secondary student and staff visits to primary schools to share information about transition and answer any questions		

Secondary School Application Process by Sector

The application process for transitioning from primary to secondary school differs between sectors in both process and timing. Below is an overview of the process and key dates for each sector:

Sector	Catholic Primary Schools	Independent Primary Schools	Government Primary Schools
Student Year	Year 5	Year 5	Year 6
Application/enrolment coordination with secondary schools 1. staying within sector 2. moving to another sector	Generally direct approach by families to individual school of choice*	Generally direct approach by families to individual school of choice*	1. Primary School Coordinators 2. Generally direct approach by families to individual school of choice*
Open Days / Transition Information Sessions	Check with individual schools	Check with individual schools	Term 1/2
Year 7 Placement Packs distributed to families	Families source application packs directly from their secondary school of choice	Families source application packs directly from their secondary school of choice	Early Term 2 – packs are either distributed or information is provided to families on how to access
Applications open	Check with individual schools	Check with individual schools	Mid April
Applications close	Mid August	Check with individual schools	Mid May (29 May in 2020)
Notification of secondary school placement communicated to families in writing by primary schools	N/A	N/A	19 August 2020
Written placement appeals available			20 – 31 August 2020
Secondary schools advise outcome of written appeal			11 September 2020
Offer of Placement communicated to families by secondary school	Mid October – one offer only	Check with individual schools	N/A
Close of acceptances	Early November	Check with individual schools	
Statewide Transition Day – Secondary schools host and Orientation Day for Year 6 students	2nd Tuesday in December (8 December 2020)		

* Transitioning from a Catholic/Independent Primary School to a Government secondary

When students are moving from either Catholic or Independent primaries to Government secondary settings they need to use the Non-Government placement form (see below). Similar to the Government school form and process, families list up to three Government secondary school preferences and once submitted to the first preference secondary school, the onus is on the secondary schools to progress the preference process until a placement is completed. However, it is important to note that often it is the responsibility of families to source, complete and submit this form directly to the secondary school rather than the process being coordinated by their primary school. Of course, where possible it is highly recommended that all families are supported in their transition to secondary school, irrespective of whether they are staying within or moving between sectors. This will ensure that no families fall through the cracks. However, should a family not submit a placement form, they will be allocated a placement at their designated neighbourhood Government secondary school.

Families may apply for places in one or more sectors but should be encouraged to share this information with their Transition Coordinator, and be aware of the timing differences for application and acceptance.

To help families explore their local secondary school options, they should utilise **Find My School** <https://www.findmyschool.vic.gov.au/>. Should they be interested in a community school setting, it is valuable to mention that these schools are currently not included in the results of a search by home address.

Other Useful Links

Description	Link
Government Transition Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For schools • For parents 	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/participation/Pages/transition.aspx https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/going-to-school/Pages/year-6-to-7.aspx
Government Year 7 Placement Information Pack and Application Form (2020) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government primary to Government secondary • Catholic/Independent to Government secondary 	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/parents/Delayed-2-weeks-Year6toYear7transitioninformationpack-government.docx https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/parents/Delayed-2-weeks-Parent-Year6toYear7transitioninformationpack_nongovernment.docx
Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) Transition Information	https://www.cem.edu.au/Our-Schools/Choosing-a-School/Enrolment-Procedures.aspx
CEM School Search	https://www.cem.edu.au/SchoolSearch.aspx
Independent Schools Victoria School Search	https://is.vic.edu.au/