

Educating Year Prep to 12 Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Western Metropolitan Region

Scoping Study Update

July 2011

Grant Thornton and the Western Metropolitan Region would like to thank everyone who has participated in the research, scoping work and data collection required for the “scoping study”. Contributions have been received very widely from a broad range of stakeholders and community members and the significant amount of information this has provided will enable the Minister of education to be well informed by the process.

This report is not intended to provide the full, detailed information arising from the work undertaken by Grant Thornton. This is still being prepared for presentation to the Minister for Education for his consideration. It provides an accurate and useful summary about the work that has been done, some of the information gathered and the next steps. It is intended to ensure that we have a public and transparent communication process about the work underway.

Specific questions about the information in this report should be directed to the Western Metropolitan Region Office at wmro@edumail.vic.gov.au or 9291 6500.

1. Context for this Scoping Study

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that, within its resources, students with an ASD are able to access the educational option that best meets their needs. This could include specialist autistic schools, mainstream schools with supports, specialist settings within a mainstream school auspiced by a specialist autistic school, special and special developmental schools, or any combination of the above. The Government supports a flexible approach to educating and supporting children in Victorian schools with an ASD.

As part of the Western Metropolitan Region's (WMR) Regional ASD Strategic Plan, a scoping study is being conducted by independent consultants, Grant Thornton, to inform prep to year 12 ASD educational provision in WMR. The outcomes of the scoping study, including all feedback from the community will be given to the Minister for Education for his consideration.

2. Approach

Literature review and research into current practice

In late 2010 the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) commissioned a review of national and international literature to highlight what constitutes better practice education for students with an ASD. This included research into the current range of Victorian options . The review considered the desired outcomes for students with autism, regardless of their educational setting. It provided insights into the current discussion as to the benefits and contribution differing settings provide to enable students to best achieve their desired outcomes. Finally, it investigates what practical, foundational supports are required to ensure education for students with an ASD is effective in the chosen setting.

Current Service Demand and Future Service Provision Analysis

Commencing in February 2011, a data analysis of current and future requirements for educating students with an ASD was undertaken for the Western Metropolitan Region. This involved understanding the current number of students with ASD, how this has changed over the past five years, and how this is likely change in the coming years based on population growth. The analysis also identified the educational settings in which students were being educated, and the location of these services relative to local governments areas in which families are living. This information will assist in informing what services are required where.

Community Consultation

Planning for the extensive community consultation commenced in March 2011, with a number of forums held in May. The purpose of the community consultation was to directly hear the voice of the WMR community, to understand what further supports and settings the community would like to see put in place to meet needs of prep to year 12 students with an ASD. This involved families of students with an ASD, schools in the Western Metropolitan Region (WMR), current program providers, parents' associations and lobby groups and the general public. A summary of key insights from the community consultation process are presented in section.

Options Paper

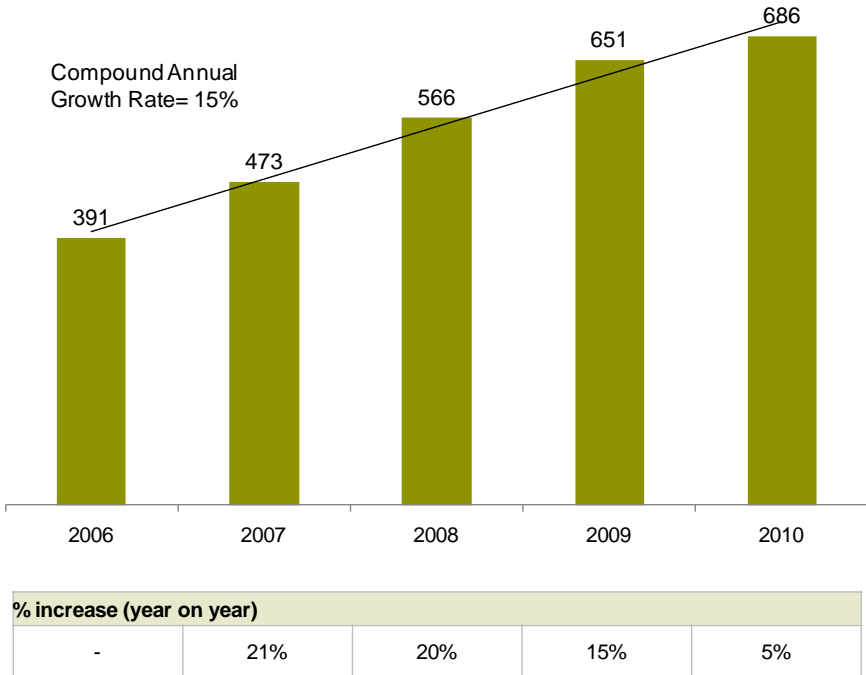
Based on the independent feedback sought through the community consultation process, and supported by the analysis of current and future demand for educating students with an ASD, an options paper is being prepared. The options paper will be provided to the Minister for Education. Grant Thornton are in the final stages of preparing the options paper and it is anticipated that this will be provided to the Minister in late July. The delay in the preparation of this paper reflects the extensive nature of the community consultation and the delay required by the 2010 Victorian election process.

3. What is the data telling us?

Please note, the following data analysis is specific to the Western Metropolitan Region and uses 2010 Program for Students with a Disability (PSD) data for students funded for an ASD as the primary disability only. For the purposes of presenting data, the term 'supported' has been used to denote this. It is recognised that all students with a diagnosis of ASD may be included in the PSD and there is a cohort of students with autism who have an intellectual disability identified as their primary disability. This has been considered by Grant Thornton in their broader scoping and options development work.

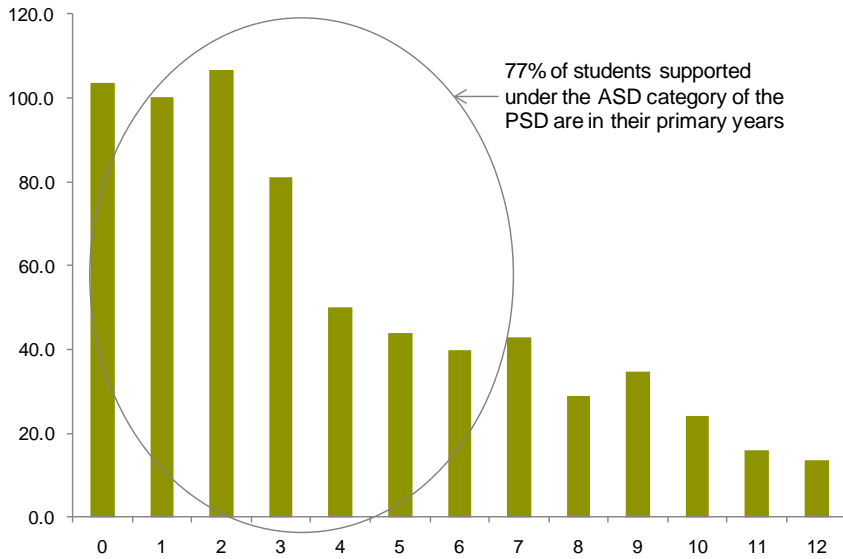
In the Western Metropolitan Region, the number of students supported with an ASD as the primary disability has steadily increased from 2006-10.

Figure 1. Students supported for an ASD in the WMR



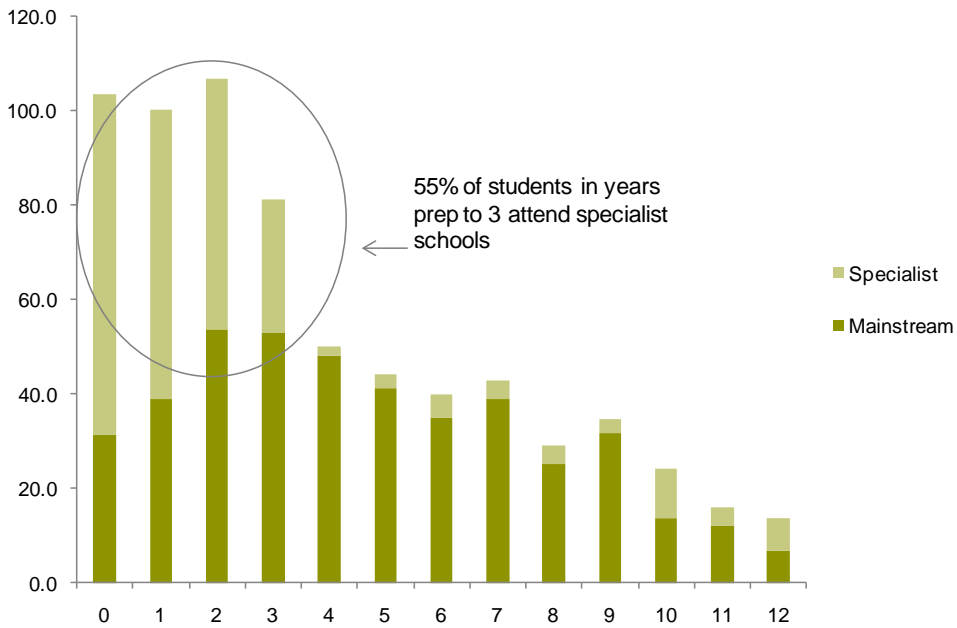
77% of students supported in WMR are in their primary years. In future years, increased pressure will be placed on secondary schools to provide for these students.

Figure 2. Students Supported for an ASD in WMR by Year Level



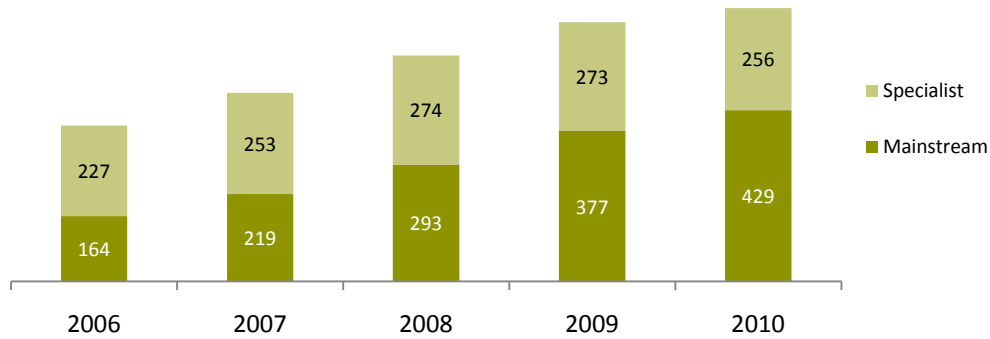
55% of students supported for an ASD in WMR in years prep to 3 attend specialist schools. Of those students in years 4 to 12, 86% of students attend mainstream schools.

Figure 3. Students Supported for an ASD by School Type and Year Level



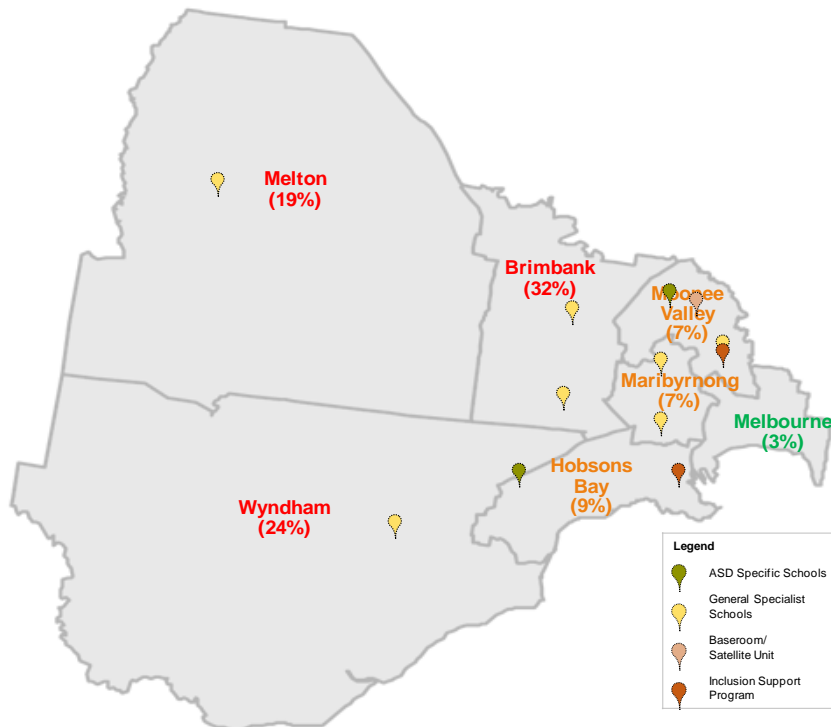
Mainstream schools in WMR cater for an increasing number of students supported under the ASD category.

Figure 4. Students Supported for an ASD by School Type



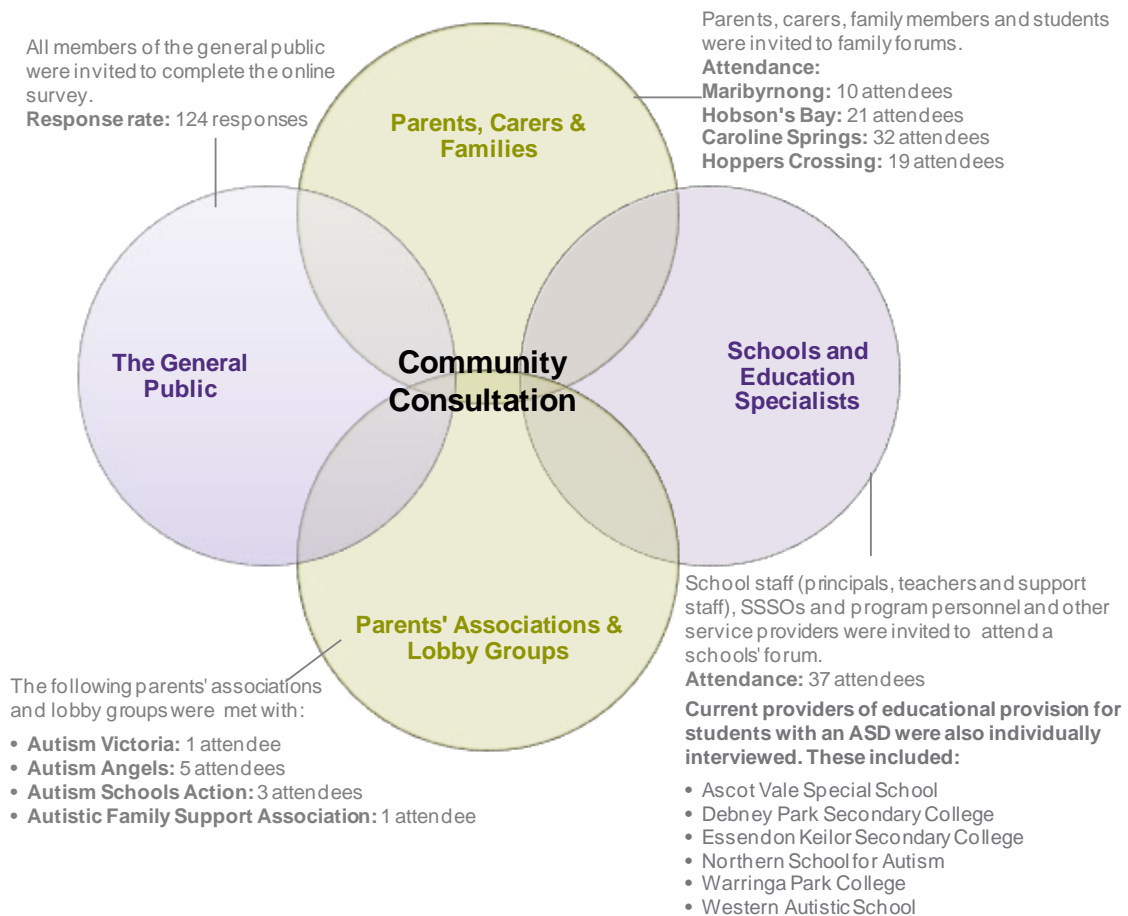
75% of students supported for an ASD live in the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Wyndham, Melton and Brimbank. In addition to services provided by mainstream schools and ASD specific support programs and outreach services, these LGAs today do not contain a relative proportion of ASD specific or general specialist support services.

Figure 5. Proportion of students supported for an ASD by student home LGA mapped against ASD specific / general specialist services locations



4. What does the community want?

An extensive community consultation process was undertaken, providing the community with the opportunity to provide direct feedback to the Minister, the Western Metropolitan Region and the DEECD on what is required for educating students with an ASD living in the region. The community consultation process provided the opportunity for over 250 parents, carers, families, school and education specialists, parent's associations and lobby groups, and the general public to provide their input into the scoping study. Below is a summary of participation in the community consultation process and a broad capture of the consultation themes. Individual comments and detailed submissions are not detailed here in keeping with privacy guarantees given at the meetings. The full comments of individuals, groups and forums will be provided directly to the Minister for his consideration, consistent with the undertaking given at the beginning of the process.



The following provides a brief summary of the broad themes arising from the community consultation process.

Many opinions were expressed by the community, encompassing a variety of views.

One of the most consistently expressed themes was the need for parents to have the opportunity to 'choose' the most appropriate schooling option to best meet the individual needs of their child(ren).

Whilst not universally supported, the following key themes were expressed by a significant number of respondents and consultation participants. These are listed below, not in order of importance,

- The need for a P - 12 ASD specific school. Concern was expressed at WMR being one of the only regions without a P-12 ASD specific school to achieve consistency across the state. Some parents also felt that more vulnerable students would be safer in an ASD specific school where they would not be 'different' and subject to bullying.
- The need to ensure mainstream schools can adequately meet the needs of educating students with an ASD. Value was placed on educating students alongside their mainstream peers and on the achievement of social outcomes.
- Support a P-12 ASD specific school, because this was the only option available to them, and that they would choose to send their child to a mainstream school if appropriate specialist supports were offered.
- The importance of parents having useful and current information to inform their choices about options and support available.
- The need to increase the choices for children when they leave Western Autistic School (WAS). Concern was expressed that children with an ASD would be unable to continue to access appropriate and intensive supports, unless they were enrolled in an ASD specific school.
- Concern that general specialist schools should have the capacity to cater specifically for students with an ASD. A common theme was the number of students with autism and intellectual disability and the need to make sure both forms of specialist schooling had the necessary expertise to meet their complex needs.
- The importance of support options for schools and children like autism coaches and teacher training.
- The need to consider other models of support in Victoria and internationally.

5. Next Steps

Grant Thornton has now finished documenting the feedback provided throughout the community consultation. With over 250 individual community members providing valuable input, significant work was involved in documenting responses and sorting through these to identify common themes being expressed by the community.

Whilst this took a little longer than expected, Grant Thornton has now completed the options paper. A briefing including all elements of the scoping study is currently being prepared for the Minister of Education. It is anticipated this information will be provided to the Minister towards the end of August.