Linking Schools and Early Years Project Evaluation: Final Report on Data Collection Round 1

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Executive Summary

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project (LSEY) is being led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and funded by The R. E. Ross Trust. It is being implemented in three sites in Victoria. This report describes the findings from the first round of data collected for the impact/outcomes component of the evaluation, and process findings from the first full year of implementation.

The impact/outcomes data is based on surveys completed by parents/carers of children starting prep in 2008; from school principals; from early childhood education and care (ECEC) services; and from child and family services who provide health and human services to young children and their families.

Goal One

Goal One is 'children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about participation in and satisfaction with transition to school activities. School and service data includes information on transition programs and activities, and the importance of ECEC services in transition to school.

Across all sites:

Most parents (88 per cent) received information from the ECEC service about transition to school. The questionnaire asked parents to think about the time their child started school, if there was any information or support they needed but couldn't get. Around eight per cent of respondents didn't get all the information they needed.

- Around seven per cent of children across all areas did not participate in any orientation activities prior to starting school.

- Around 11 per cent of parents did not participate in any transition or orientation activities.

- All schools and ECEC services report running orientation and transition activities. More than half the ECEC services report that children attending their service visit schools as part of orientation.

- All schools receive visits from children and have their teachers visit ECEC services. Most offer an orientation day or night and information sessions for parents.

- Schools and ECEC services were asked to report on the importance of ECEC services in ensuring a successful transition to school. Both ECEC services and schools rate ECEC services highly in most domains.

- School and ECEC service questionnaires indicate that they of assisting children to make a smooth transition to school very seriously. Much of the energy spent on this appears to aim to inform and habituate children into school routines and rules.

Goal Two

Goal Two is 'early years services and schools actively connect with families'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about satisfaction with ECEC services and schools and parental contact with school. School and service data

includes information on the use of schools as a resource for child and family services and ECEC services.

Across all sites:

- Most parents thought their ECEC services provided useful information, were welcoming for parents, offered resources for parents and communicated who parents could speak with about concerns. About 23 per cent were neutral, and around eight per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed, that the service provided resources and activities for parents and carers

- Most parents were satisfied with the information they get from school about their child's experience and their relationship with teachers. Around 30 per cent of parents were neutral or unsure about activities and resources for parents.

- More than 90 per cent of parents reported the school requesting information about their child, while 80 per cent attended an interview at school during first term

- About 43 per cent of parents spend time at child's school other than picking them up and dropping them off. The educational attainment of parents appears to be a factor in whether or not they spend time at the school

- Five schools (71 per cent) reported that they make school resources and school grounds available to child and family services. ECEC services and child and family services were asked if they organised groups or activities in school grounds. Most services reported none of these activities occurring in the previous six months, but two child and family services and seven ECEC services had conducted 1-4 of these activities.

Goal Three

Goal Three is 'schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about perceptions of their child's experience of school and the school response to any special needs. School and service data includes information on school individualised learning programs; and on referrals between schools, ECEC services and child and family services.

- Parents were asked about their child's experience of school. The majority reported their child has positive experiences of school and positive indications relating to social and emotional development, conduct and prosocial behaviour. Around eight per cent agreed or strongly agreed that their child is unhappy a lot of the time, which may indicate emotional problems. (Note that these are very broad indicators. No standardised or validated instruments were used as child indicators are not included in the outcomes framework.)

- All schools offer individualised learning programs and most offer classroom-based health services. School principals rate the effectiveness of these programs highly

- All of the schools reported referring families to child and family services, and exchanging information about families with the services. In contrast, twenty four per cent of child and family services reported communicating with schools about families and 12 per cent received referrals from schools. This is probably an artefact of the sample in part. However, discrepancy between school and child and family responses may also reflect disparities in the perceptions that each has of the links between them.

- Qualitative data from the ECEC services and child and family services questionnaires indicate that children with additional needs face barriers in getting access to schools and to the services they need.

- Most ECEC services report that they exchange information about particular families with child and family services and refer families to those services. Most had received between one and four referrals from child and family services in the previous six months, and six had made more than eleven referrals.

Process findings

The process findings, based on data provided by the LSEY Project team and partnerships, indicate that there have been considerable achievements made in the first full year of implementation. The most important considerations and dilemmas facing the project are likely to be time, balancing inclusion with progress, and the historic and service context and relationships with existing programs.

Overall, there is a high level of satisfaction with schools and ECEC services from parents, and a high level of satisfaction with orientation programs and individualised learning from schools and ECEC services.

Similarly, the relationships between schools, ECEC services and child and family services appear to represent a solid foundation on which to build new and strengthened initiatives to ensure children arrive at school ready to engage. There is evidence of a strong service network, which should also represent a strong foundation from which to build activities around the project goals.

1   Introduction

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project (LSEY) is being led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and funded by The R. E. Ross Trust.

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

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

This evaluation is based on data collected from each of the primary groups involved in the project, and on contextual data on the communities in which it is implemented. The evaluation methodology is detailed in the evaluation framework (Appendix C).

Survey data is collected from:

- The parents of children starting school.

- School principals.

- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, that is, services whose primary business is delivering early education and care services to children in the prior to school years. For the sake of the project the term 'early childhood education and care' services refers to: kindergarten or pre-school, long day care and family day care

- Child and family services, including organisations, groups and agencies whose primary business is delivering health, family support, advocacy and advice services to young children and their families. Example of Child and Family services are maternal and child health, playgroups, pre-school field officers, neighbourhood renewal, libraries etc.

Contextual and process data will include:

- Local community demographic data

- School level data

- LSEY Action Plans

- School Annual Implementation Plans

- Partnership evaluation journals and attendance records

This baseline report describes the findings from the first round of survey data (impact/outcome findings) and process data based on administrative data collected by CCCH and provided to the evaluators. Process data describing project activities and achievements are presented for each area. Process findings for the project are presented as summaries of

key challenges and lessons from the reflections of project staff, qualitative data from the questionnaires and contextual data.

Information on service use and non-use by parents, and links between services and schools, is described in Appendix B: Supplement to Baseline Report—Service Networks. Parents were asked about use of family support, health and human services, and participation in playgroups and parenting groups. This section of the survey was drawn from the Stronger Families in Australia instrument, used by the national evaluators of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. Service use is an indicator of the needs of the population. If families need a service but cannot use them this may indicate an area in which improved provision or co-ordination of services is needed.

Links between schools and ECEC services, between schools and child and family services, and between ECEC services and child and family services can indicate how well services and schools connect with each other. Strong links should mean that services and schools have multiple ways of knowing about, and reaching, families. Although there is no necessary relationship between active networks between services and active engagement with families, they should facilitate this engagement through enabling co-ordinated planning and provision, communication, building service pathways and new groups and events.

2   Data collection

Primary data collection for the impact/outcomes component of the evaluation is from questionnaires distributed to parents, schools and services.

Parent questionnaire

The Centre for Community Child Health established a partnership with the Office for Children and Early Childhood Development to undertake a pilot of the proposed 2009 Primary School Nursing Program School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ), in each of the Linking Schools and Early Years project schools. All parents or primary carers who have children in prep at each of the eight LSEY schools received a package including:

- A plain language information sheet explaining the study's purpose and intentions.

- The 2009 version of the SEHQ.

- An LSEY Parent Questionnaire: a short questionnaire based around each of the Linking Schools and Early Years project goals.

Parents were asked about use of ECEC services prior to starting school; their child's and their own participation in transition/orientation activities; satisfaction with the ECEC service and school; involvement in school activities and events held in schools grounds; service use; and perceptions of their child's experience of school.

Schools and services questionnaires

Questionnaires were mailed to participating LSEY schools, and all ECEC services and child and family services in the LSEY geographic area in August 2008. A reminder postcard was mailed two weeks after the initial distribution.

 Schools were asked about their transition and orientation activities, links with ECEC and child and family services, and programs and activities to respond to individual learning needs. ECEC services were asked about transition to school activities, and links with schools and child and family services. Child and family services were asked about links with schools and ECEC services. This section describes the sample, links between schools and ECEC services, links between child and family services, schools and ECEC services and perceived effectiveness of transition to school activities.

This section of the report describes the data returned for the LSEY Parent questionnaire, including matched demographic information from the SEHQ questionnaire; schools; ECEC services; and child and family services. The SEHQ demographic data was made available to the LSEY evaluators by the Office for Children and Early Childhood Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Parent response rate and sample

The total response rate for the parent[1] questionnaire is shown in Table 2.1. There was an overall response rate of 72 per cent. Table 2.2 shows that 199 children are included in the sample, and more than 50 per cent are in the Corio/Norlane area.

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[1]   Parents or other primary carers completed the questionnaire. Respondents in this report are described as 'parents' for brevity. The majority of respondents were biological parents (Table A.6)

The demographic characteristics of the non-respondents to the questionnaire are unknown, and may be significantly different from the sample. It is important to bear in mind that those families who did not use an ECEC service or who are more disconnected from their schools would be less likely than others to complete the LSEY questionnaire, and so the most disadvantaged families may be non-respondents. However, while is not possible within the constraints of this evaluation to investigate further the characteristics of non-respondents, broad comparisons between the demographic profile of the areas (Sections 6, 11, 16) indicate the sample does seem to be representative of the broader populations. Moreover, while it is difficult to generalise between interventions, bias cannot be assumed from response rates (Day and Davis, 2006; Gerrits et al., 2001).

Table 2.1: Parent Response Rate

	N	Returns	Response rate (per cent)
Footscray	55	41	75
Hastings	70	49	70
Corio/Norlane	152	109	72
All areas	277	199	72

Table 2.2: Parent Sample

	N	per cent
Footscray	41	20.6
Hastings	49	24.6
Corio/Norlane	109	54.8
All areas	199	100

School, ECEC and child and family service response rate and sample

Table 2.3 shows the response rate, which was much lower for child and family services than schools and ECEC services. This could be a function of the fact that LSEY has not been in place long enough to be visible to services not directly connected to schools. Table 2.4 shows a high proportion of ECEC services from Corio/Norlane, similar to the parent questionnaire, but a similar number of school and child and family service respondents across the areas.

Table 2.3: ECEC, School and Child and Family Response Rate

	N	Returns	Response rate (%)
ECEC services	35	18	51
Schools	8	7	88
Child and family services	72	25	35

Table 2.4: ECEC, School and Child and Family Sample

	N	%
ECEC services		
Footscray	5	25
Hastings	1	5
Corio/Norlane	12	60
All areas	18	90
Schools		
Footscray	2	25
Hastings	3	37.5
Corio/Norlane	2	25
All areas	7	12.5
Child and family services		
Footscray	8	32
Hastings	8	32
Corio/Norlane	9	36
All areas	25	100

Table 2.5 shows the type of primary services and activities conducted by the child and family services. The largest proportion of responses nominated playgroups and parent-parent child groups, followed by parenting education course and programs, then family support services.

Table 2.5: Primary Services/Activities of Child and Family Services

	Footscray N	Hastings N	Corio/Norlane N	All areas N
Health (and allied health) services for children	2	0	1	3
Health (and allied health) services for adults	0	0	0	0
Health (and allied health) services for adults and children	1	1	0	2
Maternal and child health services	0	0	0	0
Counselling and/or mental health services	0	2	0	2
Alcohol and other drug services	0	0	0	0
Playgroups or parent-child groups	3	2	4	9
Housing	1	0	0	1
Disability services	0	3	0	3
Indigenous services	0	0	0	0
Migrant or ethnic services	0	0	0	0
Library/toy library/mobile library	1	1	1	3
Family/domestic violence services	0	0	1	1
Family support services	1	2	2	5
Parent education courses or programs	2	2	3	7

Due to the small sample size for schools and services, the questionnaire results are presented for the three sites overall rather than data presented for each site. Where there appear to be differences between sites these are noted but data are not presented.

3   Goal 1 All Sites

Goal One is 'children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school'. This section describes the findings from parent, school, ECEC and child and family services that relate to this goal, from across the three project sites.

Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about participation in and satisfaction with transition to school activities. School and service data includes information on transition programs and activities, and the importance of ECEC services in transition to school.

Parent experience of transition to school

The parent questionnaire asked if they had received information from the ECEC service their child attended on starting school, for example information on orientation programs or advice on how to help your child start school. Most parents (88 per cent) received information from the ECEC service about transition to school (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Parent Received Information About School from ECEC Service

| | All areas | |
	N	%
Yes	168	88
No	23	12
Total	191	100

Parents were asked to rate how useful that information was on a scale of 1-10. Table 3.2 shows that the average satisfaction rating was 7.5 out of 10.

Table 3.2: Parent Satisfaction with School Information from ECEC

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
All areas	182	7.5	1	10	2.219081

The questionnaire asked parents to think about the time their child started school, if there was any information or support they needed but couldn't get. Around eight per cent of respondents didn't get all the information they needed (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Parent Needed but Didn't Get Transition Information

| | All areas | | |
	N	%	Valid %
Yes	15	7.7	
No	180	92.3	
Total	195	100	98

Around seven per cent of children across all areas did not participate in any orientation activities prior to starting school. Table 3.4 shows that around half visited the school, and 44 per cent spent a half day or longer at the school, including short sessions over several weeks.

Table 3.4: Child Participation in School Orientation/Transition Programs

	All areas	
	N	%**
Visited the school	114	48
Half day or longer at school	102	44
Other*	1	.5
No	17	7

*One-on-one session with teacher for an hour
** Percentages may not total 100 as respondents could give more than one answer

The majority of children participated in at least one type of orientation program. In order to identify whether the demographic characteristics of children were related to participation, cross tabulations of language spoken by the child at home and Indigenous status were calculated. Most children who are Aboriginal or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participated in half day or longer at the school (not presented in table). The majority of children who speak a language other than English at home participated in an orientation activity, but around 40 per cent did not and the lowest number of responses was for taking part in extended transition activities over a half day or longer (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Child Participation in Orientation/Transition Activities by Language Child Mostly Speaks at Home

	English	Other
Visited the school	98	10
Half day or longer at school	98	2
Other*	1	0
No	9	5

* One-on-one session with a teacher

Table 3.6 shows the participation of parents and carers in transition and orientation activities. Most visited the school, including information sessions at the school and participating in classroom activities with their child. Around 11 per cent did not participate in any activities.

Table 3.6: Parent Participation in School Orientation/Transition Programs

	N	%**
Visited school	132	59.5
Information session at another service	44	22
Other*	3	1
No	24	11

*One on one with teacher
** Percentages may not total 100 as respondents could give more than one answer

School and ECEC transition programs

Table 3.7 shows the orientation and transition activities offered by ECEC services, as reported by ECEC services. More than half have children visit schools. There were five responses of 'other', including exchange of information folios, meetings between preschool and prep teachers, written information about schools provided to parents and visits to the kindergartens by school children and prep teachers.

Table 3.7: ECEC Transition/Orientation Activities

	All areas	
	N	%
Information sessions for parents	5	27.8
Children visit the school	10	55.6
Other	5	27.8

Table 3.8 shows the orientation and transition activities offered by schools, as reported by schools. All schools receive visits from children and have their teachers visit ECEC services, and most offer an orientation day or night and information sessions for parents.

Table 3.8: School Transition/Orientation Activities

	All areas	
	N	%
Orientation day/night	6	85.7
Information sessions for parents	6	85.7
Children visit the school	7	100
Teachers visit ECEC services	7	100
Other*	1	14.3

*Playgroup coffee afternoons for families

Schools were asked to rate, with a mark out of 10, the effectiveness of orientation and transition programs for all families, for disadvantaged or 'hard to reach' families and for teachers and schools. Table 3.9 shows that most schools rated the programs as similarly useful for all groups.

Table 3.9: School Rated Usefulness of Orientation/Transition Programs

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
All families	7	8.14	6	10	1.345
Disadvantaged families	7	8.43	6	10	1.512
Teachers and schools	7	8.43	7	10	1.397

Importance of ECEC in Transition to School

Researchers on the large *Starting School Research Project* (Dockett and Perry, 2007) found that the categories of knowledge, adjustment, skills, disposition, rules, family issues, educational environment, physical environment and family issues are consistently reported by adults (parents, school teachers and ECEC educators) and children as important to the transition to school. Schools and ECEC services were asked to report on the importance of ECEC services in ensuring a successful transition to school in the first six of these categories, where 1 was not important and 5 was very important. The purpose of this question was to identify the degree to which schools and ECEC services converge in their assessment of the importance of ECEC services. Dockett and Perry (2007) found that adults regard children's adjustment as a very important aspect of transition. Given this, it is interesting that the survey results show that both ECEC services and schools rate ECEC services highly in this domain,

and in most of the other domains as well (Table 3.10). It is also interesting that the domain in which both schools and ECEC services report the lowest mark for the importance of ECEC services is knowledge, which is categorised as important by less than five per cent of adult respondents in the *Starting School Research Project*.

Table 3.10: ECEC and School Ratings of Importance of ECEC in Transition to School

	Mean	Min	Max	SD
ECEC Rating				
Knowledge	3.5	2	5	1.043
Adjustment	4.89	3	5	.471
Skill	4.22	2	5	.808
Disposition	4.56	3	5	.616
Rules	4.11	3	5	.676
Environment	3.83	2	5	.924
School Rating				
Knowledge	2.86	1	5	1.464
Adjustment	4.86	4	5	0.378
Skill	4.43	3	5	0.787
Disposition	5	5	5	.000
Rules	4.14	2	5	1.069
Environment	3.71	2	5	0.951

The questionnaire asked schools and ECEC services about the effectiveness of their relationships with each other, on a 1-10 scale. Table 3.11 shows that schools had a higher mean rating, but there was a greater variation in scores from ECEC services.

Table 3.11: Rated Effectiveness of Relationships Between ECEC Services and Schools

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
ECEC rating	18	5.5	2	10	2.30
School rating	7	8	7	9	0.6

Schools and ECEC services were also asked an open-ended question, 'what else do you do to prepare children for school?' This question is based on the *Starting School Research Project* , which emphasises that 'readiness' is not a characteristic of individual children but a relationship and that schools and communities are each important to it (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Responses to this question from schools and ECEC services indicate that each takes the responsibility of assisting children to make a smooth transition to school very seriously, and that much of the energy spent on this is directed towards informing and habituating children into school routines and rules. This suggests that, as Dockett and Perry (2007: 188) argue, children 'still bear the brunt of readiness discussions and assessments'.

Answers from both schools and ECEC services described getting children used to school practices and physical environments, for example bells and classroom areas. They described providing parents with accessible and useful information via information packages and discussions. The aims and strategies of ECEC services and schools appear similar in many cases, for example:

Provide parent friendly information booklets – starting time, recess/lunch arrangements, readings for school, how the school supports individual needs. (School)

Promote school enrolment through information about schools, provide information to families on starting school, encourage parents to attend visits to school with our kinder visits (ECEC)

However, there is also some evidence that ECEC practitioners do not feel entirely respected by schools in that a few responses from ECEC services described lack of information from schools. There were no responses that described changing school or ECEC practices to better meet children's needs and no responses from schools indicating any effort to better align school with ECEC curricula. There were a few responses from ECEC services about aligning with schools, but these mostly focused on formal activities and life skills (eating packed lunches, resolving conflicts amicably).

4   Goal 2 All Sites

Goal Two is 'early years services and schools actively connect with families'.

Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about satisfaction with ECEC services and schools and parental contact with school. School and service data includes information on the use of schools as a resource for child and family services and ECEC services.

Parent satisfaction with ECEC services

The questionnaire asked parents to rate, on a scale of 1-10, their satisfaction with a number of the characteristics of the ECEC service they mainly used. Parents were also asked similar questions about the school their child is now attending. Table 4.1 shows that most parents thought their ECEC services provided useful information, were welcoming for parents, offered resources for parents and communicated who parents could speak with about concerns. About 23 per cent were neutral, and around eight per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed, that the service provided resources and activities for parents and carers.

Table 4.1: Parent Satisfaction with Primary ECEC Service

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral/not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The service provided me with useful information about my child's day	2	1.1	11	5.9	25	13.4	103	55.1	46	24.6
The service offered activities and resources for parents as well as children.	2	1.1	13	7	43	23.2	43	23.2	35	18.9
If I needed to speak to someone about my child, I knew where to go.	0	0	1	.5	10	5.3	92	48.9	85	45.2
I had a good relationship with the teachers/staff at the service	0	0	1	.5	16	8.6	85	45.5	85	45.5
The service is friendly and welcoming for parents	0	0	3	1.6	13	7	82	44.1	88	47.3

Table 4.2 shows that parental ratings of school were similar to ECEC services. Most parents were satisfied with the information they get from school about their child's experience and their relationship with teachers. Around 30 per cent of parents were neutral or unsure about activities and resources for parents.

Table 4.2: Parent Satisfaction with School

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral/not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My child's school provides me with useful information about their time at school.	1	0.5	9	4.6	24	12.3	109	55.9	52	26.7
My child's school offers activities and resources for parents as well as children.	3	1.6	2	1	58	30.1	85	44	45	23.3
If I need to speak to someone about my child's experience at school, I know where to go.	1	0.5	0	0	8	4.1	89	45.6	97	49.7
I have a good relationship with my child's teachers(s).	1	0.5	1	0.5	34	17.4	84	43.1	75	38.5
My child's school is friendly and welcoming for parents.	1	0.5	0	0	8	4.1	85	43.6	101	51.8

Parents were asked if the school asked for information about the child at enrolment, such as special learning needs, disability or health concerns, and if they attended an interview with the child's teacher during the first term of school. More than 90 per cent reported the school requesting information about their child, while 80 per cent attended an interview at school during first term (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Parent-School Contact During First Term

	All areas		
	N	%	Valid %
Information			
Yes	178	90.8	89.4
No	18	9.2	9.0
Total	196	100	98.5
Interview			
Yes	157	79.7	78.9
No	40	20.3	20.1
Total	197	100	99

Parental involvement at school

The questionnaire asked if parents spent time at school other than dropping them off and picking them up. Table 4.4 shows that about 43 per cent of parents spend time at child's school other than picking them up and dropping them off.

Table 4.4: Parent Time Spent at School

	N	All areas %	Valid %
Yes	84	43.1	
No	111	56.9	
Total	195	100	98

Parents with children already attending the school may be more likely to spend time at the school. They may already be involved in tuckshop or classroom activities, and familiarity with the school may mean they are more likely to know about events such as sports carnivals and cultural days. Table 4.5 shows that the smallest number of responses are from those whose first child is starting school, who also spent time at the school. However, the frequency of 'no' responses to spending time at school is similar for those who have had other children starting school and those for whom this is the first. Thirty two of the parents who did spend time at school (38 per cent) reported that this was their first child starting school, while 52 (62 per cent) had had a child start school previously. Of the 111 who didn't spend time at school, about half had had a child start school previously and half had not. This suggests that previous experiences of having a child start school makes a difference, but is not the only factor determining parental attendance at school.

Table 4.5: Parental Attendance at School by First Child Starting School

Is this your first child starting school?	Do you spend time at school other than pick up or drop-off?	
	Yes	No
Yes	32	57
No	52	54

As schools are often thought to be less welcoming to parents whose own experience of school was interrupted or unhappy, cross tabulations of parent attendance and education are shown in Table 4.6. The highest number of 'no' responses to the question asking if the respondent spent at the school other than drop-off and pick-up were those who had completed some high school, indicating that parental education does make a difference in their involvement at the school.

Table 4.6: Parent Attendance at School by Highest Level of Parent Education

Do you spend time at school other than pick up or drop-off?		Some high school	Completed high school	TAFE, Trade certificate, Diploma	University or CAE[1]	Other
	Mother					
	Yes	32	19	8	12	2
	No	58	19	9	10	1
	Father					
	Yes	36	6	15	8	1
	No	52	16	15	13	1

[1]Or some tertiary institute degree, including post university

Table 4.7 shows that reading or other classroom activity with children, and attending community or cultural events, were the activities with the highest response.

Table 4.7: Parent Activities at School

	N	%
Attending classes or groups	15	7.5
Attend parent committees/P&C	19	9.5
Work in the tuckshop	9	4.5
Reading or other classroom activity with children	38	19.1
Use the library	2	1
Attend community or cultural events	32	16.1

Schools and services were asked about the use of school grounds for community activities and events. Five schools (71 per cent) reported that they make school resources and school grounds available to child and family services. ECEC services and child and family services were asked if they organised groups or activities in school grounds. Table 4.8 shows that most services reported none of these activities occurring in the previous six months, but two child and family services and seven ECEC services had conducted 1-4 of these activities.

Table 4.8: ECEC and Child/Family Service Activities in School Grounds

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
ECEC	10	7	1	0
Child and family services	6	2	0	0

5   Goal 3 All Sites

Goal Three is 'schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children'.

Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about perceptions of their child's experience of school and the school response to any special needs. School and service data includes information on school individualised learning programs; and on referrals between schools, ECEC services and child and family services. Referrals between services and schools can indicate that families have multiple pathways to get the services they need.

Parent perceptions

Parents were asked about their child's experience of school (Table 5.1). The majority agreed or strongly agree that child is usually well behaved and does what adults request. This question is a broad indicator of conduct problems and is borrowed from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman and Scott, 1999). Most agreed or strongly agreed that child is happy to go to school on most days and has at least one good friend, and that their child will volunteer to help others (this is a broad indicator of prosocial behaviour, borrowed from the SDQ). Most disagreed or strongly disagreed that child is unhappy a lot of the time which is a broad indicator of emotional problems as 'many worries' and 'often unhappy, depressed or tearful' are questions on the 'emotional problems' scale on the SDQ. Around 8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 5.1: Parent Perceptions of Child Experience of School

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral/not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My child is happy to go to school on most days.	1	0.5	2	1	4	2	64	32.7	125	63.8
My child has at least one good friend at school.	3	1.5	1	0.5	10	5.1	73	37.4	108	55.4
My child seems worried or upset a lot of the time.	98	50.5	64	33	17	8.8	11	5.7	4	2.1
My child likes their teacher(s).	1	0.5	1	0.5	4	2.1	53	27.3	135	69.6
My child often volunteers to help others (e.g. parents, teachers, other children).	2	1	3	1.6	50	25.9	78	40.4	60	31.1
My child is generally well behaved, and usually does what adults request.	1	0.5	4	2.1	18	9.3	100	51.5	71	36.3

The questionnaire asked about parental satisfaction with the school's response to the special health, disability or learning needs of their children. Around 17 per cent of parents identified their child as having special needs (for example, disabilities or health problems). Parents who identified their child as having special needs were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-10, how satisfied they were with the school's response to those needs. Table 5.2 shows that most rated their satisfaction levels highly.

Table 5.2: Parent Satisfaction with School Response to Special Needs

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
All areas	77	8.7	6	10	1.2

School responses

The school questionnaire asked about the classroom and whole-of-school based responses to the individual learning needs of individual pupils and the school community. Table 5.3 shows that all offer individualised learning and most offer classroom-based health services. School principals rate the effectiveness of these programs highly, as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: School Individualised Programs and Activities

	N	%
Assessment and classroom tasks to meet individual learning needs	7	100
Community language programs	1	14.3
Classroom based health services (individual)	6	85.7
Classroom-based health services (group)	5	71.4
Cultural/community specific positions	3	42.9
Other	2	28.6

Other: A psychologist works at the school one day per week; her services are available to all students, parents and staff; class room aids developmental curriculum; Vietnamese Bilingual Program from prep to Year 3; classroom aides.

Table 5.4: School Rated Effectiveness of Individualised Programs and Activities

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
All areas	7	8	7	9	.577

Referrals between schools, ECEC services and child and family services

All of the schools reported referring families to child and family services, and exchanging information about families with the services. In contrast, twenty four per cent of child and family services reported communicating with schools about families and 12 per cent received referrals from schools (Table 5.5). This is probably function of the sample, in part. There are fewer schools than child and family services in each of the sites. In addition, many of the child and family services completing the questionnaire were playgroups, with which schools report fewer links than other services. However, there was also a high proportion of parent support groups in the child and family services sample, with whom schools report strong links, so the discrepancy between school and child and family responses may also reflect disparities in the perceptions that each has of the links between them.

Qualitative responses on the surveys also suggest a disconnect between perceptions of the effectiveness of networks between schools and ECEC and child and family services. ECEC services and child and family services reported children with additional needs face barriers in getting access to schools and to the services they need. A few responses stated that co-ordination between schools and services is needed but that links with schools are difficult to achieve.

Table 5.5: Child and Family Service Referrals to and from ECEC services and Schools

	N	%
Referred a child to an early childhood education and care service in the area	6	24
Received a referral from an early childhood education and care service	6	24
Received a referral from a school in the area	3	12
Communicated with a school about a particular family	6	24

Table 5.6 also shows a contrast between school and child and family service reporting of referrals. Most had received no referrals from schools in the previous six months, although four had received more than eleven.

Table 5.6: Child and Family Service Number of Referrals from Schools in Previous Six Months

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Requests for information	12	7	3	3
Referrals	17	4	0	4

Table 5.7 shows that most ECEC services exchange information about particular families with child and family services and refer families to those services.

Table 5.7: ECEC Reported Referrals to Child and Family Services

	N	%
We exchange information about particular families with these services	16	88.9
We refer families to these services	17	94.4

Table 5.8 shows that most ECEC services had received between one and four referrals from child and family services in the previous six months, and six had made more than eleven referrals.

Table 5.8: ECEC Number of Referrals to and from Child and Family Services in Previous Six Months

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Referrals to services	0	5	2	6
Referrals from services	3	10	5	0

6   Process Findings

The formative or process component of the evaluation focuses on the development and implementation of the LSEY project. It aims to:

- monitor the extent to which activities and services are delivered in the form envisaged in the project design; and

- help refine and develop the intervention through informing future implementation.

This section of the report describes the achievements and challenges of the partnerships in the first year of implementation, as indicated in the project team journals and other data. It also summarises key themes and lessons from these challenges, by relating them to research and evaluation literature on other community-based child, school and family interventions.

Activities and achievements

The focus of the first year of implementation in Hastings and Footscray was on building networks and relationships between schools, ECEC services and child and family services, especially those that are already working successfully with vulnerable or 'hard to reach' families. Activities and achievements include:

- The formation of local Partnership Groups. (Footscray, Hastings and Corio/Norlane)

- A peer exchange program in which Hastings prep teachers spent a day in a feeder kindergarten or ECEC service and an educator from an ECEC spent a day in the prep classroom. (Hastings and Footscray)

- Establishment of a Practitioners Network/Working Group designed to build networks between school, ECEC and community health practice and develop new transition activities (Hastings and Footscray)

- Forums attended by representatives of schools ECEC services, child and family services

  - Information sharing (Footscray)

  - Importance of the early years and the importance of each service in transition to school (Hastings)

- Schools running 'obligation free' activities (playgroups, story telling, arts and talent shows) for families to attend, to increase the accessibility of the school to families and make schools more welcoming to families. (Hastings)

- Building links between schools and community groups and locating community services (supported playgroup) in the school. (Footscray)

Corio/Norlane was a late addition to the project and has limited (and insecure) funding, and most of its activities were focused on the development of the area's Action Plan in the first half of the year and the formation of a large Partnership Group and smaller Working Group.

Each of the areas has implemented many of the activities planned in the 2008 Action Plan. There are planned activities still to be implemented in one of the sites.

Challenges and next steps

LSEY is an innovative project but its structure of community partnerships, and goal of improving the co-ordination of schools and services, shares similarities with other initiatives,

including the UK program Sure Start, Victoria's Best Start, the Australian Commonwealth funded Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and Families NSW. It also appears that some of the dilemmas and challenges facing the LSEY partnerships were also faced by those initiatives' practitioners and communities, so the findings from the evaluations are relevant. The most important of these are time; balancing inclusion and progress; and the historic and service context and relationships with existing programs.

Time

The LSEY project goals focus on the needs of children and families, and an important precondition of meeting these goals is the relationship between schools and services. Partnership groups have put a lot of energy into improving these relationships in the first year of implementation. This is important not just because schools and ECEC services need to know and respect each other's work in order to ensure children have a smooth transition to school. It has also been shown that educational attainment and social-emotional outcomes are affected by high quality ECEC and school experiences that are aligned and co-ordinated with each other (Bogard and Takanishi, 2005). Child and family services are often a vital resource for the most disadvantaged families, who do not use ECEC services. These services can also assist in making schools more accessible and welcoming to parents, which can lead to increased parent involvement in their children's schooling. Parental involvement has also been shown to be a strong factor in children's educational achievements (Schulting et al., 2005).

There are therefore two separate fields of activity, and both of them are more time-intensive than may initially have been anticipated. The first is building relationships between professionals and organisations, through forums and groups. Although there is a lot of enthusiasm and goodwill invested in these, the time taken in meetings and consultations is considerable. The second is building relationships with families, especially disadvantaged families, which is likely to take even longer. Partnership members are also busy, with limited time available to work on LSEY activities and planning.

The experience of Sure Start in the UK and Best Start in Victoria was that the time taken to set up and deliver new services was always longer than anticipated, and that improving access to vulnerable groups is often difficult to achieve. In the case of Sure Start, it took on average between 24 and 36 months for the full range of services to be offered, to have capital developments (new buildings) in place, and to be spending at their peak level, with some Sure Start Local Programs not fully operational in terms of spending until their fourth year (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004) The evaluation of Best Start found that engaging vulnerable families required flexible and co-ordinated practices, which required additional resources and focused on personal connections with families. (Raban et al., 2006: 234). The nature of the partnerships and the project's relatively limited resources (compared to some international initiatives) is also likely to have an impact on the pace of new activities being delivered.

There are several risks involved with the time needed to effect changes in practice and to improve the experiences of children starting school and their families. Initial enthusiasm for the partnerships could fade if there is no sense of achievements being made, and staff and organisational changes could slow momentum. It has already happened in one LSEY site that staff changes in some services have resulted in the departure of enthusiastic partnership members and new members starting with little knowledge of the initiative.

Balancing inclusion and progress

As with other community-based initiatives, the success of LSEY will come from broad-based participation in its activities and goals, and improved co-ordination and respect between all relevant services and agencies. A priority for the project has therefore been to ensure the engagement of each of the sectors. The evaluation of Families First in NSW found that active and sustained inclusion strategies in the planning and management of the initiative were important to its acceptance and take-up by different services. This required senior, middle and local participation in working groups and management; senior management support, leadership and champions; staff training; resourced local participation for representation from smaller agencies; and multiple forms of communication (Fisher et al., 2004)). However, strategies of this type also add to the time taken in consultation and planning, and so risks losing the enthusiasm of those initially involved. Two LSEY sites have had difficulty in ensuring continuous engagement from some ECEC services and child and family services, and this represents a challenge for planning ongoing activities. Without the engagement of these services the project is unlikely to be successful, and it is important that the strategies and activities are locally planned and responsive to the needs identified by each of the sectors. However, practical activities and achievements are needed to maintain and build on the enthusiasm of those who are already involved, and dedicating more time to consultation and attempts to engage new services could get in the way of this.

The experience of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy's 'Communities for Children Committees' was similar. While most interviewees in the process evaluation valued the committee and found that they had created mutual respect, most had difficulties in recruiting all relevant, especially families, representatives of disadvantaged populations, local business and ECEC providers (Stronger Families Stronger Communities National Evaluation Consortium, 2008: viii).

The evaluation of Best Start found that in some areas, rather than focusing on inclusion and engagement, 'the early emphasis was on "getting runs on the board" to establish the Best Start profile and to consolidate the partnership membership by providing service providers with tangible results.' (Raban et al., 2006: 55).

Historic and service network context

Existing relationships and the presence of other initiatives in the same area can be crucial to the success of new initiatives. In Corio/Norlane this has had a somewhat unusual impact in that a long history of initiatives in the area and the presence of a number of practitioners used to working with new initiatives mean that many more people attended initial partnership meetings than were anticipated. The history and presence of other initiatives in this area also means that there are strong existing relationships between individuals and agencies, and these could form a strong base on which to build new LSEY activities. In contrast Footscray has not had a Best Start coordinator since LSEY began, and the difference between this and other areas in terms of support and co-ordination is noticeable. Best Start itself was most successful when it built on already established networks. (Raban et al., 2006: 54)

A critical relationship for LSEY is the relationship between schools and ECEC services and this relationship can be fraught, as noted by US Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids project team: 'Teachers may not think that early care and education providers are professionals and early care and education providers may think teachers do not respect them' (Curtis and Simons, 2008: 182). In this context it may be useful to ensure that expectations

about lack of respect, or the past experiences of individuals, do not foreclose the potential of the partnerships. Group dynamics and activities appear in some cases to be very 'schools focused', which could also compound a sense that ECEC and other services are less central to the success of LSEY than schools. It is also often difficult to engage smaller agencies or less-resourced organisations and professionals. However, the results of the surveys published above indicate that schools do recognise the importance of ECEC services and child and family services.

7 Summary and conclusion

Child and family characteristics

The demographic profile of the areas and the demographics of the LSEY families are broadly similar, indicating that the families in the study are largely representative of the community. However, it is also important to bear in mind that those families who did not use an ECEC service or who are more disconnected from their schools would be less likely than others to complete the LSEY survey and so the most disadvantaged families may be excluded from the evaluation study.

Project outcome and preconditions

As noted earlier, there is strong evidence from both quantitative and qualitative questionnaire data that schools and ECEC services take transition to school very seriously, conducting a range of activities and programs to introduce both children and their parents to school.

There are areas where improvement seems possible, in particular around the project preconditions of ready schools, ready services and ready communities. The emphasis that schools and services appear to place on 'readying children' and their parents for school relates to the precondition of ready families, but changes to schools and service systems appear to receive less attention.

Project goals

Results from the parent, school and ECEC questionnaires are presented here as baseline outcomes data for each of the project goals. They relate to

- Goal One: 'children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about participation in and satisfaction with transition to school activities. School and service data includes information on transition programs and activities, and the importance of ECEC services in transition to school.

- Goal Two: 'early years services and schools actively connect with families'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about satisfaction with ECEC services and schools and parental contact with school. School and service data includes information on the use of schools as a resource for child and family services and ECEC services.

- Goal Three: 'schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children'. Parent questionnaire data included for this goal is from questions asking about perceptions of their child's experience of school and the school response to any special needs. School and service data includes information on school individualised learning programs; and on referrals between schools, ECEC services and child and family services. Referrals between services and schools can indicate that families have multiple pathways to get the services they need.

Overall, there is a high level of satisfaction with schools and ECEC services from parents, and a high level of satisfaction with orientation programs and individualised learning from schools and ECEC services. Satisfaction ratings can be useful as a broad indicator of areas that are doing well and those that could be improved, but they have inherent limitations. In

particular, satisfaction levels are a measure of the fit between an individual's expectations and their experience, rather than a measure of the quality of that experience. It is very difficult for initiatives such as LSEY to change satisfaction levels, but it is interesting to note the differences *between* the areas in which parents, staff and teachers were asked to rate their satisfaction. Given that, it is interesting that most parents were satisfied with ECEC services and schools, but there were areas in which a fairly high proportion were neutral or unsure, such as the availability of schools as a resource for parents. Participation in the school's usual transition activities also appears to be fairly high, although 10-20 per cent of parents do not participate.

Similarly, the relationships between schools, ECEC services and child and family services appear to represent a solid foundation on which to build new and strengthened initiatives to ensure children arrive at school ready to engage. There are existing relationships between schools and ECEC services, but for the most part these seem to be focused on information exchange rather than strategic planning or joint training and management.

There is evidence of a strong service network, which should also represent a strong foundation from which to build activities around the project goals. For example, child and family services report awareness of local ECEC services, and while most found out about them through other services more than 40 per cent found out through interagency meetings or management committees, suggesting an active service network.

Relationships between services of different types are crucial to LSEY and research shows that there are often difficulties in building and maintaining these relationships. It is often especially challenging when statutory universal services, such as schools, are attempting to build relationships with ECEC services and child and family services. Differences in size, resources, accountabilities and priorities can get in the way of effective collaboration. Mutual respect between teachers and ECEC practitioners is vital but it can be difficult to achieve: for example, teachers and practitioners may say that they respect the other but are not respected by them. As noted, the similar ratings from schools and ECEC services around the importance of ECEC services to transition to school is encouraging in this respect, as it suggests that both schools and ECEC services have similar views on the importance of ECEC services, and that schools do respect the work of ECEC practitioners.

Data will be collected in April 2010 and April 2012 for the outcomes component of the evaluation, so that changes in these domains over time can be assessed. Analysis of these changes, and other contextual and process data, will enable an assessment of the effectiveness of LSEY in meeting the project goals.

Appendix A: ECEC Service Use and Demographics

The LSEY parent questionnaire collected information on use of ECEC services, prior to starting school. Definitions of ECEC services from the Raising Children Network (raisingchildren.net.au) and Care For Kids Internet Services Pty Ltd (careforkids.com.au) were included in the questionnaire:

- *Long day care* is centre based day care that offers child care for at least eight hours a day for at least 48 weeks per year. Some long day care centres include preschool programs.

- *Kindergarten or preschool* run group programs for children of three and four years of age that are sessional and part-time.

- *Occasional care*: short periods of care for children under school age. Families can use occasional care on either a regular or irregular basis. Parents use occasional child care for a variety of reasons, including casual, shift-work or part-time work; respite care; crisis and emergency care, shopping or attending appointments

- *Family day care*: experienced family day carers provide care and developmental activities in their own homes for other people's children.

Table A.1 shows that almost all children had attended an ECEC service prior to starting school.

Table A.1: Attendance at ECEC Service Prior to School

	All areas		
	N	%	Valid %
Yes	194	97	
No	5	3	
Total	199	100	100

The type of ECEC service attended was long day care in the majority of cases (84 per cent of children) (Table A.2). Most attended between 11 and 15 hours per week (Table A.3). These hours are broadly in line with the average Australian attendance (in 2005) as most children in long day care attended between 10 and 19 hours per week and most children in preschool attended between 10 and 14 hours per week (cited in Blaxland, 2008: 36).

Table A.2: Type of ECEC Service Used

	All areas	
	N	%
Long day care	168	74
Kindergarten	12	3
Occasional care	16	7
Family day care	18	9
Care with relative	2	1
Care with neighbour/friend	5	2
Other	5	2

Table A.3: Average Hours per Week Spent at ECEC Service

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Footscray	12	11	2	24	6.8
Hastings	10	11	1	32	11.1
Corio/Norlane	13	14.86	3	36	12.2

Parents were asked if their child has any special needs (for example, health problems or disabilities). Table A.4 shows that around 17 per cent of the total sample responded yes to this question.

Table A.4: Does your child have special needs?

	All areas	
	N	%
Yes	32	16.7
No	160	83.3
Total	192	100
Valid %		93

Demographic information was collected on the SEHQ about the parent or carer completing the questionnaire and the child who is the subject of the questionnaires. Table A.5 shows that English was spoken at home by most parents in all areas but 34 per cent of Footscray responses spoke languages other than English. The primary specified languages other than English were Vietnamese (3 in Footscray); Chinese (Footscray, 5); Tagalog/Filipino (Corio/Norlane 3, Footscray 1); Macedonian (Corio/Norlane 3); Serbian (Corio/Norlane 3); Lao, Spanish, Greek, Hindi and Tamil.

Table A.5: Language Parent Mainly Speaks at Home

	Footscray		Hastings		Corio/Norlane		All areas	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	21	66	46	100	95	92	162	90
Other	11	34	0	0	8	8	19	10
Total	32	100	46	100	103	100	181	100

Table A.6 shows that most people completing the questionnaire were biological parents of the child, with only one response each of adoptive parent, step parent or other guardian.

Table A.6: Relationship to Child

	All areas	
	N	%
Biological parent	186	98
Adoptive parent	1	1
Step parent	1	1
Other guardian	1	1
Foster parent	0	0
Grandparent(s)	0	0
Other	1	1
Total	190	100

Respondents were asked about the people with whom the child normally lives, and were able to give more than one response. Table A.7 shows that the majority of children in all areas live with both parents.

Table A.7: Person with whom Child Normally Lives

	All areas	
	N	%
Both parents	125	45
Mother only	50	19
Mother and partner	8	3
Father only	6	2
Father and partner	1	.4
Sibling(s)	30	11
Grandparent(s)	3	1
Unrelated adult	1	.4
Other	3	1

** Percentages may not total 100 as respondents could give more than one answer

Table A.8 shows that more than half the children in each area are listed on a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card. Health Care Cards are available to adults receiving certain income support payments (for example, NewStart Allowance, Sickness Allowance, Partner Allowance, Widow Allowance, Parenting Payment (partnered), Special Benefit), or otherwise qualify as a 'low income earner'. However, children are only listed on Health Care Cards if they have significant health problems or disabilities. The responses to the question around children's special learning needs were lower than this, so it is possible that most of the responses are children are listed on pensioner concession card.

Table A.8: Child Listed on Health Care Card/Pensioner Concession Card

	All areas	
	N	%
Yes	116	63
No	100	37
Total	183	100

Most of the children's mothers were born in Australia across all areas (Table A.9).

Table A.9: Country in which Child's Mother Born

	Footscray		Hastings		Corio/Norlane		All areas	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Australia	12	39	39	91	85	83	136	77
Other	19	61	4	9	17	17	40	23
Total	31	100	43	100	102	100	176	100

Table A.10 shows the highest level of education achieved by the child's father and mother. The majority of mothers in all areas had finished some high school, and most fathers had completed high school across all areas.

Table A.10: Highest Level of Education Child's Parents Achieved

	All areas	
	N	%
Mother		
Some high school	92	53
Completed high school	38	22
TAFE, Trade Certificate, Diploma	18	10
University or CAE[1]	23	13
Other	3	2
Total	174	100
Father		
Some high school	91	55
Completed high school	22	13
TAFE or Trade certificate or Diploma	30	18
University or CAE[1]	21	13
Other	2	1
Total	166	100

1 Or some tertiary institute degree, including post university

Table A.11 shows that just over half of children for whom questionnaires are completed are boys; six per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Table A.11: Child Demographics

| | All areas | |
	N	%
Child's Sex		
Male	107	56
Female	83	44
Total	190	100
Child is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin		
No	184	94
Yes, Aboriginal	10	5
Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	1
Total	195	100
Where was Child Born		
Victoria	172	90
Elsewhere in Australia	11	6
Other	9	5
Total	192	100
Language Child Mainly Speaks at Home		
English	168	91
Other	16	9
Total	184	100

As the experience of school transition can be different for first-time parents, the questionnaire asked if this was their first child starting school. Table A.12 shows that about half of the parents responding have had another child start school.

Table A.12: First Child of Parent Completing Questionnaire Starting School

| | | All areas | | |
	%	N	%	Valid %
Yes	47.7	92	46.5	
No	52.3	106	53.5	
Total	100	198	100	99.5

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Appendix B: Service Use and Networks

Parent Data on Service Use and Non-Use, All Sites

The survey asked about use of family support, health and human services, and participation in playgroups and parenting groups. This section of the survey was drawn from the Stronger Families in Australia instrument, used by the national evaluators of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. Service use is an indicator of the needs of the population. If families need a service but cannot use them this may indicate an area in which improved provision or co-ordination of services is needed. Table B.1 shows the use and non-use of services for the child that is the subject of the survey. In all areas most services were not needed and not used, with the exception of GP services, which were used by a majority of children across all areas. Health and allied health services were among the service types with the highest responses of needed but not used: dental services, speech therapy and paediatrician. Table B.2 shows that waiting time was the highest response given for non-use of needed services

Table B.1 Service Use and Non-Use for this Child

	Not needed		Needed but couldn't use		Needed and used	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Playgroup or parent-child group	150	85.7	5	2.9	20	11.4
Maternal & child health nurse	150	85.7	2	1.1	23	13.1
Hospital emergency ward	150	85.2	2	1.1	24	13.6
Hospital outpatients clinic	154	88.5	1	0.6	19	10.9
GP services	45	23.4	2	1	145	75.5
Speech therapy	140	80	6	3.4	29	16.6
Dental services	96	54.2	9	5.1	72	40.7
Paediatrician	148	85.1	4	2.3	22	12.6
Other psychiatric or behavioural services (e.g. psychologist, social worker)	162	94.2	3	1.7	7	4.1
Other medical services	155	89.1	4	2.3	15	8.6
Other child services*	151	95	3	1.9	5	3.1

* Day care and Kindergarten, hospital for broken/fractured wrist, School holiday program, Optometrist, Child's Occupational Therapist, Kindergarten (listed three times), Speech and Learning therapy.

Table B.2 Reasons for Non-Use of Child Services Needed but not Used

	N	%
Too expensive	11	5.5
Too far away	1	0.5
Transport problems	9	4.5
Had to wait too long for an appointment	13	6.5
Hours available did not suit	3	1.5
Child care difficulties	4	2
Cultural or language difficulties	0	0.5
Other	3	1.5

The survey also asked about service use and non-use about family members other than the child who is the subject of this survey. Table B.3 shows there the highest response rate for services needed but not used was similar to that of child services in the previous tables, around five per cent. Table B.4 shows reasons for non-use of needed services. Child care difficulties had the highest number of responses, although there was a low overall response rate to this question.

Table B.3 Service Use and Non-Use for Other Family

	Not needed		Needed but couldn't use		Needed and used	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Parenting education courses or programs	160	90.9	7	4	9	5.1
Other counselling services	148	84.6	9	5.1	18	10.3
Parent support groups	163	93.1	5	2.9	7	4.0
Alcohol and other drug services	175	100	0	0	0	
Adult/mental health services	165	94.3	3	1.7	7	4
Migrant or ethnic resource services	170	97.1	3	1.7	2	1.1
Housing services	166	94.3	4	2.3	6	3.4
Disability services	167	95.4	1	0.6	7	4
Family/domestic violence or other violence services	171	98.3	0	0	3	1.7
Specialist medical services	154	88	3	1.7	18	10.3
Church or religious groups	154	88	0	0	21	12
Other family support services	146	94.2	1	.6	8	5.2

Table B.4 Reasons for Non-Use of Other Family Services Needed but not Used

	All areas	
	N	%
Too expensive	5	2.5
Too far away	3	1.5
Transport problems	1	0.5
Had to wait too long for an appointment	5	2.5
Hours available did not suit	4	2
Child care difficulties	6	3
Cultural or language difficulties	1	0.5
Other	3	1.5

School and Service Data: Service Links, Referrals and Partnerships

Links between schools and ECEC services, between schools and child and family services, and between ECEC services and child and family services can indicate how well services and schools connect with each other. Strong links should mean that services and schools have multiple ways of knowing about, and reaching, families. Although there is no necessary relationship between active networks between services and active engagement with families, they should facilitate this engagement through enabling co-ordinated planning and provision, communication, building service pathways and new groups and events.

Schools and ECEC services were each asked about their relationships with each other, aside from transition and orientation programs. All ECEC services reported links with schools. Table B.17 shows that the link most commonly reported by ECEC services was visits from school teachers, followed by information exchange. There was one

response each to joint planning and management activities, and joint training and education sessions. ECEC services were asked if they had links with other ECEC services, and all but one reported they did (not shown in table).

Four ECEC services report recording information on the schools attended after leaving their service. Services were asked why they recorded this information, if they did, and were able to give more than one response. The main reasons given were that it is a policy of their service to record this information (three services) and that the ECEC service uses this information for planning their orientation and transition activities (three services) (not shown in table).

Table B.1: ECEC Reported Links with Schools Other than Transition

	N	%
Our service is attached to a school	1	5.6
Staff/directors visit the school	9	50
School teachers visit our service	12	66.7
Our staff provide child profiles to the school	6	33.3
We exchange information with schools	10	55.6
We run joint training and education sessions	1	5.6
We conduct joint planning and management exercises with schools	1	5.6
Other	1	5.6

All schools reported links with ECEC services. Table B.18 shows that schools report similar links as ECEC services do, although all schools report visiting ECEC services while two-thirds of services receive visits from schools. Half the ECEC services report exchanging information with schools and all schools report exchanging information with ECEC services. This could indicate that schools have strong relationships with a proportion of their feeder ECEC services, but ECEC services do not have strong connections with all their feeder schools.

Table B.2: School Reported Links with ECEC Services

	N	%
Our school has a kindergarten	1	14.3
Early education and care services staff visit the school	4	57.1
Teachers visit early education and care services	7	100
Early education and care staff provide student profiles to the school	7	100
We exchange information with early education and care services	3	42.9
We run joint training and education sessions	0	0
We conduct joint planning and management exercises with early childhood education and care services	0	0
Other	2	28.6

Table B.19 shows that most ECEC services reported links with playgroups, maternal and child health services, allied health, psychiatric/behavioural services for children, parenting education courses/programs, parent support groups, migrant or ethnic resources services, disability services. The lowest reported number of links was with

services specifically for adults (AOD and mental health), housing services and church/religious groups.

Table B.3: ECEC Reported Links with Child and Family Services Types

	N	%
Playgroups or parent-child playgroups	10	56
Maternal and child health services	13	72.2
Allied health services for children	11	61.1
Psychiatric or behavioural services for children	18	100
Parenting education courses or programs	15	83.3
Parent support groups	10	55.6
Alcohol and other drug services	4	22.2
Adult mental health services	4	22.2
Migrant or ethnic resources services	12	66.7
Housing services	2	11.1
Disability services	12	66.7
Family/domestic violence or other violence services	7	38.9
Church or religious groups	1	5.6

The nature of links between services is also important: for example, services may attend the same interagency meetings and be involved in planning together, or they may primarily deal with each other with referrals or information sharing about particular families. Table B.20 shows that the types of links reported by the majority of ECEC services were receiving and providing general information and receiving and providing referrals, with more than 90 per cent receiving general information and making referrals.

Table B.4: ECEC Reported Types of Links with Child and Family Services

	N	%
We receive general information about these services	17	94.4
We provide general information about our service to these services	12	66.7
We exchange information about particular families with these services	16	88.9
We refer families to these services	17	94.4

Table B.21 shows that most ECEC services had received between one and four referrals from child and family services in the previous six months, and six had made more than eleven referrals.

Table B.5: ECEC Reported Referrals to Child and Family Services in Previous Six Months

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Referrals to services	0	5	2	6
Referrals from services	3	10	5	0

Planning, training and management activities can represent opportunities to work more collaboratively and develop strategic, 'big picture' relationships. In addition to their day to day links with each other, schools, ECEC services and child and family services were asked about these kinds of long-term activities.

Most ECEC services reported carrying out planning and information days organised or managed by child and family services (Table B.22). Most had attended between one and four such days in the previous six months and two had attended between five and ten. Most had not attended planning and information days organised or managed by schools or education authorities, although six had attended between one and four in the previous six months, and most had not organised events in partnerships with schools or education authorities. However, seven reported having organised activities, groups or community events in school grounds

Table B.6: ECEC Reported Planning, Training and Information Sharing with Child and Family Services, Schools and ECEC Services

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Planning and information child and family services	3	13	2	0
Planning and information schools	11	6	0	1
Planning and information other ECEC services				
Activities in school grounds	10	7	1	0
Partnerships with schools/EAs	15	2	1	0

Table B.23shows the reported partnerships and networks between schools and child and family services. Schools reported stronger links with other schools than with child and family services, and all reported attending planning and information days with other schools. In contrast, child and family services mostly reported no partnerships with schools or education authorities in the previous six months. However, around a third did participate in joint planning or training exercises, or conducted activities in school grounds (not shown in table).

Table B.7: Networks and Partnerships between Schools and Child and Family Services

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Reported by child and family services	16	8	0	1
Reported by schools	0	4	2	0

Table B.8: School Reported Links with Child and Family Service Types

	All areas	
	N	%
Playgroups or parent-child playgroups	2	33.3
Maternal and child health services	3	50
Allied health services for children	5	71.4
Psychiatric or behavioural services for children	7	100
Parenting education courses or programs	7	100
Parent support groups	5	71.4
Alcohol and other drug services	4	66.7
Adult mental health services	1	25
Migrant or ethnic resources services	2	40
Housing services	3	60
Disability services	4	80
Family/domestic violence or other violence services	5	83.3
Church or religious groups	6	100

The types of links reported by the majority of schools were receiving and providing general information and receiving and providing referrals, with 100 per cent receiving general information, making referrals and exchanging information about families (Table B.25).Two schools each reported making between one and four and between five and ten referrals to child and family services in the previous six months, and three schools reported making more than eleven referrals (not shown in table).

Table B.9: School Reported Types of Links between Schools and Child and Family Services

	All areas	
	N	%
We receive general information about these services	7	100
We provide general information about our school to these services	4	57.1
We exchange information about particular families with these services	7	100
We refer families to these services	7	100
We make school resources/grounds available to these services for activities and groups	5	71.4

The links between ECEC services, schools and child and family services, as reported by child and family services, are shown in the following three tables. There are a few notable differences between these reported links. Twenty four per cent of child and family services reported communicating with schools about families and 12 per cent received referrals from schools (Table B.26), as compared with all the schools reporting making referrals. This is probably a product of the sample as many of the child and family services completing the survey were playgroups, with which schools report fewer links than other services. However, there was also a high proportion of parent support groups in the child and family services sample, with whom schools report strong links, so the discrepancy between school and child and family responses

may reflect disparities in the perceptions that each has of the links between them. Table B.26shows that most child and family services reported communicating with families about ECEC services.

Qualitative responses on the surveys also suggest a disconnect between perceptions of the effectiveness of networks between schools and ECEC and child and family services. ECEC services and child and family services reported children with additional needs face barriers in getting access to schools and to the services they need. A few responses stated that co-ordination between schools and services is needed but that links with schools are difficult to achieve.

Table B.10: Child and Family Service Reported Links with ECEC Services and Schools

	N	%
Referred a child to an early childhood education and care service in the area	6	24
Received a referral from a school in the area	3	12
Communicated with a school about a particular family	6	24
Communicated with families about schools	11	44
Communicated with families about early childhood education and care services	16	64

Table B.27also shows a contrast between school and child and family service reporting of referrals. Most had received no referrals from schools in the previous six months, although four had received more than eleven.

Table B.11: Child and Family Service Reported Requests and Referrals from Schools in Previous Six Months

	0	1-4	5-10	11+
Requests for information	12	7	3	3
Referrals	17	4	0	4

Appendix C: Evaluation Framework

S.PRC
Social Policy Research Centre

**LINKING SCHOOLS AND
EARLY YEARS PROJECT**

**EVALUATION
FRAMEWORK**

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April 2008

1 Linking Schools and Early Years

The Linking Schools and Early Years Project (LSEY) is being led by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), Murdoch Children's Research Institute at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and funded by The R. E. Ross Trust.

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

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

- *Hastings:* Hastings Primary School, Hastings Westpark Primary School and St Mary's Primary School.

- *Footscray:* Footscray Primary School, St. Monica's Primary School.

- *Corio/Nolane:* Corio West Primary School, Norlane West Primary School and North Shore Primary School

A local partnership group will be established to guide the project locally in each project site. In partnership with the project team, each partnership group will conceptualise, develop and implement a set of local strategies and activities based on the stated project goals.

The evaluation will be based on data collected from each of the primary groups involved in the project, and on contextual data on the communities in which it is implemented. These are:

- The parents of children starting school.

- Schools.

- Early education and care (EEC) services, that is, services whose primary business is delivering early education and care services to children in the prior to school years. For the sake of the project the term 'early childhood education and care' services refers to: kindergarten or pre-school, long day care and family day care

- Child and Family services, including organisations, groups and agencies whose primary business is delivering health, family support, advocacy and advice services to young children and their families. Example of Child and Family services are maternal and child health, playgroups, pre-school field officers, neighbourhood renewal, libraries etc.

A project advisory group made up of experts in education and early childhood development has been established to oversee the project.

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1.1 LSEY outcomes framework[1]
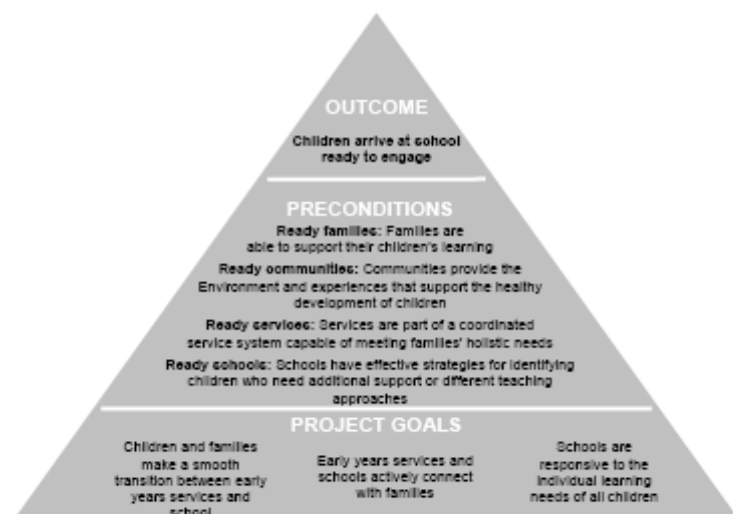
1.2 Project preconditions, goals and objectives

(This section and the diagram above are from the LSEY outcomes framework[1].)

The outcome for the project, that **children arrive at school ready to engage**, is the ultimate aim for the whole project. The overall outcome is the hardest to measure and requires the longest time to reach. Being ready to engage at school means that children have the social, emotional and learning skills and attitudes that will enable them to benefit from the school environment. In order for this to occur, a number of things need to take place before they get to school:

- They need to attend high quality early childhood services.

- Early childhood services and schools need to develop strong links so that children's transition to school is smooth.

- There needs to be support for children's learning from their families. This includes families being actively engaged in child and family services and being welcomed into school settings.

To achieve the ultimate aim, research suggests that certain outcomes or preconditions need to be achieved. There are four **preconditions** in the LSEY framework that contribute to the overall outcome outlined above. These preconditions or broad outcomes are also hard to measure and are beyond the scope and impact of the project.

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[1] Centre for Community Child Health (2007), *Linking schools and early years project: Outcomes framework*, Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

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The broad outcomes are:

- Ready families: families are able to support their children's learning. In order to achieve this outcome parents need to understand how they can support their child's development and learning in general and how their children's learning needs are met by early education and care services and schools.

- Ready schools: schools have effective strategies for identifying children who need additional support or different teaching approaches. Schools need to have a variety of strategies to meet the diverse individual learning needs of children.

- Ready services: services are part of a coordinated service system capable of meeting families' holistic needs. Families' general and parenting needs are met most effectively in an integrated child and family support service system.

- Ready communities: communities provide the environment and experiences that support the healthy development of children. Families and children are supported best when their local community has accessible local facilities (for example, libraries and community centres), opportunities for children to play and meet one another, and an overall child- and family-friendly environment.

The Project cannot have a direct impact on the overall and broad outcomes listed above. Three specific **goals** based on research evidence have been identified which are within the scope of the Project to measure, and which have been translated into specific **objectives**. Project sites will need to address all three of these goals, which are as follows:

1. Children and families make a smooth transition between early years[2] services and school.

This goal focuses on linking schools and early years services so that there is a seamless transition for children and their families. Research has demonstrated that transition points in children's lives can be challenging. Smoothing transitions will require dialogue and shared effort between early years services and schools.

2. Early years services and schools actively connect with families.

This goal is based on the research finding that the greater the parent's presence in schools, the more improvement there is in child school-related outcomes. Achieving this goal will involve reaching out to families in which children have not had any involvement in early education and care services prior to starting school. It will also involve trying to engage parents who had negative experiences themselves at school and helping them to support their child's learning.

3. Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children.

There is enormous diversity in children's experiences, backgrounds and learning styles when they start school. Schools that link with early education and care services, parents and child and family services prior to the start of the school year are in a position to develop tailored learning solutions.

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[2] For the purpose of this project the term early years services includes both early education and care services and child and family services (see definitions on p.1)

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2 Evaluation

Ilan Katz and kylie valentine from the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC), University of New South Wales will conduct an evaluation of the project. Evaluation has been built into the project model from the outset, and there is a clear intention to examine the effectiveness of the model and the potential for wider implementation.

2.1 Evaluation aims

The evaluation of LSEY will attempt to operationalise and measure the project goals, using the outcomes framework already developed by CCCH. See table 1.3

There are two overall aims of the project evaluation:

1. Measure the effectiveness of the Project model for:

   • Ensuring that child and family services, early education and care services, schools, children and families are better prepared for the transition between early education and care services and schools.

   • Strengthening connections between child and family services, early education and care services, schools and families, including hard to reach families.

   • Increasing schools' responsiveness to the individual learning needs of all children.

2. Understand the impact of the project on children's experience of their first years at school, and the likely long-term outcomes.

A fundamental concept underpinning the project is that in order for children to 'arrive at school ready to engage' the child and the family must be ready for school and the school must be ready for the child. In addition, the family and school are based in a *community* context and a *service delivery* context (early education and care and wider child and family services) which both also play an influential role in shaping factors that contribute to children being able to 'arrive at school ready to engage'. The evaluation will attempt to reflect the dynamic contributions that each of these factors make to ensuring that children arrive at school ready to engage.

The evaluation will be both *formative*—it will help to refine and develop the intervention, and *summative* – it will provide information on the effectiveness of the Project.

2.1 Methodology

The evaluation will have two strands: an *impact* evaluation which will look at the effect of LSEY on children, families, early education and care services, child and family services and schools and a *process* strand which will focus on the process of implementing LSEY in the three project sites. We will also examine contextual data which will give an indication of the nature of the communities in which the schools are based (Section 2.4).

2.2 Impact evaluation

The basic methodology of the impact evaluation will be to measure changes in the 'child and family readiness' (including service links and responsiveness to individual needs) of schools and early education and care services over the six years in which LSEY operates. It will also measure changes to 'school readiness' (including social, cognitive and emotional development) of children who enter the schools, although it

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is not anticipated that the project can have a significant measurable impact on these domains for individual children over the duration of the project. This component of the evaluation will consider the following questions:

- Has the experience of transition to school improved for children and their families over the life of the project?

- Have the connections between schools and families strengthened over the life of the project?

- Have the connections between early education and care services and families strengthened over the life of the project?

- Have the connections between early education and care services, schools and child and family services strengthened over the life of the project?

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

- In addition to LSEY, what other factors were involved in achievement of outcomes?

- Have there been unanticipated outcomes, positive and negative?

Data will be collected from families, schools, early education and care services and child and family services (Table 2.1).

2.3 Process evaluation

The process evaluation will assess the extent to which the project has been implemented as designed, and the internal and external factors that assisted or impeded implementation. With regard to the changes in service delivery and coordination the process evaluation will consider the following questions:

- Barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the project.

- Changes in processes and activities as a result of the partnership.

- The extent to which schools, early education and care services and child and family services have changed their operations to better facilitate children's transition to school.

In addition this component of the evaluation will identify the interactions between community context and the implementation of LSEY.

The methodology for the process evaluation will involve analysis of selected questions from parent, school, early education and care and child and family service questionnaires; reports provided by the project; and process evaluation instruments and other program documents and plans.

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Table 2.1 Evaluation summary

Project goal	Objective	Evaluation component	Data sources
Children and families make a smooth transition between early education services and school	To increase the understanding of children and their parents about the move to school	Impact	Parent questionnaire
	To increase the mutual understanding of how both the early education and care services and schools contribute to children's long-term outcome	Impact, process	School questionnaire EEC questionnaire CCCH journal
Early years services and schools actively connect with families	To increase the number of activities for parents in the school	Impact, process	Activity-specific evaluation Partnership workplans Child and family services questionnaire
	To increase the number of parents who report that they feel welcome and comfortable in their child's early education and care service and school	Impact	Parent questionnaire
	To increase the number of parents involved in their child's school, including 'hard-to-reach' families	Impact, process	Parent questionnaire School questionnaire CCCH journal Child and family service questionnaire
Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children	To increase the connections that schools have with early education and care services to discuss the children's learning needs prior to entering school	Impact, process	School questionnaire EEC questionnaire CCCH journal Partnership workplans
	To increase the responsiveness of schools to the diverse needs of students	Impact, process	School questionnaire EEC questionnaire Parent questionnaire Child and family services questionnaire CCCH journal Activity-specific evaluations

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Table 2.2: Data collection instruments

Instrument name	Instrument type	Completed by	Domains	Evaluation data collected	Data collection points
Parent questionnaire	Self-completed survey, distributed through school	Parent	• Early education and care history (inc. informal care) • Transition to school/orientation activities • Relationship with teacher/school • Service use and access to services	Impact and Process	1. Baseline (May 2008) 2. T2 (March-May 2010) 3. T3 (March-May 2012)
School survey	Postal survey	Principals	• Transition to school activities (inc. links with early education and care services) • 'Extended schools' activities • Links with child and family services (inc. referrals, information exchange, joint training and planning)	Impact and Process	1. Baseline (August 2008) 2. T2 (March-May 2010) 3. T3 (March-May 2012)
Early education and care services survey	Postal survey	Directors	• Transition to school activities • Links with child and family services (inc.	Impact and Process	1. Baseline (August 2008) 2. T2 (March-May 2010)

Instrument name	Instrument type	Completed by	Domains	Evaluation data collected	Data collection points
			referrals, information exchange, joint training and planning)		3. T3 (March-May 2012)
Child and family services survey	Postal survey	Managers	• Links with schools • Links with early education and care services (inc. referrals, information exchange, joint training and planning)	Impact and Process	1. Baseline (August 2008) 2. T2 (March-May 2010) 3. T3 (March-May 2012)
Partnership evaluation survey	Self-completed survey, distributed through partnerships	Partnership members	• Satisfaction • Degree to which implementation plans have been realised	Process	Annually
Partnership process evaluation	Group reflection, supplementary to annual consultation	Partnership members	• Barriers and facilitators • Effective program elements	Process	Annually
Other program documents and plans	CCCH journal; activity-specific evaluations	CCCH; project staff; partnerships	• Satisfaction • Degree to which implementation plans have been realised • Subjective changes	Process	Throughout project

2.4 Context study

In addition to information collected from families, schools, early education and care services and child and family services, it will be important to develop a detailed profile of each of the three LSEY communities and each of the eight schools. This will involve a demographic profile of the local population (for the purposes of LSEY we are defining the community as the suburb in which the schools are based), as well as data about school performance, availability and use of early education and care services, and links between schools, early education and care services and other services (family support, health and social services). These data will be drawn from Best Start planning, state surveys or ABS data if available.

The main source of secondary data will be the AEDI, which will be administered at baseline in 2008, in 2010 and in 2012 before the project ends. The unit of analysis for AEDI will be the school, the school level data will be considered within the context of the AEDI findings for the community in which the schools are located. However, because early education and care services do not map directly to schools, we will also do some analysis at the community level. Another source of demographic data is the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ), a parent report instrument that records parent's concerns and observations about their health and wellbeing. The evaluation team will only has access to the demographic data collected in the SEHQ.

In addition to the AEDI and SEHQ we will examine other available data sets such as children's attainment in those schools at the end of prep. Other data which measures health, emotional wellbeing etc will also be analysed if available at the school level.

2.5 Project management

The evaluation will be led by Professor Ilan Katz from the SPRC at the University of New South Wales. Ilan will be assisted by kylie valentine. The evaluation will be carried out as a partnership between SPRC and CCCH. The SPRC role will be to:

- Lead on the development of the evaluation framework, instrumentation and methods.
- Lead on the analysis of data.
- Report to the Project Advisory Group on the evaluation.
- Advise on and conduct necessary ethics procedures.
- Select control sites (if appropriate and in the light of resource constraints).
- Advise on indicator selection, tools and data sources.
- Provide regular Interim Reports and a Final report to CCCH.

The role of the CCCH will be to:

- Assist in the development of the framework and evaluation methodology.
- Coordinate ethics applications and requirements through the relevant agencies in Victoria.

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- Collect (or arrange to collect) primary data through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

- Arrange for data produced by the project (e.g. partnership workplans and activity-specific evaluation reports to be conveyed to SPRC for analysis.

- Assist SPRC in the collection of secondary data (e.g. Victorian health surveys, community strength survey etc).

An MOU will be signed between SPRC and CCCH which covers their respective roles and which addresses such issues as intellectual property, publication and ethics.

2.6 Reporting

Project reports will be provided on each round of data (October 2008, September 2010 and September 2012) and a final project report in February 2013.

Brief progress reports and reports on the context study will be delivered in September 2009 and September 2011.

2.7 Limitations of the evaluation

It must be recognised that the evaluation of LSEY will have severe limitations imposed on it, both because of the nature of the initiative itself and because of the resource constraints for the evaluation. In relation to LSEY itself, the main issue is that it is being implemented in only eight schools in three areas in Melbourne. This means that any findings will not easily be generalisable to schools more broadly. In addition all the schools have expressed a willingness and commitment to be involved in the project and are therefore committed to some degree to the project. Research in schools has shown repeatedly that the commitment of the school, especially the Principal and senior staff, is crucial for the implementation of new initiatives.

The second limitation of the evaluation methodology is that it will have no specific comparison data for analysis, and therefore the extent to which any changes can be attributed to LSEY will be difficult to measure.

Finally the resource constraints of the evaluation mean that it will depend largely on secondary data analysis and some action research conducted by the project staff, and therefore there will be less rigour in the method (especially in relation to process issues).

However, within these constraints the method described here will be robust enough to make clear judgements about the effectiveness of the LSEY approach, the barriers and facilitating factors relating to its operation, and its potential for wider implementation.

2.8 Timelines

The length of the LSEY initiative and the relatively small resource for the evaluation means that the evaluation activity will have to be spread thinly over the course of the initiative.

The evaluation will therefore focus on data collection at three points:

- Baseline (Defined as data collected in or before 2008).

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- Two years after implementation (early 2010).
- Four years after implementation (early 2012).

This will allow comparison across the different domains of the evaluation and will minimise the imposition on schools and agencies.

The final months of the evaluation will involve pulling together all the various strands and completing the analysis and reporting, so that the evaluation will end at around the same time as LSEY itself.

The main deliverables of the evaluation will be the completed evaluation framework; annual interim reports; and the final report (Table 2.3). Evaluation activities will be concentrated in the periods around data collection, and in finalising the research design in 2007-8 (Section 2.9).

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Table 2.3: Tasks and milestones

Task	Milestone	Accountability	Year	Month
Research design and ethics	Evaluation framework	SPRC and CCCH	2007	December
Data sources and instruments	Draft evaluation framework	SPRC	2007	December
Data sources and instruments	Final evaluation framework	SPRC	2008	March
Data collection (impact)		CCCH	2008	May - August
Data collection (process)		CCCH	2008	May-September
Baseline data analysis (process)		SPRC	2008	May-September
Data collection and analysis (context study)		SPRC and CCCH	2008	March-August
Reporting	Baseline report	SPRC	2008	September
	Progress report/team meeting	SPRC and CCCH	2009	April
	Interim report	SPRC	2009	September
	Progress report/team meeting	SPRC	2010	March
T2 data collection (impact)		CCCH	2010	April-May
Secondary data analysis (context study)	Progress report	SPRC and CCCH	2010	June
Data collection (process)		CCCH	2008	May-October
Reporting	Interim report	SPRC	2010	September
	Progress report/team meeting	SPRC and CCCH	2009	April
	Progress report	SPRC	2011	September
T3 data collection (impact)		CCCH	2012	March-May
Data collection (process)		CCCH	2012	May-September
Secondary data analysis (context study)	Progress report	SPRC and CCCH	2012	June
Reporting	Interim report	SPRC	2012	September
Reporting	Final report	SPRC	2013	May

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