Evaluation of Positive Partnerships — the DEEWR component of the Helping Children with Autism package

November 2010
Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
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Contents

Executive summary vi
Evaluation overview vii
Findings and recommendations ix

Chapter 1
Introduction 1
  1.1 Australian Government policy context 1
  1.2 The Helping Children with Autism package 2
  1.3 Development of Positive Partnerships 4
  1.4 Evaluation methodology 8

Chapter 2
Good practice in providing ASD education support for teachers and parents/carers 12
  2.1 Good practice summary 12
  2.2 Effective educational outcomes for children with ASD 13
  2.3 Effective professional development for teachers 19
  2.4 Effective parent and carer education 23
  2.5 Conclusion: providing ASD education support programs for teachers and parents/carers 27
  2.6 Jurisdictional overview of programs/services offered in states and territories 28

Chapter 3
Appropriateness of the Positive Partnerships program 29
  3.1 Establishing community need 29
  3.2 Appropriateness in the context of the identified good practices 30
  3.3 Achieving improved educational outcomes 32
  3.4 Effective professional development for teachers — good practices 35
  3.5 Effective parent/carer education good practices 36
  3.6 Sustainability 37
  3.7 Summary and conclusion 37

Chapter 4
Effectiveness of Positive Partnerships: Professional development component 39
  4.1 Expectations 39
  4.2 Increasing the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff 40
  4.3 Creating a national pool of teachers and other school staff equipped to share their knowledge and skills on ASD 47
4.4 Establishing professional networks among participants  51
4.5 Fostering an ‘autism friendly’ culture in schools  52
4.6 Summary and conclusion  56

Chapter 5
Effectiveness of Positive Partnerships: Parent/carer component  57
5.1 Expectations  57
5.2 Informing parents/carers about current, evidence based knowledge on ASD  59
5.3 Processes and strategies that enable effective parent, school and teacher partnerships  62
5.4 Equipping parents/carers with specific information and strategies  65
5.5 Summary and conclusion  67

Chapter 6
Efficiency of Positive Partnerships  68
6.1 Funding arrangements and expenditure (inputs)  68
6.2 Outputs  71
6.3 Benchmarking  73
6.4 Efficiency of Positive Partnerships  76
6.5 Summary and conclusion  78

Chapter 7
Positive Partnerships for the future  79
7.1 Ongoing need for Positive Partnerships  79
7.2 Possible improvements  81
7.3 Future organising models for the program  87
7.4 Recommendations  90

Appendix A
Evaluation framework  92
A.1 Introduction  92
A.2 Purpose of the evaluation  94
A.3 Audiences for the evaluation  94
A.4 Ethics  94
A.5 Risk management  96
A.6 Other matters  97
A.7 Conceptual approach  98
A.8 Appropriateness  99
A.9 Effectiveness  101
A.10 Efficiency  103
A.11 Data strategy  104
Appendix B

List of stakeholders consulted  110
B.1 Stakeholders consulted  110

Appendix C

Jurisdictional overview of ASD programs and services  113
C.1 Overview of jurisdictional arrangements  113

References  118
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism spectrum disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of Education, Employment and workplace relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoHA</td>
<td>Department of Health and Ageing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary

Evaluation overview

The Allen Consulting Group was engaged by DEEWR to undertake an evaluation of the Positive Partnerships program: the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package.

The evaluation framework identifies three criteria, which form the basis of the evaluation and the structure of this report.

- Appropriateness — considers whether the program is designed in a suitable way to target a particular problem or community need.
- Effectiveness — considers program objectives and desired outcomes compared with actual outcomes.
- Efficiency — considers the cost of program outputs relative to inputs. This includes comparing the efficiency of Positive Partnerships to other programs.

The evaluation used three main sources of information in evaluating the Positive Partnerships program: published literature, survey data and stakeholder consultation.

The purpose of evaluating the DEEWR Helping Children with Autism initiatives is to:

- assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved; and
- identify learnings and possible improvements that may inform decisions about the program’s future direction.

Achievement of objectives: summary of findings

Using the evaluation criteria as a reference point, the summary provided in Table ES 1.1 considers the extent to which Positive Partnerships objectives have been, or are being, achieved.
FINDINGS: EVALUATION OF POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation criteria</th>
<th>Does Positive Partnerships satisfy the criterion?</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships is an appropriately designed program responding to the increasing number of children being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the current deficit in knowledge about providing a learning environment that supports their achievement of good educational outcomes. It is evidence based and reflects good practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness:</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships has met or is meeting a number of its objectives. For those objectives that require a longer time frame to assess effectiveness, the evidence gathered suggests that Positive Partnerships is well placed to meet its stated objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships is achieving a reasonable level of efficiency. Its efficiency performance is comparable to two other programs assessed by the evaluation. However, based on stakeholder feedback and the evaluation's observations there are opportunities to further improve efficiency and value for money.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those responsible for Positive Partnerships have produced a high quality program, for which there was a demonstrated need. They have delivered the program well in a manner that leverages the use of experts but recognises the differences between the states and territories, and the school systems that operate within them.

Given these findings, the future direction of Positive Partnerships takes on particular importance. The evaluation has adopted a structured approach to forming findings and recommendations.

Positive Partnerships future direction: approach to findings and recommendations

Potential improvements to Positive Partnerships are considered in these steps, which form the basis for recommendations for the future development of Positive Partnerships:

- confirming the need for Positive Partnerships;
- considering the strategy for Positive Partnerships; and
- considering how the strategy could affect the program delivery model.

High level findings are summarised in Table ES 1.2.
### Table ES 1.2

**HIGH LEVEL FINDINGS FOR POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there an ongoing need for Positive Partnerships that justifies</td>
<td>Yes, based on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continuation of the program?</td>
<td>• increased prevalence among school age children;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• benefits of a national approach;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the knowledge deficit that exists and the lack of other programs that are addressing this deficit; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the high quality of Positive Partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should be the strategy for targeting Positive Partnerships if it</td>
<td>Broad coverage of the program to maximise the number of teachers and other school staff with at least a baseline of understanding of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is to achieve improvements in educational outcomes for students with</td>
<td>ASD and with the skills and expertise to work effectively with families in improving the educational outcomes of children with ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD?</td>
<td>Broad coverage of parents and carers of children with ASD to improve their relationship with their children’s teachers and schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the consequences of such an approach?</td>
<td>EITHER:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A significant increase in funding, which is unlikely to be feasible in the current climate. And would result in the model having logistical constraints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining national development and management but with changes in the delivery model:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• increase trainer the trainer local delivery approach;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• increase online delivery; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• introduce a whole school delivery model.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Allen Consulting Group

### Findings and recommendations

The evaluation findings summarised above are discussed in further detail in the following sections. They are presented as findings relating to the conduct of the program to date, and findings and associated recommendations regarding the future of the program.

**Appropriateness**

Positive Partnerships is responding to an established and growing community need. This need is based on the increasing number of children being diagnosed with ASD and the current deficit in knowledge about providing a learning environment that supports achievement of good educational outcomes for children with ASD.
Stakeholders are generally supportive of Positive Partnerships. There is widespread agreement that Positive Partnerships is timely and necessary. Stakeholders are supportive of the program having a national approach and endorse its organisation: both the performance of the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium and the collaborative organisation between public, Catholic and independent schools. Positive Partnerships has set a high benchmark for national delivery of professional development across these three education sectors.

While other ASD related information sessions, conferences and training are offered, they are either provided on a commercial basis (and therefore not widely accessible), are available sporadically, or are of dubious quality. The provision of a high quality, publicly funded program, established by well regarded experts and with the backing of the Australian Government was therefore seen as a watershed compared to the previous situation.

The content of the program — comprising the information contained in the folders, website and presentations — is the area that attracted the most consistent and strongest praise from stakeholders. This endorsement applied equally for both the parent/carer stream and the professional development stream. Stakeholders, including autism associations, view the materials as being an authoritative and practical guide for parents and carers of children with ASD. They frequently provide extracts to parents and carers. The website is also considered a rich source of information, which has a high level of currency.

Based on the good practices identified by the evaluation, Positive Partnerships is evidence based. It reflects, or has at least considered, good practice in the design and delivery of a program with its stated objectives.

Effectiveness

Positive Partnerships is effective in meeting its objectives. In making this observation, the evaluation notes that the input from stakeholders provided to the evaluation accorded with the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium survey results. Effectiveness is considered separately for the professional development workshop and the parent/carer workshop.

Professional development stream

The evaluation found significant evidence that the program increased the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff currently working with students with ASD.

Survey results indicate a significant improvement in self assessed professional development workshop participant knowledge after being involved in the workshop. Participants highlighted a number of strategies that were implemented in classrooms and schools, leading to positive educational outcomes.

The program is making progress towards developing a national pool of teachers and other school staff with knowledge of working with children with ASD and their families. However the program would need to continue for some considerable time to successfully achieve this objective on a wide scale. Beyond the current agreement with the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium, the Australian Government will need to determine if it retains the existing strategy for the program, or if it explicitly seeks to achieve broad coverage across the majority of schools.
Professional networks were strengthened through Positive Partnerships. However, based on consultation, some networks were stronger than others, and they tended to be stronger in regional areas than metropolitan areas.

There is evidence that Positive Partnerships has had some success in fostering an autism friendly culture in schools. The evaluation has identified the circumstances in which this is most likely to occur. To be autism friendly, a whole of school approach is required, including engagement of the principal and the ability of a special needs coordinator or similar to be empowered to implement good practice tools and strategies, such as those advocated by Positive Partnerships.

Additionally, it was significant that implementation of Positive Partnerships has been beneficial for students with disabilities other than ASD — many of the tools and strategies are broadly applicable. Specific examples included improved communication with parents/carers, transition planning and a commitment to maintaining individual education plans.

**Parent/carer stream**

One of the most successful outcomes of the parent/carer workshop has been the improved ability of parents and carers to develop partnerships with their child’s school. Learning of such processes and strategies has had a positive impact on the parents and carers, their children and the school environment.

Parents and carers were empowered by Positive Partnerships to raise issues with their child’s school in a constructive way using the techniques suggested by the program. They appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences with others. The evaluation team learned of a number of examples where parents took this action, which led to the school improving its performance in terms of accommodating the needs of children with ASD.

The workshop did improve the knowledge of parents and carers who attended. Prior to the workshop, 16 per cent of participants reported having either a good or great deal of knowledge on current evidence based approaches to their child’s learning, while after the workshop this increased to 68 per cent. The parent/carer workshop improved the knowledge of participants by a greater extent than did the professional development workshop, largely due to the parent/carer workshop participants having a lower level of self reported knowledge at the outset.

Parents and carers identified new ways to assist the learning environment for children with ASD. Tools that were cited as particularly useful included the use of the learning matrix and strategies for dealing with specific issues that are frequently confronted by parents and carers of children with ASD, such as those discussed on the second day of the workshop.

While the interaction between parents and carers during workshops was clearly viewed as a strength of the program, the extent to which these networks were sustained varied, with some more successful than others.
The key local facilitator has a lead role in working to develop and maintain the network. The key local facilitator role presented more challenges than that of the key local professional role undertaken in the professional development workshops. Key local facilitators were often drawn from the parent/carer group, with some key local facilitators reporting that this was a significant additional responsibility. Some key local facilitators found there was a limited response from participants for face to face networking. In some instances a parent network already existed and these continued on and were not altered significantly by Positive Partnerships.

**Efficiency**

The efficiency evaluation took into account feedback from stakeholders, including the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium, analysis of Positive Partnerships financial information, comparison with two other programs and the observations of the evaluation team.

Comparison with other programs indicates that Positive Partnerships is substantially as efficient as these programs, although opportunities for cost reductions and improved efficiency were identified through stakeholder consultation.

Based on observations of the evaluation team and feedback from stakeholders, it is apparent that Positive Partnerships could be delivered for less cost, or for the same cost to more people. The number of facilitators is generous, and central administrative costs for the final year of the program are relatively high, even allowing for evaluation and hand over arrangements.

If efficiency can be improved further, more people will be exposed to the benefits of the program for either the same, or a reduced level of funding. This is consistent with the overall direction of the evaluation’s recommendations.

**Positive Partnerships in the future**

The evaluation finds:

• there is an ongoing need for a program such as Positive Partnerships for these reasons:
  – there is an increasing prevalence of school aged children being diagnosed with ASD;
  – there are likely to be educational benefits to children with ASD from a nationally consistent approach to professional development and parent/carer workshops and content management;
  – there is a knowledge deficit in schools relating to teaching children with ASD, which reflects teacher training and an ongoing trend towards children with ASD being educated in mainstream settings;

• there is a case for further public investment in the program and it is appropriate that this be provided by the Australian Government;

• a broad coverage strategy is appropriate to ensure the maximum number of children with ASD achieve their educational potential. This will require alterations to program delivery. Not only would significant additional funding be required, there are practical constraints on the extent to which broad coverage can be achieved through the existing model; and
• the opportunities for amending the delivery model (which are not mutually exclusive and which could be applied if a targeted strategy continued) include a train the trainer approach to local delivery of the program, increasing online delivery, a focus on whole school delivery and module based delivery.

Overall, the evaluation considers that Positive Partnerships, or a program with similar objectives, is needed. This need is based on the increasing number of children being diagnosed with ASD, the deficit in knowledge about delivering good educational outcomes for children with ASD that exists at present, the high quality of the materials currently being delivered by Positive Partnerships, and the benefits of a national approach.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Positive Partnerships continue beyond the current agreement with the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium.

It is recommended that Positive Partnerships adopts a model based on broad coverage — meaning that the program seeks to reach as many of those who would benefit from the program as possible, while being accompanied by quality assurance mechanisms to maintain the quality of the information and training provided.

It is recommended that in adopting this model, there are clear targets relating to the coverage of Positive Partnerships and the percentage of teachers/school staff that need to attend if there is to be a significant impact on educational outcomes nationally.

It is recommended that the delivery model be altered to enable this model to be practical and affordable.

It is recommended that the alterations to the delivery model include the following features:

• Retain national development/maintenance of materials — making efficient use of subject matter experts, minimising duplication of development costs and ensuring national consistency in materials which reduces confusion for teachers, other school staff and for parents and carers of children with ASD.

• Train the trainer local delivery — which would involve Positive Partnerships training more people locally to deliver the program and providing them with support to do so.

• Increasing online delivery — increase the proportion of online delivery relative to face to face for the professional development workshop.

• Whole school delivery — a modified version of the professional development workshop be presented in schools, which could be a stand alone offering for school staff generally, or targeted specifically at those in leadership positions.

• Module based delivery — the modules could be offered as individual sessions of shorter duration (half a day to a day each). It would be possible for someone to undertake all modules separately and receive a certificate of completion.

It is recommended that the program is provided nationally with Australian Government funding. Public funding marks an important recognition from government about the need for greater support in delivering improved educational outcomes for children with disability.
It is recommended that Positive Partnerships continue to be directed at providing introductory level information about teaching children with ASD and developing partnerships between parents/carers and teachers, to ensure maximum coverage of teachers, school staff and parents/carers of children with ASD. In line with this approach, it is recommended that more advanced programs dealing with specific issues be developed outside the Positive Partnerships initiative.

It is recommended that a nationally managed, locally delivered approach be retained, as this is administratively efficient and enables effective maintenance of course materials and the website, and draws on the expertise of existing organisations, such as state and territory autism associations.
Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter describes the program and its policy context and the evaluation methodology

1.1 Australian Government policy context

The Australian disability policy environment has changed significantly in recent years. In 2007 Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, indicating a renewed effort to address issues of concern for people with disability. Following this, in December 2008 the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians highlighted a commitment by all Australian governments, in collaboration with all school sectors, to reduce the effect of sources of disadvantage, including disability, and improve educational outcomes for all children in Australia. The commitment to enhance educational outcomes for all school students is central to the National Education Agreement, the objective of which states that:

...all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy’ (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2008)

In early 2009, all Australian jurisdictions agreed to the new National Disability Agreement (the Agreement) to achieve reforms in the disability service system. The objective of the Agreement is that:

People with disability and their carers have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of the community’ (COAG 2008a)

A priority area of the Agreement is to introduce a National Disability Quality Framework with a National Quality Assurance system for disability services in order to develop a national approach to the continuous improvement of disability services by 2010. The new standards will replace the National Standards for Disability Services, which have remained largely unchanged since 1993. They will also bring greater consistency between states and territories. In September 2009, the Disability Services Ministers endorsed the revision of the National Standards to ensure they reflect current philosophical directions for people with a disability, policy reform and a contemporary format that addresses gaps identified in the current National Standards.

The Australian Government has developed a Draft National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. The strategy, which will be presented for approval by COAG, provides national direction to improve the lives of people with disability, promote participation and create a more inclusive society.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 it is unlawful to discriminate against somebody if they have a disability in a number of specified areas, including education. The Disability Standards for Education (2005) applies to government and non government providers in all education sectors, as well as organisations whose purpose it is to develop and accredit curricula. The objectives of the standards are to:
• eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of
disability in the areas of education and training;

• to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same
rights to equality before the law in the area of education and training as the rest
of the community; and

• to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle
that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the
community.

A report to FaHCSIA (AABASD 2007) uses the Australian Government’s
Centrelink data to estimate the prevalence of children with autism in Australia
(aged 6–12 years) as approximately 62.5 per 10,000 children (or one in 160). While
this figure is for 6–12 year old children, for the purposes of determining an
approximate national prevalence for primary and secondary school aged children
this figure is deemed appropriate. Based on a figure of 3,484,700 primary and
secondary students in Australia (ASB 2010), this equates to approximately 22,000
school aged children with ASD in 2010 (0.63 per cent of all school students).

A recent report on the provision of education to students with a disability or special
needs in NSW (General Purpose Standing Committee No.2 2010) highlighted a 165
per cent increase in the incidence of students with autism in NSW government
schools, between 2003 and 2009. Reasons for this increase included an increase in
the number of students with autism in response to earlier and increased diagnosis,
as well as parents choosing to send their child with ASD to government schools.

1.2 The Helping Children with Autism package

The Helping Children with Autism package involves a number of diverse
components delivered jointly through DEEWR, DoHA and FaHCSIA.

The long term objective of the package is that children with ASD and their families
benefit from early intervention, education and support. This objective is derived
from the available research and evidence (primarily Roberts and Prior 2006) on the
effectiveness of best practice early intervention.

More specifically, the program as a whole has two intended outcomes (FaHCSIA
2009):

• providing families with best practice intervention support services including
financial assistance, as well as providing education and support (intermediate
outcomes), through better access to these services; and

• enhancing the service system to increase the availability of best practice early
intervention services, advisory services, education and support, and relevant
information.

The DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package

Positive Partnerships includes education workshops for parents and carers and
professional development programs for teachers and other school staff. Between
2008-2011, the program aims to provide professional development for up to 2,200
teachers and other school staff and support for up to 5,800 parents and carers of
school aged children with ASD.
**Professional development component**

The professional development workshop is a five day commitment, four days of which is face to face delivery. Participants are required to complete some online modules prior to the workshop. After delivery of the first two days, they are asked to undertake a project at school using what they have learnt. They then return for the final two days.

The course covers the following focus areas: teacher understanding; teacher skills and expertise; fostering an autism friendly culture in the school environment; strengthening teaching methods; and the establishment of professional networks following the development sessions. Each group is assigned a key local professional who assists the group in maintaining a professional network.

**Parent/carer component**

The parent/carer workshop is undertaken face to face over two consecutive days. The first day provides information about tools and strategies that parents/carers can use in their interaction with the school of their child with ASD. The second day involves smaller group sessions on specific topics of interest such as: positive behaviour support; siblings; making friends; completing work; managing transitions; communication; establishing a support group; sexuality and bullying.

The workshops also use an online web based component to support parent and carer learning, as well as providing discussion boards for the sharing of information. Following attendance at a workshop, participants are able to access information and resources from an identified key local facilitator for a three month period (AAETC 2009a).

Table 1.1 summarises the Positive Partnerships program objectives, as part of Helping Children with Autism.
Table 1.1

**POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional development workshop</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Increase the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff (includes school leaders, education assistants, teacher aides, special support teachers and coordinators currently working with students with ASD in the full range of government and non government primary and secondary schools across Australia, specifically with respect to the following areas:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. the facts about ASD, its effect on the developing child and issues in adolescence;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. the learner profile of the student with ASD and effective teaching strategies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. making curriculum adjustments according to the needs of the child;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. working effectively with the education assistant;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. working in partnership with parents and carers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. mental health issues that older primary/secondary students may face;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii. social relationships and how they impact on the young person e.g. building social skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii. support for students at key transition points, e.g. from one grade to the next and from primary to secondary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Improve the quality of teaching and support provided to school students with ASD in primary and secondary schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Create a national pool of teachers and other school staff equipped to share their knowledge and skills with their peers and network and learn from each other beyond their participation in the professional development workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Establish a professional network to provide opportunities for sharing among participants and access to advice and support following the professional development workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Foster an ‘autism friendly’ culture in schools and the development of productive connections and partnerships between school and home and the broader community.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/carer workshop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Informing parents/carers about the most current evidence based knowledge on ASD and how this directly impacts on their child’s learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Assisting parents to understand the processes and strategies that enable effective parent, school and teacher partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Equipping parents/carers with specific information and strategies on how they can be effective advocates to support their child’s learning whilst negotiating the education environment of which their child is a part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Informing parents/carers about their local school system’s processes to support their child’s learning at all stages of their educational pathway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Helping parents/carers understand ways to maximise their child’s learning in the home environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DEEWR

### 1.3 Development of Positive Partnerships

**DEEWR requirements of the program**

DEEWR invited organisations or consortia of organisations to deliver services nationally for either one or both of the Positive Partnerships components. Key requirements included the following.

- **Professional development workshops** for teachers and other school staff:
  - provision of residential courses of up to five days for up to 450 participants each year; and
  - making course materials available on the internet and establishing a professional network to provide ongoing advice and support.
The professional development workshop also needed to meet university standards to enable recognition of prior learning and linkage to teacher registration/accreditation in states and territories (where ongoing professional development is a requirement).

The professional development workshop was to comprise five days, with a minimum of six hours per day, and a residential component of at least two days. As part of the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium response, a suggestion was made to shift the professional development workshop from a residential program to a non-residential program, which was accepted by DEEWR.

- **Parent/carer workshops** and information sessions for parents and carers of school-aged children with ASD:
  - provision of face to face workshops and subsequent information sessions (held the following day) and online workshops to support up to 1,450 parents and carers of school aged children with ASD;
  - providing parents and carers with access to one on one support and advice at the information sessions; and
  - conducting workshops and information sessions in city and rural locations.

**Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium’s response to tender**

A consortium comprising Autism Spectrum Australia, University of Canberra, Autism Association of South Australia and the Department of Education and Training (Western Australia) was awarded a contract to deliver the Positive Partnerships professional development and parent/carer workshops. Figure 1.1 depicts the organisations that comprise the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium.

![Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium](image.png)

Source: The Allen Consulting Group

The delivery of Positive Partnerships is based on the organisational and reporting structure depicted in Figure 1.2.
National education and training team

The national education training team is a core team who coordinate and support nationally consistent delivery of both the professional development and parent/carer workshops. The national education training team comprises members of the consortium (with experience in the field of autism and the delivery of high quality training). The national education training team’s responsibilities include developing high quality materials and resources for each component, including the online resources.

Regional education and training teams

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium established a minimum of four regional education and training teams to aid in the delivery of the professional development workshop, nationally. The regional education and training team is comprised of one member of the national education training team and at least two other people who have the appropriate experience, capacity, and local credibility in the delivery of high quality professional development for teachers and other school staff. The regional education and training team provide mentoring and support to key local professionals for the duration of the professional development.
Key local professionals and key local facilitators

The agreement between the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium and the DEEWR describes the roles of key local professionals and key local facilitators. There are a minimum of 45 key local professionals and 31 key local facilitators each year.

Key local professional responsibilities include establishing, maintaining and facilitating local professional networks and in class mentoring and coaching advice and support to the participants. Each key local professional will be able to access up to 25 days paid release per annum (funded by DEEWR) to undertake the role.

Key local facilitator responsibilities include additional mentoring and support to parents and carers following the workshop. This is provided for a minimum of three months (or equivalent) following participation in the face to face workshops. Key local facilitators are supported by up to 36 days paid release per annum (funded by DEEWR).

Governance, administration and reporting requirements

The development of the Positive Partnerships program began in April 2008, and included a number of significant deliverables prior to the delivery of the program in November 2008. Development of the program included:

- establishment of a national education and training team;
- development of an evaluation strategy and other protocols;
- finalisation of all state and territory implementation plans; and
- the finalisation of project content and materials.

Pilots were conducted for both the parent/carer and professional development workshops of the program, prior to the commencement of program delivery.

DEEWR project advisory committee

An Advisory Committee was established by DEEWR to oversee the implementation of both components of the Positive Partnerships program, with specific responsibility to:

- provide input and advice on the promotion, design, content and delivery of the professional development workshop and the parent/carer workshop; and
- collaborate with and inform identified stakeholders of progress and key issues.

The Advisory Committee met four times in 2008 and twice in 2009 to review progress of the project.

Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium evaluation strategy

As a requirement of delivering the program for DEEWR, the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium developed an evaluation strategy for the Positive Partnerships program to collect qualitative and quantitative information about program progress and impact on participants.

The purpose of this evaluation strategy was to:
• support the achievement of the project’s objectives through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in order to continuously improve the delivery of the services (formative evaluation, internal); and

• collect data that will contribute to an independent evaluation at the end of the second year of delivery to measure the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the project (summative evaluation, external).

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has undertaken data collection and analysis on all sessions conducted, as part of their formative evaluation strategy for both the Positive Partnerships professional development and parent/carer workshops. Program participants were surveyed prior and immediately following Positive Partnerships workshops. A follow up survey was also undertaken three to six months later.

This evaluation has used the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium data to assist in reporting on the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of Positive Partnerships.

**Funding arrangements**

Total funding for the Positive Partnerships program from DEEWR in 2008 and 2009, amounted to $11.3 million (including GST). Total funding for establishment of the program in 2008 amounted to $4.5 million, with total funding in 2009 amounting to $6.8 million. DEEWR is the sole direct funder of Positive Partnerships.

In 2010 and 2011, funding for the Positive Partnerships program will total $11.5 million (including GST) for the delivery of 20 professional development workshops and 70 parent/carer workshops. In 2010 this will cost $6.5 million, with $4 million allocated for 2011. Analysis of funding arrangements is provided in Chapter 6.

**Additions to Positive Partnerships in 2010-11**

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium developed an evaluation, research and publication framework for the extension of Positive Partnerships in 2010 and 2011. The framework extends the original evaluation strategy developed as part of the 2008-09 contract, and directly incorporates key performance indicators listed in the contract extension. The framework includes proposals for research to be undertaken in the areas of diverse communities, including Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse and rural/remote backgrounds.

**1.4 Evaluation methodology**

An evaluation framework was developed to guide the evaluation of Positive Partnerships. An overview of the evaluation framework is provided in Figure 1.3 and the framework is provided in full at Appendix A.
At the time of appointing the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium to conduct the program, it was agreed that an independent evaluation would take place at the end of the second year of delivery. This evaluation is the independent evaluation.

This evaluation used three main sources of information in evaluating the Positive Partnerships program:

- recent published literature;
- survey data; and
- consultation with stakeholders, including with program participants.

**Literature review**

Research questions for the literature review were as follows:

- Are the DEEWR components of Helping Children with Autism consistent with the available evidence about how to build a skill and knowledge base for educating children with ASD in school settings?
- Have programs with similar objectives been established elsewhere in selected comparable countries?
- What evidence is there about whether these programs have worked?
The review of the literature summarises findings from the empirical evidence concerning positive outcomes for school children with ASD. The review also identifies methods shown to be effective and reflect good practice in educating teachers, parents and carers towards achieving these positive outcomes. The literature review forms the basis of Chapter 2, it summarises evidence in relation to:

- effective professional development for teachers;
- effective parent/carer education;
- good practice in providing ASD education and support programs; and
- international examples.

Examples of search terms used in this review included:

- ‘effective professional development training’;
- ‘Autism Spectrum Disorder, parent training, parent support’;
- ‘Autism teacher training’;
- ‘Autism parent support’; and
- ‘Education program, Autism Spectrum Disorder’.

**Survey data**

Analysis was undertaken of data collected by the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium, through surveying program participants (before, during and after participating in the program). Data specific to the evaluation criteria of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency was provided in response to data requests.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium survey data are of high quality because all participants were surveyed, and the data are used as an important component of periodic progress reports from the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium to DEEWR.

The qualitative data derived from the stakeholder consultation were found to be in general alignment with stakeholder views expressed through the survey. This implies that both the quantitative and qualitative data are mutually reinforcing and robust.

**Stakeholder consultation**

Stakeholder consultation occurred with participants and non participants. Non participants are stakeholders that did not attend sessions as learners, although they may have participated as facilitators. They are representatives from: state and territory education departments and disability departments; the Catholic school sector; the independent school sector; and autism associations. Many stakeholders consulted had an organising role for Positive Partnerships in their jurisdiction.
Program participants were consulted through separate focus groups with professional development workshop and parent/carer workshop participants. Ten focus groups were conducted in four states (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia), in both rural and metropolitan locations. Stakeholders were also invited to make a submission to the review via the review website (www.allenconsult.com.au/HCWAevaluation). Case studies of good practice were identified during stakeholder consultations to provide evidence of program outcomes. A list of stakeholders consulted, excluding individual teachers, other school staff, parents and carers, is provided in Appendix B.
Chapter 2

Good practice in providing ASD education support for teachers and parents/carers

This chapter describes good practices in delivering education programs to teachers, other school staff, parents and carers of children with ASD. The good practices are derived from a review of the literature. The good practices are subsequently used for program assessment in later chapters.

2.1 Good practice summary

The following good practices have been identified based on a targeted review of literature on effective education programs for teachers, parents and carers of children with ASD. They are presented under three areas:

• features of teaching programs likely to achieve improved educational outcomes for children with ASD;
• features of effective professional development workshop programs; and
• features of effective parent/carer education.

Improved educational outcomes for children with ASD

This can be better achieved through programs that feature:

• the development of a collaborative team approach (including teachers, parents and professionals) to education of a child with ASD;
• providing a child centred approach to delivering education;
• employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours of a child with ASD; and
• high teacher quality.

Effective professional development workshop programs for teachers

Programs should include:

• clear and specific content of professional development workshop programs for teachers of children with ASD;
• the use of a variety of delivery methods; and
• the provision of a supportive teaching environment for teachers to be able to implement new practices.

Effective parent/carer education

This should have content focused on:

• the identification of supports available for parents and carers (social, emotional and practical support), including information and strategies for application in the home setting; and
• the role parents and carers should play in their child’s education.

The good practices identified provide a reference point for the evaluation of the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of the Positive Partnerships program in subsequent chapters. The more successful Positive Partnerships is in achieving good practice, the more likely it is to consistently achieve positive educational outcomes for children with ASD.

2.2 Effective educational outcomes for children with ASD

Four features have been identified that are required to providing effective educational outcomes for children with ASD.

A collaborative team approach involving teachers, families and other professionals

In recent years, a collaborative team approach to education involving teachers, parents, families and relevant professionals has been advocated widely in the autism and disability literature. Empirical evidence suggests that by educating parents/carers and teachers in the potential benefits of a collaborative relationship surrounding a child with ASD’s education, effective mutually beneficial outcomes can be achieved.

The Victorian Department of Human Services (2007) guidelines for the provision of high quality specialist mental health care echoes the literature regarding the benefits of collaborative relationships and the importance of parental inclusion in care and education provision. In summary the guidelines state:

• families and carers should be recognised, respected and supported as partners in providing care;
• roles and responsibilities of clinicians and of carers should be clearly defined;
• families and carers should be engaged as early as possible in the episode of treatment and care;
• clear and open communication and the sharing of information between clinicians, consumers, families and carers needs to occur regularly;
• clinicians require a sound understanding of the confidentiality provisions of the relevant Act; and
• services should ensure that the cultural and language needs of families and carers are considered (Victorian Department of Human Services 2007).

Mandalawitz (2002) as cited in Roberts and Prior (2006) outlines the importance of home-school collaboration. Trust between parents and teaching staff is a key element in enhancing communication and the effective implementation of an educational program for a child with ASD. In a survey of 120 parents of children with disabilities in the USA, over half of the respondents desired relationships with professionals that focused on respect, collaboration, communication and information sharing (Prezant and Marshak 2006).
Teachers and other professionals advocating for children with disabilities in schools face many complex and challenging issues in successfully meeting the child’s needs. These challenges may relate to school structure, regulations, involvement of external agencies, social issues and family dynamics. Parents participating in Prezant and Marshak’s survey (2006) identified that sometimes a professional’s attempts to ‘help’ may or may not meet the perceived needs of parents, and that a strong and respectful collaborative relationship between parents and professionals can help to overcome issues and challenges such as this (Prezant and Marshak 2006).

Review of the literature has identified several collaborative models for delivering education. ‘Floortime’ by Greenspan and Wieder (1999) is an example of one such model. This model builds an intervention program around the child with ASD and their family members, with the aim of increasing processing capabilities, such as language, and developing other core functional development capabilities (Greenspan and Wieder 1999).

Dunlap (1999) identifies that when these collaborative relationships exist, strategies can be implemented across a variety of settings for the child, including the home and the community. Such strategies have been shown to be effective in delivering positive educational outcomes.

The importance and effectiveness of strong collaborative relationships between parents, carers, teachers and professionals are strongly recommended throughout the literature (including Graham and Spandagou 2009; Roberts and Prior 2006 and Prezant and Marshak 2006), as well as in a practical sense as described in Shaddock et al (2007). Educating both teachers and parents in forming and sustaining these relationships is highly beneficial for a child with ASD and for their ongoing growth, transition and development.

Box 2.1 describes Australian examples of using collaborative multidisciplinary teams in the education of children with an ASD.
SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH AN ASD

Western Autistic School, Victoria
The Western Autistic School, in Melbourne (also home to the Autism Teaching Institute), incorporates a number of evidence-based approaches to education of students with ASD. This approach includes: the provision of individual learning programs, a focus on social and communication skills, a functional teaching approach, participation of families, peer-group and the community; the promotion of independence and self-esteem and strong partnerships with parents/guardians.

Autism Spectrum Australia Schools
Autism Spectrum Australia schools provide specialised evidence-based programs for children aged 4-16 years with an ASD, and require an autism specific program. Autism Spectrum Australia schools provide a comprehensive example of the use of multidisciplinary teams in educating children with an ASD. The team provides consultative therapy services to students, their families and teaching staff enrolled at Autism Spectrum Australia schools. The team consists of speech pathologists, occupational therapists and psychologists. Therapists are involved in a range of direct and indirect services including development of individual education programs, class programming input, parent and community education, home base programming and resource development when necessary. Therapists are also available to aid in transitions between schools, such as between a special school and the inclusion of a student in mainstream education settings.

Source:

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that the program should foster this collaborative approach to a child with ASD’s education to ensure that teachers, parents and professionals work together to achieve the best outcomes for the child, in both the home and school environment.

A child centred approach to education

‘Historically, services for individuals with disabilities have been based on available options, rather than on programs created to meet the unique needs, desires and situations of each individual’ (Renzaglia et al 2003).

Due to the varying abilities of children with ASD, a ‘one size fits all’ approach to developing curriculum is not effective or appropriate. Empirical evidence (Roberts and Prior (2006); Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber and Kincaid (2003) indicates that the core components of effective educational pedagogy for students with an ASD includes an ‘individualised approach’ and the provision of autism specific curriculum.

Recent literature discusses the importance of developing individual education plans for children with ASD. These are sometimes referred to as individual education profiles. A learner profile outlines individual student’s strengths and deficits and assists in determining an appropriate intensity and level of instruction to work towards outcomes and achievements. Establishing a learner profile is a critical starting point for teachers in developing effective educational programs and learning outcomes for children with ASD in any educational setting (AAETC 2008), including special schools.
Roberts and Prior (2006) identify that the type of placement, teaching methods employed and curriculum content are all key interrelated aspects of educational programs for students with ASD — the where, how and what of learning. Roberts and Prior highlight the need to focus on providing ASD students with an appropriate education to meet their needs, rather than assuming that inclusion in a regular classroom is optimal for all students with ASD at all stages of their education.

Rose, Dunlap, Huber and Kincaid (2003) list the core elements of educational practice which should be included in any comprehensive educational program for students with ASD may include:

- environmental and curricular modifications, general education classroom support and instructional methods including systematic instruction;
- specialised curriculum content;
- individualised supports and services for students and families;
- comprehensible/structured learning environments;
- a functional approach to problem behaviour;
- family involvement/home-school collaboration;
- attitudinal and social support;
- coordinated team commitment; and
- recurrent evaluation of inclusion procedures.

Simpson et al (2003) used these core elements listed above to develop the Autism Spectrum Disorder Inclusion Collaboration Model. Collaboration underpins this model, but also allows for variation around the individual learner and for instructional factors. This model is detailed in Figure 2.1.
From a teacher’s development perspective, one of the most important aspects of the inclusive collaboration model is the environmental and curricular modifications, general education, classroom support and variation in instructional methods. This component of the model includes several specific areas to support the successful and effective education of children with ASD in the mainstream classroom setting. These elements are listed as follows:

- availability of appropriately trained support personnel;
- accessibility to collaborative problem-solving relationships;
- in service training (group and individual);
- implementation of appropriate instructional methods;
- availability of para-educators;
- adequate teacher planning time; and
- reduced class size.

The use of multifaceted models, such as the collaboration model, can assist schools and teachers to effectively and efficiently include students with ASD in the classroom and wider school community. Models such as these also highlight areas in which teacher support and education can be used to successfully deliver positive educational outcomes for all students concerned (Simpson et al 2003).
An individualised approach to a child with ASD’s education is recommended internationally in both the literature and in practice. In 2005, the Canadian National Disability Authority published guidelines to developing and implementing an individual education plan or learner profile for a child with ASD. The details of these guidelines demonstrate the need for teachers to be adequately equipped to allow flexibility in education and develop specific individual strategies to achieve positive educational outcomes for a child with ASD.

Provision of autism specific curriculum for children with ASD

Children with ASD face unique social and communication challenges. This means that the curriculum content of any intervention or education program should be specific (O’Reilly et al 2008).

The literature identifies several core elements of an autism specific curriculum:

- focus on the core deficits associated with ASD;
- teaching of functional skills;
- focus on the explicit teaching of social skills required for group work, playground and peer interactions; and
- use of ICT and assisting technology.

One of the most challenging aspects of developing specific curriculum is the coordination of individual goals within a mainstream class program. In delivering an autism specific curriculum, Simpson et al (2003) highlights the need for the recurrent evaluation of inclusion practices in delivery, implementation, environmental arrangement, interaction amount and type, the participation level of the student, attitudes of the teacher, teachers’ aides and peers.

Empirical evidence highlights the importance of providing autism specific curriculum for children with ASD, and therefore highlights the need for teachers to be able to continually adapt mainstream curriculum to suit the needs and developmental goals of a child with ASD. Tailored and continuing professional development and the provision of additional related teacher resources may help achieve this goal. However, the ability of a teacher to plan and deliver an autism specific curriculum may also hinge on the overall supportiveness of the teaching environment (Simpson et al 2003, O’Reilly et al 2008).

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that teacher (and other school staff) professional development needs to promote and provide the resources for teachers to develop a flexible learning environment and curriculum for a child with ASD.

Employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours of children with autism

There is consensus in the literature that schools should adopt a positive approach to behaviour support to assist in managing behavioural challenges (Horner et al 2002). ‘A positive behavioural approach is underpinned by assessment and interventions that focus on skills development and replacement behaviours — rather than simply attempting to eliminate particular problem behaviours’ (Horner et al 2002) of a child with ASD.
Educating teachers in employing this approach to challenging behaviours is especially important as the emotional development of children with ASD is often delayed. Examples of this approach include establishing effective reward systems and being alert to early signs of stress and responding immediately (Disability Services Commission of Western Australia n.d).

Teacher resources such as *Autism the school years* (Disability Services Commission of Western Australia n.d) provide guidance on employing this approach in the classroom. Language used in communicating with a child with ASD is identified in this resource as one of the most important tools in providing a positive approach to sometimes challenging ASD behaviours. For example, using clear, concise concrete instructions and questions, avoiding indirect language and double meanings.

Other practical texts, such as *Autism for all teachers: a teacher’s guide to working with students with ASD* (Gardner et al 2001), provide further information and strategies in this area. Texts such as these provide teachers with a reference point for information in areas such as cognition and learning, sensory processing, communication, social skills and behaviour.

Implementing this approach in the classroom may require significant education and support for teachers. Therefore, professional development in this area may be particularly important in ensuring the teacher can cope with challenging ASD behaviours.

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that both the professional development and parent/carer workshops need to provide resources and tools for positive approaches to be applied to the sometimes challenging behaviours of a child with ASD — and demonstrating the positive outcomes that can be achieved when this approach is applied.

**Teacher quality**

Teacher quality is critical in providing positive education outcomes for children. Rowe (2003) finds that the quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most significant influences on students’ outcomes of schooling — including students’ cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes. International evidence suggests that ‘what matters most’ is the quality of teachers and teaching, coupled with strategic teacher professional development (Rowe 2003).

Professional development is one way of ensuring and building teacher quality, in both a general and autism specific teaching environment.

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that teacher quality is of key importance and that professional development programs, such as Positive Partnerships, are one way of ensuring and building teacher quality.

**2.3 Effective professional development for teachers**

In recent years the literature regarding the professional development of teachers has begun to focus on sustainability and building school capacity to cope with dramatic increases in the diagnoses of children with ASD. The literature considers these themes both in terms of appropriate content and delivery of the training. The following good practices have been highlighted from the literature:

- clear and specific content of professional development workshop programs for teachers of children with ASD;
• employment of a variety of delivery methods; and
• the provision of a supportive teaching environment.

**Clear and specific content of professional development programs for teachers of children with ASD**

There is limited evidence regarding the specific content of professional development for teachers of children with ASD. However, reviewing effective strategies in the provision of teacher professional development, in general, enables similar strategies to be transferred into development programs for teachers and other school staff teaching children on the autism spectrum.

Hattie (2003) recognises that in the past there have been ‘few goal posts to aim for in the professional development’ of teachers, instead allowing varying and sometimes short term government education policies to underlie the content of professional development. Hattie summarises the need for ‘a deeper representation of excellence in teachers, a greater challenge and commitment to recognising excellence and a coherent, integrated high level understanding about teacher expertise’.

Following a review of the international literature, Villegas-Reimers (2003) highlights a number of key recommendations for teacher professional development. Firstly, teachers’ professional development is a long term process — this approach requires a transformation of current processes and policies to support this view, as teachers grow in the profession. Secondly, teachers’ professional development has a considerable impact on the success of educational reforms and student learning. Thirdly, the goals of a teacher professional development program should be aligned with those of the curriculum — which may be especially important when tailoring a curriculum for children with ASD (Villegas-Reimers 2003).

*The implications for Positive Partnerships are that the content of professional development programs has a significant effect on the transfer of learnings to other staff within the school community, as well as application in the classroom environment.*

**Employment of a variety of delivery methods**

Garet et al (2001) highlight a number of requirements for creating effective professional development opportunities. To begin with, professional development should be sustained and intensive, as opposed to short programs. Professional development delivery should also involve opportunities for hands-on work and be integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence) in order to produce ‘enhanced knowledge and skills’. In improving professional development it is important to focus on the duration, collective participation and core features of development, including content, active learning and coherence – as opposed to the type of development. Professional development programs that establish a long term relationship with the school and individual teachers seem to result in more sustained implementation of the knowledge learnt than short term programs (Mesibov et al 2004).
Based on Joyce and Showers’ (1988) survey, Mesibov et al (2004) also conclude that the majority of teachers were unlikely to implement any new skills they learnt via professional development — highlighting the need to identify ways to ensure that all trainees will implement new skills. Strategies to reinforce the messages in teacher professional development may include following up training, and the provision of additional information resources for reference. Follow up components and evaluations also increase the likelihood that professional development learnings will be implemented in the longer term (Mesibov et al 2004).

Furthermore, a variety of program delivery models should be used in delivering professional development workshop education. Technology should be employed to support the delivery of these models — for example not all aspects of professional development can or should be addressed in ‘courses’ (Villegas-Reimers 2003). Other professional development delivery options include lectures, manuals, demonstrations and practice (Mesibov et al 2004).

In the USA, the importance of teacher training has been highlighted due, among other reasons, to a significant increase in the number of lawsuits on behalf of children with autism. The majority of these lawsuits pertain to a lack of trained personnel to deliver effective intervention programs and reflect that in the USA changes to practice are lagging 10 to 20 years behind research findings (Koegel and Brown 2007).

Finally, a question of who should be trained is also raised in the literature. Anderson et al (1993) cited in Mesibov et al (2004), highlight that training may have more impact if it is aimed not only at teachers, but also at other school employees who have contact with the child with ASD, or who can provide ongoing support to individual teachers. Using this approach, teachers develop a network of colleagues to help them apply new teaching methods, solve problems and evaluate their implementation (Mesibov et al 2004).

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that delivery of professional development in a variety of methods (including face to face, hard copy resources and online), allows for information and strategies to be incorporated into teaching practices in the longer term.

**Provision of a supportive teaching environment**

The provision of a supportive teaching environment has been highlighted throughout the literature as being a core component to facilitating successful inclusion in mainstream schools for children with ASD, where this is appropriate. There are several factors that contribute to building and sustaining a supportive teaching environment in schools including children with special needs.

As highlighted by Roberts and Prior (2006) a supportive teaching environment may include adequate and ongoing professional development for the classroom teacher, support from the principal and other school staff such as teaching aides, and external professional aides.
Spears et al (2001) in Roberts and Prior (2006) comment that teachers often report that they consider themselves to be less than fully capable of meeting the needs of students with ASD due to the varying nature of the disorder. A report from the South Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee of Students with Disabilities (2000) on students with ASD in high schools, recognises that the unique and varying character of each student with an ASD ‘presents school communities with a range of issues for which there are no simple solutions’. In the past, teachers may not have been consulted or well prepared for the enrolment of students with disabilities (Roberts and Prior 2006). Simpson et al (2003) identify that shared responsibility is essential to ensure successful education and inclusion of a child with ASD and that this can be achieved by employing effective communication, shared decision making and participatory management. Participatory management refers to involvement of the school, parents/carers and others in managing education of a child with ASD.

Jordan (1999) highlights the need for access to appropriately trained support personnel, due to the complex needs of students with ASD. Trained support personnel are often needed to fully implement a comprehensive program that is collaborative, multifaceted and multidisciplinary, and perhaps to offer support and guidance to teachers where necessary. Teachers also need to be able to access ‘collaborative problem solving relationships’, in which an expert consultant is able to share information and provide consultative support to the teacher (Idol 1997 and Simpson et al 2003 cited in Roberts and Prior 2006).

In addition to this, Roberts and Prior (2006) identify that reduced class size and adequate teacher planning time are other factors that heavily influence the success of an ASD child’s education within a mainstream school. Simpson et al (2003) also advocate the availability of teachers aides and continuous teacher in-service training with regard to educating children with ASD, depending on the varying needs of teachers and schools. Simpson et al (2003) refer to ‘continuous training’ as the need for ongoing reinforcement of the knowledge and tools imparted during training.

Furthermore, a positive school climate is increasingly important for successfully including students with special needs, such as ASD, in the school community. The attitude of the school principal is paramount in setting the overall attitude of the school, as well as the attitudes of parents towards the inclusion of children with special needs into the school community (Simpson et al 2003).

O’Reilly et al (2008) highlights the importance of a supportive teaching environment for the children themselves — including the physical teaching environment, predicability and routine of the teaching setting.

The provision of a supportive teaching environment also enables teachers to be more innovative in the strategies they use to achieve positive educational outcomes for a child with ASD.

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that a supportive teaching environment is highly important in facilitating the successful inclusion of children with ASD in mainstream schools (where appropriate). This includes ongoing professional development for teachers directly involved with children with ASD, as well as support from the school principal and other teaching support staff. A supportive teaching environment enables strategies from professional development to be implemented in the classroom environment.
2.4 Effective parent and carer education

As outlined previously, a number of good practices have been identified, relating to education programs for parents and carers of children with ASD:

- a focus on the supports available for parents and carers (social, emotional and practical support), including information and strategies for application in the home setting; and
- the role parents and carers should play in their child with ASD’s education.

Parents and carers of children with ASD play a key role in their education. Parents can provide a wealth of information about their child that enables teachers, other school staff and the school community to tailor and deliver positive educational outcomes to children with ASD. The complexities and challenges presented by children with ASD mean that parents and carers must work closely with teachers and other school staff to achieve the best outcomes for that child. This relationship enables teachers to become aware of the many and varied ways that a child with ASD may learn and the way in which they understand the world around them (AAETC 2007).

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium (2007) identifies a number of benefits from engaging in training with parents of children on the autism spectrum:

- providing a sense of partnership between parents and other intervention agents;
- helping parents know empirically the child’s abilities and difficulties;
- involving parents directly in selecting target behaviours for intervention;
- providing addition intervention hours in a cost effective way;
- enhancing maintenance and generalisation of gains;
- teaching different skills;
- being more relevant to the home environment and the community;
- providing parents with a sense of control and self efficacy, which may decrease parent stress;
- improving parent interactions and relationship with their child; and
- preventing the development of more severe problem behaviours.

Matson et al (2009) highlight a long tradition of parent training in the ASD literature, but also note that it has not reached the sophistication of treatment packages seen for children with other behavioural problems.

Early intervention packages often include a parenting component, which is important as it allows parents to become involved in treatments as early as possible. Support programs that follow on from early intervention programs — once the child is older — are less likely to include significant parent involvement. Currently, the literature does not adequately address the types of issues encountered by teenagers with ASD (Matson et al 2009).
Programs that help the child with ASD and their parents cope with new life challenges over time need to be developed (Matson et al 2009). A lifelong education model for parents of children with ASD would be ideal — however research has not currently explored this. However, Matson et al (2009) advise that parents periodically attend ‘booster’ sessions to maintain existing skills.

Johnson et al (2007) highlight that large scale, multi-site studies of parent training programs in children with pervasive developmental disorders (including ASD), are uncommon. Although there is accumulated evidence that parent-mediated interventions are effective in children with developmental disabilities, widespread dissemination and evaluation of treatment programs has been limited. A successful parent training program must balance uniformity with flexibility (to the needs of the child and family), along with the ability to be delivered by external professionals (Johnson et al 2007).

**Supporting parents and carers**

Llewellyn et al (2003) highlight the importance of overall family wellbeing in balancing the needs and demands of a child with ASD with day to day life, and in some cases the needs and demands of other siblings. Family members in this situation are likely to experience a range of economic, social, physical and emotional challenges throughout different periods of their child’s education and development (Dowse and Moore 2003 and Llewellyn 2003).

Parents of children with ASD experience a wide variety of stresses, often at clinical levels. In many cases social support systems, quality intervention programs, lifespan planning and other psychological supports are not provided to families of children with ASD. Supports such as this play a large part in reducing the anxiety of families (Koegel and Brown 2007).

Carers NSW (n.d) list four specific areas in which families often experience these challenges:

- financial impact of care;
- the family having to negotiate their child’s way through the education system;
- difficulties in transition for the child (for example: preschool to primary school and school to adulthood); and
- as parents age they may no longer be able to meet the physical demands of care.

The National Agenda for Young Children in Australia (Department of Family and Community Services 2003) recognised the need for increased resources and support services for parents of children with intellectual disability and/or special needs across all states and territories. In addition to this, Siegel (2003) highlights the need for more parent centred support services, due to a number of parents experiencing high amounts of stress and being at risk of depression during the early years following their child’s diagnosis. These measures are important for the wellbeing of parents.
By providing parents and carers with the education and tools for meeting the complex needs of their child as they develop, these challenges may be able to be better managed and resolved. Supporting parents and carers often also requires education in the range of services and help available to them when need arises, as evidenced by the views of parents described in Shaddock et al (2007).

Mesibov et al (2004) conclude that studies of parental stress and coping ability have been limited by methodological factors such as small sample sizes, although some general trends have emerged from research. Mesibov et al (2004) uses three main points to summarise the literature in relation to parental supports.

- Parents of young children with ASD experience increased logistical demands and stress relative to parents of other young children, showing increased rates of depression and anxiety.

- Social, emotional and practical support provide buffers that reduce some of the distress that parents may experience, although no one approach is helpful to all parents. Some of these approaches include written information and hands-on practice, rather than discussion of a child’s needs.

- Parents value practical information and guidance in understanding their child’s ASD, learning specific techniques and learning general principles to apply to new skills and situations (Mesibov et al 2004).

Heiman and Berger’s (2008) study of different groups of parents, including parents of a child with disability, focusing on family environment and social support, highlighted the need for additional social support for parents with a child with special needs. The study showed the importance of developing awareness and intervention programs to facilitate the coping ability of parents and families (Heiman and Berger 2008).

Tullemans (2004) and Tullemans and Larkey (2008) provide a practical guide for parents in working with teachers of their child with an ASD. This guide once again highlights the importance of a collaborative relationship with teachers and the need for constant and clear communication between parents and teachers. Tullemans also identifies the importance of trust in these relationships, suggesting strategies for building trust through being knowledgeable about the disability and supporting the teacher in difficult periods. Other key areas of focus include practicing reflective listening, having a positive attitude, being assertive but not aggressive and a number of more general strategies for working ‘with’ and supporting teachers.

The literature describes solid evidence that parents/carers with a child with special needs experience higher levels of stress, anxiety and other forms of emotional and mental distress. The literature also highlights the need for a greater number of programs designed to help parents/carers cope with these challenges, as their child grows. Supporting parents/carers in this role can also allow for more positive educational outcomes to occur in both the home and school environments.

*The implications for Positive Partnerships are that educating parents and carers on the types of support and information available to them is highly effective and important. Supporting parents through education such as this also has a positive impact on their own well being, as well as their family.*
Parents/carers role in their child with ASD’s education

A parent’s/carer’s role in the education of their child with ASD can be highly varied. Stoner and Angell (2006) identify these roles specifically as: negotiator; monitor; support; and advocate — usually in interaction with teachers, health professionals and other school staff.

Dunlap (1999) recognises that a child with ASD has a huge impact on all aspects of families’ lives. This includes during diagnosis, the child’s behaviour and the interventions themselves. Families are also often the most influential, durable and valuable assets that children will ever experience in this context (Dunlap 1999).

Family involvement in the formation and implementation of interventions is understood by the literature as an important element of best practice — although evidence does not devote much time to discussing how families play a part in selecting, creating, evaluating and benefiting from interventions with their child (Dunlap 1999).

Parents should play an important role in early intervention programs (Mahoney and Wiggers (2007). The authors stress that intervention programs should do more to put parents in a central role in treatment, given the large amount of time that parents spend with their child (Mahoney and Wiggers 2007).

Parents who participated in Stoner and Angell’s study (2006), identified trust as the most vital element to forming effective relationships between teachers and other professionals involved in delivering their child’s education.

Prezant and Marshak (2006) indicate that desired teacher actions by parents fall into three main areas:

• teachers need to listen and be respectful of parental input;
• teachers should be knowledgeable and provide information to parents; and
• teachers need to collaborate and communicate with parents and other professionals aiding in a child’s education.

Again these points highlight the need for a collaborative and supportive relationship between parents and teachers in particular.

Siegel (2003) discusses a number of ways that parents of children with ASD can facilitate their child’s education. These roles include:

• parents as co-therapists (integrating current therapy and education in the home environment); 
• parents as interpreters (knowing their child’s behaviours and interpreting them, as well as aiding in teacher’s and other professionals’ understanding of their child); and
• parents as head hunters (putting together their child’s treatment plan).
Parents’ advocacy role

In supporting a child with ASD, parents and carers often play the role of advocate in reaching the best resources and outcomes for their child. The National Research Council (2001) describes this role as a ‘parent understanding the legal rights of their child according to federal and state law and regulations’. However, for most parents this role focuses primarily on the needs and wants of their own child and being an effective collaborator with the professionals who work with their child (National Research Council 2001).

As stated previously, a parents’ role in their child with ASD’s education and intervention programs is critical. The benefits of this input can far out weigh the implementation of a program in only one particular setting, such as school. Input from parents can also minimise the sometimes disruptive nature of some interventions to family life, and ensure that interventions and education programs involve informed family choice and empowerment (Dunlap 1999).

There has been no significant research into the most effective ways to train parents to be advocates, or how effective parents can be in this role. Research from this perspective may be helpful in determining how best to prepare parents for advocacy and when additional support services may be needed to support parents in this role (National Research Council 2001).

The implications for Positive Partnerships are that outlining parent and carer roles in children’s education allows more effective teacher/parent/carer relationships to develop, with greater outcomes being achieved when teachers and parents work together.

2.5 Conclusion: providing ASD education support programs for teachers and parents/carers

Roberts and Ridley (2004) describe elements of successful programs involving intervention and education for children with an ASD, as evidenced by the literature. The elements of successful programs include:

• autism specific curriculum content focusing on attention, compliance, imitation, language and social skills;
• need for highly supportive teaching environments and generalisation strategies;
• need for predictability and routine;
• a functional approach to problem behaviours;
• transition from the preschool to the classroom; and
• family involvement.

Parent/carer and teacher education can be directed to each of the areas listed above, are incorporated in the good practice areas described above.
The literature, both nationally and internationally, presents a number of key areas for which teachers of children with ASD need extensive and continuing professional development in order to achieve positive educational outcomes for these children. These key areas include: an individual approach to education; the provision of an autism specific curriculum; the provision of a supportive teaching environment by the school and the wider community; employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours and developing a collaborative team approach involving teachers, families and other professionals in the child’s education.

Dunlap et al (1999) summarise the benefits of family involvement and training in the education of a child with ASD. They found that ‘comprehensive family support is a needed element of early intervention, and that family support is most effective when it is family centred, established early in a family’s experience with autism, developed collaboratively with the families and arranged so that it provides for stability and consistency across time and circumstances’. Involving families in autism intervention programs is highly individualised, and programs therefore must be tailored in every aspect to ensure positive outcomes (Dunlap et al 1999). Dunlap et al find that family centred support may be a common feature of intervention that is universally beneficial for ‘diverse children and families affected by autism’.

As evidenced by the literature, the most important aspects of parent/carer education is how to access support networks for their child and how to develop and sustain collaborative relationships with their child’s teacher(s) and other professionals, as part of their education. Parent’s advocacy roles may also be important, however additional research is needed in this area to confirm whether educating parents in this role is effective. As part of parent/carer education, we also note that education programs need to be applicable to a diverse range of children on the autism spectrum — some of which will not attend a mainstream school. It is important that parent/carer education transfers across all levels of functioning on the autism spectrum and equips parents and carers with the tools and knowledge they may need in any number of circumstances.

Dunlap (as cited in Koegel and Brown 2007) highlights the continuing challenges that we face, as a society, as a result of the dramatic increase in the incidence of autism and how variations of the disorder makes the optimal provision of intervention and education difficult to pinpoint.

2.6 Jurisdictional overview of programs/services offered in states and territories

As part of the consultation process, the evaluation has developed an overview of ASD programs and services related to teacher (and other school staff) professional development and parent/carer education, by state and territory. This overview focuses on programs and services provided by the government, catholic and independent education sectors in each state or territory, as well as the Autism Association in each state or territory. Privately provided programs, such as intervention services, are not detailed as part of this overview.

This jurisdictional overview of programs and services offered in states and territories is detailed in Appendix C.
Chapter 3

Appropriateness of the Positive Partnerships program

This chapter considers the appropriateness of the Positive Partnerships program. Appropriateness refers to whether Positive Partnerships is designed in a suitable way to target community need, based on the available evidence and taking into consideration broader policy objectives and constraints. It considers whether the program theory — the logic on which the program is based — is sound.

If the program is appropriate, it will be based on evidence that shows that if the program is implemented well, it is expected to meet the objectives of the DEEWR components of Helping Children with Autism, which are to:

- increase the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff who are working with students with ASD (professional development workshop); and
- assist parents and carers of school aged children with ASD in developing productive partnerships with their child’s school teachers and school leaders.

The extent to which these objectives have been met is considered in the evaluation of program effectiveness, described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

3.1 Establishing community need

Community need for the Positive Partnerships is based on an increasing number of children in Australian schools being diagnosed with ASD.

Although national data on prevalence and forecast growth is patchy, a recent NSW report (General Purpose Standing Committee No.2 2010) highlighted a 165 per cent increase in the incidence of students with autism in NSW government schools, between 2003 and 2009. International experience suggests a steadily increasing number of children diagnosed with ASD and the last major national report (AABASD 2007) identified growth in each of the following age groups:

- 0-5 age group increased from 2,456 in 2003 to 3,355 in 2005;
- 6-12 age group increased from 8,746 in 2003 to 11,814 in 2005; and
- 13-16 age group increased from 2,807 in 2003 to 4,112 in 2005.

Teachers and other school staff need skills and knowledge, as well as the support of parents and carers, to improve the educational outcomes of these children. Parents and carers of school aged children with ASD need information, skills and strategies to work in partnership with teachers and other school staff to support the education of their child (DEEWR 2007).

Furthermore, the relationship between parents/carers and schools is most likely to achieve these outcomes if there is a shared understanding of ASD and of the respective perspectives of school and family.
3.2 Appropriateness in the context of the identified good practices

The good practices described in Chapter 2 provide a solid basis for assessing appropriateness. If Positive Partnerships is consistent with good practice, this indicates that it is an appropriate response to the identified community need. Conversely, if it is at odds with good practice, this suggests that the model could be altered to become more appropriate.

This table summarises the identified good practices and comments on whether Positive Partnerships is conforming to good practice. The issues for consideration identified are then considered from Section 3.3.
### POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS COMPARED WITH IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good practice</th>
<th>Issues for consideration</th>
<th>Comment on Positive Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving improved educational outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The development of a collaborative team approach (including teachers, parents and professionals) to education of a child with ASD</td>
<td>Is the design of the program well suited to achieving a collaborative approach?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships is directed towards achieving a collaborative approach by having both the parent/carer and professional development workshops and through reinforcing the need for parents/carers and educators to working in partnership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a child centred approach to delivering education</td>
<td>Is Positive Partnerships supporting implementation of the child centred approach at school?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships does provide tools and strategies consistent with a child centred approach. The program reinforces the need for individualised, tailored education plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours of a child with ASD</td>
<td>Is Positive Partnerships supporting implementation of a positive behavioural approach at school?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships does focus on skills development and replacement behaviours — rather than simply attempting to eliminate particular problem behaviours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher quality</td>
<td>Is Positive Partnerships reaching the teachers who would benefit most from the program?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships is contributing to ongoing improvement of teacher quality. There is a lack of clarity concerning the overall percentage of teachers and other school staff that Positive Partnerships aims to reach, which impacts on the overall change to teacher quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective professional development for teachers good practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and specific content of professional development programs for teachers of children with ASD</td>
<td>Does Positive Partnerships provide content that is specifically useful for teachers?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships does provide clear and specific content for teachers of children with ASD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employ a variety of delivery methods</td>
<td>Could Positive Partnerships offer other delivery methods, which would increase access to the program, without compromising quality or effectiveness?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships has delivery methods for the professional development and parent/carer streams, each of which is based on a combination of face to face and online learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a supportive teaching environment for teachers to be able to implement new practices</td>
<td>Is the participation of school leaders sufficient to provide a positive environment? Have school leaders participated in the program to the level envisaged / required?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships requires school leadership participation. This is intended to lead to a whole of school approach, including a supportive teaching environment for new practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective parent/carer education good practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify supports available for parents and carers (social, emotional and practical) including information and strategies for application in the home setting</td>
<td>Are parents/carers able to apply Positive Partnerships in the home setting?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships is focussed on providing practical supports that can be used with the school, and which often are applicable at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus content on the role parents/carers should play in the education of their child with ASD</td>
<td>Is the key local facilitator role effective in linking parents/carers to other services?</td>
<td>The key local facilitator/key local professional is intended to link participants with other programs and supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does Positive Partnerships cover all of the dimensions of the parent/carer role in their child’s education?</td>
<td>Positive Partnerships does focus content on the role of parents/carers in child’s education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The remainder of this chapter examines in further detail the extent to which Positive Partnerships features the good practices. In doing so, each of issues raised as questions in Table 3.1 is considered. The chapter concludes with an overall assessment about the appropriateness of Positive Partnerships.

3.3 Achieving improved educational outcomes

The development of a collaborative team approach (including teachers, parents and professionals) to education of a child with ASD

Positive Partnerships has been designed with collaboration between teachers, parents and professionals in mind. The program is structured to foster constructive and collaborative relationships, which in turn are likely to lead to improved educational outcomes for children with ASD. While parents and carers of children with ASD may experience conflict or tension with their children’s teachers, the separate Positive Partnership streams allow each group to develop an understanding of the others’ perspective. This presents a dilemma of sorts because tension, and in some cases conflict, are frequently part of the relationship between parents/carers of children with ASD and teachers/schools. If these groups were placed together in a workshop environment, there would be a risk of animosity, which may be counterproductive. Collaboration is achieved when the respective participants of the professional development and parent/carer streams apply the tools and strategies learned.

In considering appropriateness, the question is whether this approach is likely to achieve the desired objectives based on available evidence and considering broader policy settings, or whether alternatives would have been better suited to achieving the desired levels of collaboration.

Possible alternatives include:

• combining training for parents/carers and teachers/schools;
• retaining the parent/carer and professional development streams but incorporate in these a session where teachers attend the parent/carer workshop and parents attend the professional development workshop as a means of encouraging discussion of shared experiences; or
• placing more emphasis on matching participants: so a child with ASD has both a parent or carer and a teacher or other representative from their school attend the program.

Each of these approaches has advantages and disadvantages. Stakeholders expressed views about each of these options:

• stakeholders support having separate parent/carer and professional development streams;
• some participants considered that incorporating a session where teachers attend the parent/carer workshop and parents attend the professional development workshop would be a good way of building empathy. Others stated they felt this could lead to uncomfortable situations; and
• stakeholders generally supported having more emphasis on matching participants, particularly the parent/carer workshop participants, although the practical limitations of achieving this were recognised.

**Providing a child centred approach to delivering education**

Positive Partnerships is focussed on a child centred approach, although whether this is achieved depends on the tools and strategies presented by the program being successfully implemented in schools. Positive Partnerships is child centred because the tools are based on understanding each child with ASD and responding to their individual needs. Central to this is the development of an individual education plan.

Consequently, an important consideration is whether Positive Partnerships is structured to provide sufficient support for this to occur. The strategies adopted by Positive Partnerships to encourage successful implementation in schools include:

• inclusion of a project in the professional development workshop, which involves a strategy learnt at Positive Partnerships being applied to the participant’s school environment;

• requirement for a school leader to attend, to encourage change in the school; and

• key local facilitators providing post program support.

These program features indicate that, as well as being child centred, Positive Partnerships has directed significant effort to supporting schools in making change.

**Employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours of a child with ASD**

Positive Partnerships does support a positive behavioural approach because it is focussed on advising parents/carers and teachers/schools about assessment and interventions that focus on skills development and replacement behaviours. For example, Positive Partnerships assumes that children with ASD may well display obsessive behaviours. It provides tools to understand what drives these behaviours, and how these behaviours can be used as a positive influence. Such as, providing a child with ASD with time for their choice of activity as a reward, after they have completed other tasks, which form part of their established routine at school.

The extent to which a positive behavioural approach is achieved in practice depends on successful implementation in schools. The discussion above relating to the support structures provided by Positive Partnerships is equally applicable to a positive behavioural approach.

Consequently, as well as employing a positive behavioural approach to challenging behaviours, Positive Partnerships has directed significant effort to supporting schools in making change.
**High teacher quality**

Positive Partnerships professional development is directed at improving the quality of teaching among those exposed to the program. In a direct sense, this refers to those teachers who attend the professional development workshop. In an indirect, but still important sense, this refers to any teacher who receives guidance or information derived from Positive Partnerships. This can include, for example, teachers who are referred to the website, or teachers at schools that adopt Positive Partnership practices.

Based on feedback from those who attended the professional development workshop and from the survey results it is clear that the quality of the session is highly regarded. For those who did attend, the evaluation can confidently say that the program has contributed to enhancing teacher quality. A related question however, is whether the program has reached a sufficient number of teachers to have a material impact on teacher quality overall.

**Participation**

Positive Partnerships requires a significant commitment from the professional development workshop participant. The program covers a large amount of material over the four days. This design reflects that the program provides a professional development workshop that is sufficiently comprehensive so as to improve the way schools teach and work with children with ASD.

In this form, it is possible that some teachers are less likely to attend because of the relative long program duration. It is also possible that programs such as this are likely to attract the most engaged teachers. These two propositions raise issues in considering if the design of Positive Partnerships is best suited to meeting its objectives.

- Firstly, there is an apparent trade off between the length of the program and the number of teachers who are willing and/or able to participate.

- Secondly, is the delivery model well suited to reaching teachers who are less engaged with professional development generally, or who do not see themselves as needing to know about children with ASD?

A final related consideration is whether Positive Partnerships is well configured to have a noticeable overall impact on teacher quality, taking into account the following:

- the number of teachers who attend (direct participation); and

- the number of schools who attend (indirect participation) — based on the intention that each school that participates will implement change, consistent with a whole of school approach, and this in turn will influence teacher quality.

These issues are explored further in the context of effectiveness and efficiency in subsequent chapters.
3.4 Effective professional development for teachers — good practices

**Clear and specific content of professional development programs for teachers of children with ASD**

This good practice raises questions related to: whether Positive Partnerships has been integrated with other professional development and with the curriculum; whether the content is clear and specific; and whether teachers who need the information are attending.

The content provides practical and specific information for teachers. Concurrently, it provides material that can be implemented by the school as a whole. Indeed, Positive Partnerships has been developed explicitly with the objective of achieving a whole of school approach, and being useful for classroom teachers.

In comparing Positive Partnerships to an existing program offered by the Archdiocese of Melbourne, the observation was made that Positive Partnerships is not as focussed on application of the tools and strategies provided. While this may be the case, it is a challenge for Positive Partnerships both to provide information and to give the opportunity for practice. It does attempt to do this through the project that teachers are required to conduct at their schools, and by offering professional development workshops of sufficient duration to allow the topics to be explored in depth, including how they should be delivered in school settings.

**Employ a variety of delivery methods**

This good practice relates to making professional development delivery sustained and intensive, beyond short programs. It should also involve opportunities for the practical application of professional development in the school setting. Further, professional development should enable an ongoing relationship to be developed by families with the school and individual teachers.

It is apparent that Positive Partnerships includes a number of techniques directed towards this good practice. There are clearly practical limitations on the extent to which every one of the many teacher professional development opportunities can result in sustained relationships with schools. Notwithstanding these limitations, Positive Partnerships reflects good practice for many of the reasons previously identified — the key local professional role, the project component and the required participation of a school leader. Additionally, it incorporates both face to face and online modules.

There may be opportunities for Positive Partnerships to offer more delivery flexibility, a suggestion that was made by a number of professional development workshop participants in consultation meetings.

**Provide a supportive teaching environment for teachers to be able to implement new practices**

Positive Partnerships has sought to provide a supportive environment, but the extent to which this is achieved in practice is sometimes limited by factors beyond the direct control of the program.
In principle, requiring a school leader to attend a professional development workshop is a sound strategy for providing a supportive teaching environment. In practice, a number of professional development workshop participants advised that their school leader did not attend, or did not attend on the final day when school change is discussed. Some of those participants did not have an overly supportive environment. They may also face cultural issues within the school, with some schools being more active than others in providing a disability friendly environment generally. Some stakeholders advised this can be a particular challenge in secondary schools.

### 3.5 Effective parent/carer education good practices

**Identify supports available for parents and carers**

Positive Partnerships has directed attention to providing parents/carers with practical tools and strategies that can be used at home and at school. Furthermore, the parent/carer workshop includes a discussion in which participants share knowledge of available services within the surrounding area. This is a helpful discussion, because there often is an array of services and supports offered by different levels of government and community organisations.

Additionally, the key local facilitator has an ongoing role in providing links to and information about other services and supports. Often, the key local facilitator is sourced from an organisation that is directly involved in service provision. While the relative success of this role has varied, the presence of the role demonstrates good practice in the design of the program.

**Focus content on the role parents/carers should play in the education of their child with ASD**

The purpose of the parent/carer workshop is to focus on the role parents/carers play in the education of their child with ASD. The structure of the workshop is directed to providing a solid base of knowledge on day one, including extensive interaction with facilitators and other participants, followed by smaller group sessions focused on specific issues on day two. Structuring the program in this way indicates that the program has considered the levels of information that parents require if they are to be well equipped to contribute to their child’s education. A number of parent/carer workshop participants advised that they found the workshops empowering and were able to apply the strategies in a constructive way.

Some of the issues relating to reaching parents/carers include the tendency of more mothers to attend than fathers. Some parents found it difficult to attend for both days, which means they do not receive the program’s full benefits. In some cases, certain group sessions on day two were oversubscribed, and a large group did not allow all present to participate. There is also the risk of an overbearing participant dominating the discussion with their issues. Considerations such as this can be resolved sensitively when the groups are set up with a skilled facilitator.

Despite these issues arising in some instances, it is evident that Positive Partnerships is structured to be consistent with this good practice.
3.6 Sustainability

A further consideration in examining the appropriateness of Positive Partnerships is the sustainability of the model. Sustainability refers to the ability of the DEEWR components to be sustained after the funding period. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of program efficiency, and the sustainability of the program is closely related to efficiency.

In the absence of funding from DEEWR, stakeholders are not convinced that the program would be sustained in its current form. There are significant advantages to Positive Partnerships being a national program funded by the Australian Government. This provides national consistency, the benefits of scale and encourages national collaboration.

A further widespread view was that while there are ASD related information sessions, conferences and training, they are either provided on a commercial basis and therefore not accessible to many people, are available sporadically, or are of dubious quality. The provision of a high quality, publicly funded program, established by well regarded experts and with the backing of the Australian Government was therefore seen as a watershed compared to the previous situation.

Stakeholders viewed Positive Partnerships as aligning with broader Australian Government policy direction of being more engaged in disability support, particularly through the Helping Children with Autism package. One aspect of coordination with the Helping Children with Autism package was raised: in that there is a workshop for parents and carers of pre-school aged children in the FaHCSIA component. Possibly, one program for parents and carers could be provided, encompassing school age and pre-school.

There is considerable frustration among stakeholders about the inconsistent and uncoordinated approaches of state and territory governments towards supporting children with ASD and their families. For this reason, states and territories taking up Positive Partnerships funding without an Australian Government role, was not viewed by stakeholders as a desirable option.

Some stakeholders advised that Positive Partnerships has placed pressure on existing resources, and in that way, was not contributing to the sustainability of the disability support workforce in those organisations. Individuals already working at capacity were saddled with the additional work relating to coordinating Positive Partnerships, or responding to Positive Partnerships inquiries.

Although Positive Partnerships could be offered on a fee for service or commercial basis, stakeholders were opposed to this idea because it would discourage participation from low income families. Chapter 6 considers in detail the options for Positive Partnerships into the future, including trends and environmental factors that could impact on the program.

3.7 Summary and conclusion

Positive Partnerships, or a program with similar objectives, is needed. This need is based on the increasing number of children being diagnosed with ASD and the deficit in knowledge about delivering good educational outcomes for children with ASD that exists at present.
Based on the good practices identified by the evaluation, Positive Partnerships is evidence based. It reflects, or has at least considered, each of the good practices identified.

The structure of Positive Partnerships is appropriate, in that it has distinct professional development and parent/carer components. In developing the program, consideration should be given to how program effectiveness can be maximised within a model that retains this structural feature.
Chapter 4
Effectiveness of Positive Partnerships: Professional development component

This chapter considers the effectiveness of the professional development workshop of Positive Partnerships.

The DEEWR objective for the Positive Partnerships program, in relation is teachers and other school staff, is to:

increase the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff who are working with students with ASD.

The evaluation’s assessment of effectiveness has focused on how effectively the program has supported teachers and other school staff to achieve the above objective. DEEWR has identified two additional measures to inform this assessment.

• Is there evidence that the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff about educating children with ASD has improved?

• Is there evidence that practice in schools has improved as a result?

In assessing effectiveness, the evaluation examines whether stakeholders attribute improved educational outcomes to Positive Partnerships. If the additional support provided through Positive Partnerships, as part of the Helping Children with Autism package, delivers a net benefit to ASD students, their teaching and non teaching support staff, parents and carers, then the initiative has been effective.

4.1 Expectations

Professional development workshop participants understood that the program was about providing school staff with knowledge and strategies to assist them in working with children with ASD, and to encourage an autism friendly approach within schools.

For the professional development program, a select number of participants — those with extensive special education and/or ASD experience — felt that the program objectives were not clearly identified prior to attending the program. These participants considered that the information communicated prior to the program did not make it clear that the program assumed little or no prior knowledge of children with ASD. Consequently, these participants found the program was reinforcing knowledge rather than providing new information. These concerns arose primarily because the program was new. As the program has become more established this has been less of an issue.

Overall, the strong view of participants generally is that the program is pitched at the right level — in providing base level information to teachers and other school staff about children with ASD.
The feedback in stakeholder meetings accords with the high percentage of professional development workshop participants who agreed strongly with the following statements related to program objectives. In each case, the proportion of participants who agreed with the statement to a ‘good’ or ‘great’ extent in the post program survey is reported:

- 91 per cent agreed that the program matched their expectations;
- 82 per cent agreed that the program was pitched at the right level; and
- 85 per cent agreed that the program covered the most important and useful information.

Professional development component stakeholders suggested that by better communicating the objectives of the program to the target audience within schools, many of the issues raised would be addressed. While they generally agreed that the program was pitched at the right level, this was not always well understood by those who attended. Some Professional development component stakeholders suggested adding another level of Professional development, effectively a more advanced course for people with extensive experience in ASD. Countering this view, other stakeholders suggested that Positive Partnerships is best advised to focus on building base knowledge as widely as possible. This perspective pointed out the scale of the task of improving ASD knowledge and practice in schools is so great, that to introduce a higher level course would be premature and not represent the best use of resources nor address the greatest area of need.

This suggestion and other possible alterations to the delivery model are discussed in the final chapter. However, overall the evaluation considers it appropriate that Positive Partnerships remains focussed on building broad base level knowledge. This position is based on the significant and growing need to build an adequate knowledge base about ASD among the teaching workforce, schools and the wider community. Presently, there are significant gaps in knowledge at both an individual and system wide level, while the prevalence of school age children diagnosed with ASD is increasing.

4.2 Increasing the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff

As Positive Partnerships recognises, it is important to increase the number of teachers with good knowledge of ASD, as teachers are increasingly likely to teach children with ASD, particularly within a mainstream school environment. One measure of the effectiveness of Positive Partnerships is the impact of the program on participant knowledge. Specifically this relates to improvement in the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff in educating children with ASD.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium’s survey asked participants to self assess their knowledge in a number of areas relating to the education of children with ASD. Figure 4.1 presents the results of participant assessment of their knowledge of autism, before and immediately after completing the training.
A significant improvement in self assessed participant knowledge is seen after being involved in the workshop. Prior to the workshop, 29 per cent of participants believed they had either a good or great deal of knowledge on current evidence based approaches to children’s learning, while after the workshop this proportion increased to 80 per cent.

The knowledge of the participants showed a significant increase after the workshop for a range of areas, including having a good or great level of knowledge of the following:

- current evidence based approaches to teaching students with autism increased from 20 per cent to 78 per cent;
- constructing a learner profile for a student with ASD increased from 9 per cent to 38 per cent;
- social relationship issues that impact on students with ASD increased from 55 per cent to 92 per cent;
- making curriculum adjustments in accordance with the needs of students with ASD increased from 52 per cent to 90 per cent;
- ways of supporting students with ASD at key transition points, for example, from one grade to the next and from primary to secondary school increased from 35 per cent to 82 per cent; and
- providing an inclusive learning environment for all students, including students with ASD increased from 51 per cent to 81 per cent (see Figure 4.2).

These results accord with feedback from stakeholders.
The relatively good pre-existing knowledge of the participants suggests that those attending often possessed a reasonably good understanding of ASD and related issues. Consultations suggest that this is likely to be because the program attracted a significant number of individuals with a special education coordination role. This issue is discussed further in Section 4.3.

Consultation with program participants highlighted that the most common impact of the program on teacher knowledge was an increase in teacher’s overall understanding of ASD. A participant advised that the Professional development workshop gave teachers a very good background knowledge of ASD, especially in relation to the behavioural aspects of ASD. Highlighting that behaviour is a form of communication, teachers gained an increased understanding of ASD students, including ‘when to push and when to back off’.

Program content

Feedback relating to the content and support provided by the professional development workshop included the following observations.

- Several teachers stated that it is the highest quality Professional development material they have received from any program.
- Stakeholders who coordinate student support services across sectors and within schools observed that the information is evidence-based and clear.
- The material contains many tools and techniques that can be used or adapted for children with other disabilities, and many of the schools consulted have done this.

The content of the program included facts about ASD and its effect on the developing child, as well as issues that may arise in adolescence. This included mental health issues related to transition, often experienced by older primary and secondary students with ASD.
The post program survey reported strong results in response to the following questions that relate to the professional development program content.

- 77 per cent agreed to a good or great extent that the web platform was interesting and engaging, with 19 per cent agreeing to a fair extent.
- 82 per cent agreed to a good or great extent that the program provided them with 'supports or information not available otherwise or elsewhere', with a further 13 per cent agreeing to a fair extent.

Participants indicated that the support materials provided as part of the program were high quality. Participants saw these materials as an important part of increasing their knowledge of ASD and being able to refer back to these resources. These materials included both the hard copy and online materials — although some participants had trouble accessing the online materials after a period of time. Information from the folders and website was often distributed to other teachers and staff within the school.

**Key local professionals**

Key local professionals were established to encourage ongoing networking among program participants following the professional development workshop. Overall feedback on the role of the key local professional has been positive, from both a participant and key local professional perspective. However, some key local professionals found the additional workload involved to be challenging. Key local professionals sustained networks by providing information to participants, and providing advice on projects. There was limited evidence of past participants meeting in person after the workshop, primarily due to people having little free time. This was balanced by the number of teachers and school staff accessing the website information, which totalled 8,950 in early 2010.

**Impact on teaching methods and the school environment**

Many examples were cited where Positive Partnerships led to changed behaviour in delivering education to children with ASD. Changes in behaviour ranged from developing or updating an individual education plan to changing the way schools approach working with children with ASD, and with disabilities more generally.

A commonly identified change in behaviour identified during consultations, was making full use of individual education plans. This change included the development of ‘achievable’ goals for a student with ASD, updating individual education plans at regular intervals and sharing a student’s individual education plan information with other teachers in the school. Many teachers also sought parental input into the formation of individual education plans.

A further common example related to giving more attention to transitions between school years and teachers. By providing a detailed profile on each child in the class, a new teacher is assisted by having the history of any particular issues. This ensures the teacher knows that there is a child with ASD, and what this means in terms of possible behaviour and learning approaches.

Participants highlighted that the program provided strategies and approaches for working effectively with education assistants or teacher aides, in developing strategies for educating students with ASD.
Based on feedback from the focus groups, in most cases, teachers who attended the Positive Partnerships training and were currently teaching a child or children with ASD, felt they were able to use what they learnt at the Positive Partnerships professional development workshop.

Changes in teaching methods had many benefits for children with ASD. The professional development workshop improved the quality of teaching and support provided to children with ASD among those who attended. As teachers implement new strategies and gain an understanding of how to tailor curriculum for different children’s needs, over time, this is expected to have a positive effect on educational outcomes for children with ASD.

**Impact in secondary school environments**

A large number of participants commented that secondary school environments present a different set of challenges compared with a primary school environment. Stakeholders observed that primary schools are better structured to work with children with ASD because they are based on each child having one teacher for the year. At secondary school, this structure changes, and children have specialist subject teachers. There were two perspectives put forward. One perspective is that this is a genuinely difficult issue for secondary schools to resolve. A different view is that this problem is overstated by secondary schools, as they have not taken adequate steps to fulfil their responsibilities to all students.

Focus group participants suggested that the program could be better tailored to the needs of secondary school teachers by placing more emphasis on adapting and delivering a flexible curriculum to students with highly varying educational needs. This would range from mainstream secondary education to tailored programs for children with ASD. Participants also identified that systematic information sharing about students with ASD in a secondary school environment was more important than in primary schools, due to movement between teachers and classes.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium was responsive to feedback from teachers that the program was too focused on teaching children with ASD in a primary school environment in the first round of program delivery. Following this, the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium adapted the program materials adding more focus on the secondary school environment including examples and strategies for secondary teachers to use.

**Working in partnership with parents and carers**

The professional development workshop participants consulted recognised the importance of improving and maintaining a positive relationship with parents of students with ASD. A number of participants indicated that the workshop gave them a better insight into the perspective of parents and carers of children with ASD.

Some examples of improvements made in teacher-parent relationships as a result of Positive Partnerships are detailed below.
• One special education teacher commented that even though her knowledge and experience of ASD was high, following Positive Partnerships she found it easier to understand parents of children with ASD and the difficulties they encounter. This led to an improvement in how she dealt with parents in pressure situations and in coping with the issues that arise.

• Another teacher identified that following Positive Partnerships, she now wrote three child profiles for each child in her class with ASD, one from the child’s perspective, one from their parent’s perspective and another from her perspective.

Impacts of Positive Partnerships on the wider school community have been widely varying and depend on a number of factors.

**Impact on school communities**

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium workshop surveys asked participants a range of questions regarding the impact of Positive Partnerships on the school. The impact of the workshop can be seen by the increase in self-assessed school based activity by the participants, where:

• participants that believed they shared with colleagues knowledge and strategies for working with students with ASD to a good/great extent increased from 49 per cent to 79 per cent; and

• participants that believed they worked effectively with education assistant/teaching aides in catering for students with ASD to a good/great extent was maintained above 60 per cent.

Prior to the workshop 70 per cent of participants were expecting the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium information to change their day to day practice at their school to a good or great extent. Immediately after the workshop 74 per cent considered that this was achieved. However, when this same question was asked at the follow up survey (conducted 3 to 6 months after the workshop), the proportion of participants still using this information to change their day to day practice at school, dropped to 46 per cent. This suggests a significant proportion of respondents had some difficulty in sustaining positive change within their school environment.

Stakeholders indicated that development of an autism friendly school culture was more likely to be achieved when a school leader attended Positive Partnerships. A school leader is generally considered to be a principal or assistant principal. When a school leader attends, Positive Partnerships tools and strategies can be more readily disseminated throughout the school community.

While this is an important general observation, it is also the case that some of those in a special education coordination role who attended, were able to implement changes at school, regardless of whether the principal/assistant principal attended. This was the case when coordinators already had considerable autonomy and support from the principal and were able to pass the information obtained on to other school staff. A number of examples were provided where this had occurred.

Consultations and focus groups with participants in the professional development workshop also revealed a number of positive school impacts resulted from Positive Partnerships training. Some of these whole school impacts are described below.
Implementing a primary-middle school transition program

A number of schools implemented changes likely to support development of an autism friendly culture relating to key transition years for students with ASD. Some examples of these programs are described below.

- After attending the Positive Partnerships program, one school implemented a new system for children in years 5 and 6, focused on transition from primary to middle school. Whilst the transition program is focused on children with ASD, the program aims to improve the ease of transition for all children at the school.

- As part of this focus, parents met with year 5-6 teachers to plan for transition from primary to middle school for their child with ASD. Teachers also compiled a transition booklet for parents to go through with their child during holiday periods, to remind and prepare them for transition to middle school in the following year.

- A school in the Sydney metropolitan area put together a DVD for year 6 orientation day to aid the transition of all children into middle school, including those with ASD. This DVD provides a visual approach to demonstrating the differences and challenges of moving into the middle school environment.

- Parent participation in planning transition was a key area raised and improved in a number of schools, and formed part of the overall improvement in parent/carer-teacher/school relationships.

Adapting whole of school policy

A number of schools provided examples of how Positive Partnerships had aided them to adapt whole of school policies to create a more autism friendly environment. These changes often benefited both children with ASD and children with other special needs. Two examples of adapting whole of school policy are provided below.

- A regional school in South Australia used learnings from Positive Partnerships to adapt a whole school policy to include a focus on flexible learning and behavioural support.

- Following attendance at Positive Partnerships, another school set up a ‘passive playgroup area’ where children (including children with ASD) who did not feel comfortable elsewhere in the playground could find a ‘safe and comfortable’ area in which to spend lunchtime. In addition to this, the library was made available to students wishing to have some ‘quiet time’ away from the playground. This also provides an example of some of the Positive Partnership strategies that benefited not only children with ASD, but also children with other disability or developmental delay.

As highlighted previously, the majority of participants indicated that it was important for the principal or another senior member of staff to attend at least one day of the workshop to achieve an autism friendly culture. Instances where little or no whole of school change were also cited. This was mainly due to a lack of support from school leaders and issues with the prevailing school culture related to children with special needs.

Box 4.1 provides a case study of positive changes implemented by Lumen Christi School, following attendance at Positive Partnerships.
CASE STUDY: LUMEN CHRISTI SCHOOL, GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA

Lumen Christi College encourages all their teachers to complete the online module of the professional development program to improve the whole of school approach to helping children with ASD. The flow-on effect has resulted in a universal shift in the teacher mindset and understanding of ASD, allowing the following changes — each inspired by Positive Partnerships — to be implemented:

- Teachers have learnt appropriate ways to speak to children with ASD, reducing the risk of situations escalating to conflict.
- Teachers have adjusted the curriculum and the environment, where appropriate, to better suit children with ASD.
- The school has introduced a range of sensory based techniques to engage and assist children with ASD. This included visual schedules, sensory and tactile items, and the presence of staff photos (particularly when children are about to be taught by a new teacher).
- The school is implementing a support group for the parents of the children with ASD attending the school.
- The school regularly encourages all parents to visit the Positive Partnerships website to learn more about ASD and to understand the school’s approach to supporting children with ASD.

According to the school, Positive Partnerships has given the school ‘permission to do a whole lot more’ for children with ASD. Positive Partnerships has taught the school how to better respect children with ASD, and has developed an enthusiasm among the staff to work effectively with children with ASD.

Source: Focus groups

4.3 Creating a national pool of teachers and other school staff equipped to share their knowledge and skills on ASD

In creating a national pool of teachers and other school staff, equipped to share their knowledge and skills on ASD, the targeting and reach, and participation in professional development workshops is assessed.

Accessibility

A proportion of program participants indicated that because the program was offered at no direct cost to participants, this enabled them to use a portion of their nominated professional development budget to implement follow up projects within their school. For example, one school used this budget to buy middle school learning folders for students to aid in transition from primary to middle school and to help with organisational skills.

Travel costs were met by DEEWR in the professional development workshop. This was particularly valuable in more remote jurisdictions where, for example, professional development workshop participants from throughout the Northern Territory were able to attend the professional development workshop in Darwin.

Access to the program from government, Catholic and independent schools was seen as appropriate. In some instances, particularly in smaller jurisdictions, there was some concern about whether a sufficient number of non government schools were able to participate. However, in each case, these issues were resolved collaboratively.


**Awareness**

Awareness of the Positive Partnerships program varied between program participants, and schools, and increased over time as delivery of the program continued.

Consultation with participant and non participant stakeholders indicated a number of varying experiences in terms of awareness of the Positive Partnerships professional development program. Overall, participant awareness seemed to depend on the enthusiasm of individual teachers and principals as well as communication from sector representatives (government, Catholic and independent).

In some cases information about the program was communicated throughout a whole school and its community (including parents and carers). In other circumstances, schools and teachers found it hard to get information about the program, or the information was lost.

It was noted that the awareness of the program improved dramatically throughout 2009, and that the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium was responsive in trying innovative methods of raising awareness about the program. This approach by the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has continued in the approach to marketing Positive Partnerships in 2010. Overall, Positive Partnerships is becoming more widely known among teachers and other school staff.

**Targeting and reach**

Targeting was more of an issue in the professional development stream than the parent/carer stream. Those reflecting on the sessions frequently stated that it was difficult to attract general classroom teachers to attend the program. The extent to which participants considered this to be a serious deficiency varied. Some considered it incongruous that the information was pitched at general classroom teachers, but few such teachers attended some sessions. This feedback often related to the first year of the program. Data provided by the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium for the 2009-10 year suggest that participation was well balanced.

According to Positive Partnerships statistics, in the year July 2009 to June 2010 there were 1,336 professional development workshop participants, which can be broken down as follows:

- 188 leadership staff (14 per cent);
- 871 teaching staff (65 per cent); and
- 277 other staff (21 per cent).

Participants considered that classroom teachers are likely to find the program most useful if they have a child with ASD in their class, or they are likely to in the near future. Consequently, these participants consider that schools need to apply judgement in deciding who should attend.

Other targeting issues related to primary school and secondary school participation, school leadership participation and special school participation.
There was universal agreement that the professional development stream needs to engage school leaders, such as a principal or assistant/deputy principal. The professional development workshop initially sought to do this by requiring that a school leader attend the four days. This proved difficult to achieve so the requirement changed to attendance on the final day, which deals with implementing change at school. Stakeholders support the revised approach, advising that a school leader is more likely to attend for one day than for all four. Some principals who have attended for the four days found this worthwhile, others questioned if such a commitment was justified, relative to other demands on their time.

A stakeholder representing special schools identified that the process of nominating a selection of schools from each sector has reduced the participation of special schools. There may be a tendency to assume that special school teachers possess experience of children with ASD and have received the necessary training and consequently are not given the opportunity to participate. The stakeholder identified that this assumption is not necessarily correct, and many special school teachers require professional development in the areas covered by Positive Partnerships.

In summary, it is important that Positive Partnerships reaches both classroom teachers, and people who are in a position of leadership that enables them to drive change in the school. It is also important that the program reaches secondary schools and special schools.

**Participation**

The reach of the Positive Partnerships program can be evaluated by comparing the prevalence of ASD in school aged children to the number of children with ASD at schools that have participated in Positive Partnerships. This task is complicated by the degree of variation in prevalence figures in the literature.

Positive Partnerships participation numbers indicate the reach of the program. As at July 2010, 1,866 teachers and other school staff from 1,108 schools have participated in 51 Positive Partnerships workshops. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2010), there are 9,529 primary and secondary schools in Australia. Approximately 12 per cent of schools have participated in the program, (where these figures represent about three quarters of the current funding cycle of the program in terms of workshop and participant numbers). Based on future planned activity and participation data, by the end of 2011 approximately 1,500 schools will have participated in the program, which equates to roughly 16 per cent of all Australian schools. It is important to note that because a school has ‘participated’ this does not mean the school has successfully developed an autism friendly culture.

Another way of viewing participation is to consider the proportion of teachers that have participated in the program. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2008) there are approximately 250,000 primary and secondary teachers (full time equivalent) in Australia. Approximately 2,400 teachers and other school staff are expected to have participated in Positive Partnerships workshops by the end of 2011, representing about 1 per cent of primary and secondary school teachers in Australia.
Participation rates by teachers and school staff demonstrate that Positive Partnerships has contributed to developing a national pool of teachers and school staff equipped with knowledge and skills relating to ASD. As would be expected, the proportion of schools to have participated is higher than the proportion of individual teachers. This emphasises the importance of effective networking and use of Positive Partnerships after the professional development workshop.

The challenge for Positive Partnerships, in conjunction with other measures, is to increase the depth and breadth of expertise related to children with ASD. Achieving this will require:

- a higher proportion of schools to participate;
- information to be shared within schools; and
- complimentary measures, such as teacher training at university.

Professional development workshop stakeholders suggested that the reach of the program could be improved by offering alternative methods of delivery. They suggested that as teachers are accustomed to undertaking professional development through a combination of online and face to face learning, the proportion of online delivery could be increased without unduly compromising quality. Professional development workshop participants considered that if the program was adapted in these ways, it could reach more schools more efficiently. Those who participated considered this would be a good outcome, because the task of achieving better school practice for children with ASD across education sectors, is a major one.

**Barriers to participation**

Professional development workshop participants identified a number of barriers to participation. Barriers to participation influence the effectiveness of the program, as well as the program’s overall impact on teachers and other schools staff. Barriers to participation included: the length of the professional development workshop; cost and access to relief teachers; the cost of travel and the location of workshops; as well as the program not specifically reaching Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

- The length of the professional development workshop was an issue raised by a number of program participants. The program runs for four days in total — although there is a break between the first two days and the final two days. There were also online requirements for the program prior to and following the professional development workshop, which some teachers found hard to find the time to complete. Other participants commented that the time commitment of the professional development workshop was a factor in some teachers and other school staff not completing.

- The cost of temporary relief teachers was raised by a large number of participants. In rural areas, schools had trouble finding relief teachers available to cover the length of the program. This may indicate that some schools and teachers did not choose to participate in the professional development program due to the time commitment of the course.
• In some local areas and regional communities where the incidence of ASD is high, participants found demand for the program outstripped the supply of places. In other locations there was more difficulty in getting teachers and other school staff to participate. In the majority of cases the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has been responsive to these issues and allocated the following ‘rounds’ of workshops to areas of need. It should be noted that demand for the program will continue to increase as awareness of the program and diagnoses of ASD continue to increase.

• Timing was an issue in some regions, with the professional development workshop being offered in school holidays, during which time teachers do not generally undertake professional development.

• A number of stakeholders indicated that the Positive Partnerships program was not wholly designed to encourage participation from Indigenous Australians or culturally and linguistically diverse groups. However, as discussed previously in Chapter 1, the program has taken a number of significant steps in meeting the needs of diverse communities.

4.4 Establishing professional networks among participants

One of the DEEWR objectives for the professional development workshop of the Positive Partnerships program is to create a national pool of teachers and other school staff equipped to share their knowledge and skills with their peers and network and learn from each other beyond their participation in the professional development program.

As discussed above, based on the focus groups, there is more evidence of networking within schools than between schools. However, education sector representatives in a number of jurisdictions advised that the key local professional role and the networking opportunities it facilitates have been of considerable value.

Focus groups also indicated that information sharing between teachers and schools appeared to be greater in regional and rural locations, than in the metropolitan environment. This may be due to a number of factors including a smaller total number of schools in these locations, a high incidence of ASD in some communities, and stronger overall community support. This observation is based on the areas consulted for this evaluation, while interesting, it is not a finding that could be generalised more broadly.

As part of the self assessment survey, participants indicated that they were involved in collegial networks that extended and supported their knowledge and skills of ASD, and allowed sharing of strategies for working with students with ASD to a good extent. During consultations, participants also identified that information and strategy sharing was more likely to occur within the school, rather than between teachers of different schools — although a small number of teachers reported this outcome.

Box 4.2 provides an example of a school approaching special needs education based on better integration of special needs and mainstream students.
CASE STUDY: NHULUNBUY PRIMARY SCHOOL, ARNHEM LAND, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Nhulunbuy Primary School is the sole public primary school in the remote town of Nhulunbuy, a mining town in Arnhem land. The school has a high prevalence of special needs students, with 11 of their 500 students diagnosed with ASD. In 2008, the school closed its special needs facility and reopened it as a learning centre for the special needs students. The school decided to approach special needs education differently and introduce integration between the special needs and mainstream students. The new approach meant that children with ASD would no longer spend all their time at the learning facility.

In 2009 the school became involved with Positive Partnerships, a timely involvement considering the changes taking place at the school. Nhulunbuy was able to utilise a number of strategies learnt from Positive Partnerships, to assist the integration of ASD children into mainstream classes. Some of these strategies and implemented changes are listed below:

- The school's inclusion support assistance employees (18 in total) completed the parent/carer workshop and discovered and implemented new classroom learning methods including social stories, thinking chairs, reward charts and break cards.
- Conventional assessment was changed so that children with ASD were assessed using more appropriate assessment tools.
- The school's signs were revamped and standardised so that there were consistent pictures for the canteen, the toilets and play areas.
- Nhulunbuy primary introduced a new enrolment policy involving a full risk and needs assessment for children with ASD and a child would only commence once their appropriate needs were met. The policy included a gentle introduction program for children with ASD, an example of which allowed a child to spend a number of days over a two week period being guided around the campus, simply to get used to the new environment.
- Transition programs for preschool to primary school and primary school to high school were introduced. Children with ASD are gradually introduced to the new environment over an extended period.
- Playground monitoring was introduced to monitor and reduce the prevalence of bullying in the playground.

Positive Partnerships was described by the school as providing a ‘straight forward recipe’ to assist and improve the education of children with ASD.

Source: Focus groups and consultation

4.5 Fostering an ‘autism friendly’ culture in schools

One of the DEEWR objectives for the program is to foster an autism friendly culture in schools and for the program to aid in the development of productive connections and partnerships between school, home and the broader community.

Many schools consulted had made immediate improvements to their existing practices using the Positive Partnership resources. The improvements related to both improving practice for children with ASD, and to applying or adapting Positive Partnerships to children with special needs more generally. Schools also used the Positive Partnership materials to train a wider range of school staff including teaching aides/support staff, thereby improving the environment for children with ASD.
During consultation with non participants and participants of the program, examples of both ‘autism friendly’ and non ‘autism friendly’ schools were provided. There were also cases in which school leaders were unwilling to make significant changes to the ‘culture’ of the school, or implement new strategies, following attendance at Positive Partnerships.

Whilst the program has contributed to developing and improving an ‘autism friendly’ culture in some schools, it would be unrealistic to expect that the program has contributed to achieving an autism friendly culture in all schools, or that development of an autism friendly culture will continue without ongoing support and materials being available where needed.

Overall, the impact in schools varied greatly depending on a number of factors such as the number of children with ASD or special needs within the school, strategies the school already had in place or the responsiveness of the principal to adopting an autism friendly school culture. In cases where teachers and principals did embrace follow up projects, the program impacts were significant.

Tennison Woods (Box 4.3) provides an example of existing good practices within schools, supporting children with ASD. These practices were extended following teacher’s participation in Positive Partnerships. This demonstrates that Positive Partnerships is also of value to schools that already have strong supportive programs for children with ASD.
Box 4.3

CASE STUDY: TENNISON WOODS COLLEGE, MT GAMBIER, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Tennison Woods College is a Reception to Year 12 coeducational Catholic school. The school has over 40 children with ASD — with most children being of primary school age. Tennison Woods currently has students who span many aspects of the autism spectrum, including verbal and non-verbal students. To support students and their families, Tennison provides both mainstream class supports and small class supports depending on each individual’s needs.

**Mainstream classroom support**

- Relaxation groups — students work in small groups to learn skills and strategies to assist them in self regulation and relaxation
- Organisational folders (years 6-10) — using 2009 grant money, Tennison was able to purchase and create folders to assist students within organisation. The school conducted several sessions on how to use the folders. The folders had colour coded sections for each subject, reminder notes on sleeves for diaries, notes to go home, assignments, and a pencil case that could be clipped inside the folder.
- Social skills lessons — students attend year level social skills sessions that target anger management, behaviour management and getting along.
- Specific ASD sessions — mainly for middle school students who practice and discuss social situations, all of which target their immediate need.
- Teachers who have students with ASD have a meeting session with the special education staff at the start of the year to discuss the specific needs of students in their class, strategies and supports to use.
- Year 4 and 5 sports — twice a week at lunch times year 4 and 5 students have the opportunity to participate in an organised sport run by an education support officer. The school targets ASD students, who eagerly participate and welcome all students to join in. The aim of the sessions are to model correct behaviours from fair play, turn taking, brushing the small things aside, listening to others and how to act when you are ‘out’.
- Speech and language — students identified via a liaison speech therapist from Community Health participate in sessions to develop vocabulary and language use.

**Small group classes**

Tennison Woods is able to cater for students with more complex issues within small group classes, where students have their own learning plan and are taught by a teacher with support from an education support officer. Classes alter year to year depending on student numbers and needs. These groups have access to Community Health workers — including a speech pathologist and occupational therapist, who assist the teacher in meeting the needs of the small group. The class has daily fine and gross motor sessions. Students also participate in dedicated speech and language sessions twice per week.

**Whole school**

- Developing profiles of each student with disabilities / learning needs in the school to ensure communication of students needs are passed to all teachers reception to year 12.
- Negotiation of class timetables and extracurricular needs of students, especially in years 6-12. If subjects are too stressful for students they are taken out of that subject line. This is often replaced with relaxation or social skills sessions.
- Play zone — a quieter, safer place for students to play / hang out during break times.

**Parents**

Questionnaires are sent out to parents of children with ASD on a yearly basis to update the school’s information on the student, and to get an idea of how things are going in the home environment. The school welcomes communication with parents and has an open door/email policy to discuss concerns and strategies. Teachers also meet with parents of children with ASD to discuss their child’s needs and how the school can better cater for them in the school environment.

Source: Focus group and supplementary information supplied by Tennison Woods College.
**Community-wide impacts**

Positive Partnerships has had a number of impacts beyond individual participants and schools. For the professional development workshop, these impacts have mainly been around the networking of teacher cohorts whilst undertaking the training, leading to continued contact and information sharing around educating children with ASD. The professional development workshop has also strengthened the relationship between government, Catholic and independent school associations, and their willingness to work collaboratively.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium workshop surveys provide further insight into the effect of Positive Partnerships beyond the school environment. Furthermore, participants with involvement in collegial networks to a good/great extent increased from 26 per cent to 65 per cent (see figure below).

![Figure 4.3](image-url)  
**INVolvement IN CollegIAL NETWORKS**

The strength of networks following completion of the program depended on a small number of factors. These factors include: the engagement or interest of participants; the community overall; receptiveness of the school to implement changes; and, to an extent, how active the key local professional was in encouraging networking between participants. This meant that the strength of professional networks following the program, varied greatly.

Collaboration between sectors (government, Catholic and independent) was one of the outcomes of the program that was highly regarded by non participant stakeholders across states and territories. It was noted by some stakeholders that there were no other national programs that had delivered professional development across these three education sectors as effectively as Positive Partnerships.
4.6 Summary and conclusion

Overall, based on consultation with participants and survey data, there is evidence to support the finding that Positive Partnerships has increased the knowledge of teachers and other school staff currently working with students with ASD.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the evaluation findings in relation to each objective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional development objective</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Increase the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff (includes school leaders, education assistants, teacher aides, special support teachers and coordinators working with school students with ASD) currently working with students with ASD in the full range of government and non-government primary and secondary schools across Australia.</td>
<td>There was significant evidence that the program increased the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff currently working with students with ASD. This was achieved in both government and non-government schools. The program, in the first instance was more primary school focused, however was adapted following participant feedback to provide greater secondary school specific information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) improve the quality of teaching and support provided to school students with ASD in primary and secondary schools.</td>
<td>The program increased the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff. This therefore increased the quality of teaching and support provided to schools students. Participants highlighted a number of strategies that were implemented in classrooms and schools, leading to positive educational outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) create a national pool of teachers and other school staff equipped to share their knowledge and skills with their peers and network and learn from each other beyond their participation in the professional development program.</td>
<td>The program is beginning to achieve this objective, however only is only delivered to a relatively small number of teachers and other school staff each year. The program would need to continue for some time to successfully achieve this objective on a wider scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) establish a professional network to provide opportunities for sharing among participants and access to advice and support following the professional development program.</td>
<td>Professional networks were established as part of the program, and provided opportunities for participants to gain access to advice and support following the program. The success of this component depended on mainly on the enthusiasm of participants and the key local professional. Some groups reported strong networks whilst in other areas networks were minimal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) foster an autism friendly culture in schools and the development of productive connections and partnerships between school and home and the broader community.</td>
<td>There is evidence that Positive Partnerships has had some success in fostering an autism friendly culture in schools. Perhaps most significantly, the evaluation has identified the circumstances in which this is most likely to occur. To be autism friendly, a whole of school approach is required, along with engagement of the principal, and the ability of a special needs coordinator or similar to be empowered to implement good practice tools and strategies, such as those advocated by Positive Partnerships. Additionally, it was significant that implementation of Positive Partnerships has been beneficial for students with disabilities generally — many of the tools and strategies are broadly applicable. Specific examples included improved communication with parents/carers, transition planning and a commitment to maintaining individual education plans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Allen Consulting Group
Chapter 5
Effectiveness of Positive Partnerships: Parent/carer component

This chapter considers the effectiveness of the parent/carer stream of Positive Partnerships.

The DEEWR objectives for the Positive Partnerships program, in relation to the parent/carer workshop, are to:

• inform parents/carer about the most current evidence-based knowledge on ASD and how this directly impacts on their child’s learning;

• assist parents/carers to understand the processes and strategies that enable effective parent, school and teacher partnerships;

• equip parents/carers with specific information and strategies on how they can be effective advocates to support their child’s learning whilst negotiating the education environment of which their child is a part;

• inform parents/carers about their local school systems processes to support their child’s learning at all stages of their educational pathway; and

• help parents/carers understand ways to maximise their child’s learning in the home environment.

5.1 Expectations

Parent/carer workshop participants understood that the program’s focus was on assisting them to work effectively with their child’s school.

Participants generally did not see Positive Partnerships in terms of both the parent/carer and professional development streams, and in many cases were not aware of the other stream. The lack of awareness of the other stream was more common among parent/carer workshop participants, but was also observed among some professional development workshop participants. This could indicate that there is not a full appreciation of how the program is seeking to develop better partnerships between parents/carers and schools. Although, it should also be recognised that matching of participants from the same school is not an explicit program objective.

For parent/carer workshop participants:

• 83 per cent agreed that the program matched their expectations;

• 81 per cent agreed that the workshops and information sessions were pitched at the right level; and

• 86 per cent agreed that the workshops and information sessions were useful.
Participation

As described in Chapter 4, it is important for Positive Partnerships to engage a significant number of parents/carers of children with ASD. As estimated in Chapter 2, there are approximately 22,000 school aged children with ASD in Australia. This figure can be used to estimate the reach of the parent/carer workshop component of Positive Partnerships. Up until July 2010, 3,507 parents/carers had participated in the parent/carer workshops. If one parent per child participated in the workshops, parents or carers of approximately 3,500 school aged children with ASD participated in a workshop.

About two thirds of the total number of workshops to be completed by the end of 2011 have been undertaken so far. By the end of 2011 approximately 4,700 families of children with ASD will have participated in the program over the four years, which equates to over 20 per cent of families that have a school aged child with ASD. However, in practice more than one parent might attend, so 20 per cent should be seen as being at the top of the range.

Parent/carer workshop stakeholders primarily raised issues about overcoming barriers to participation and in so doing, ensuring those most in need of Positive Partnerships are able to attend. This is discussed below in the context of barriers.

Awareness

A number of parents/carers raised concerns about the lack of awareness of Positive Partnerships. Autism associations raised a similar concern.

The main issue concerning the targeting of the parent/carer stream related to the ability of the program to reach more vulnerable families. This may be due to difficulty in raising awareness among people who are under greatest family stress and those families that may not be as connected to support and information services such as autism associations. It may also reflect a concern about the time and cost of attending (see barriers to participation). For example, some parents said that they were lucky to find out about the workshop and did so either by chance on the internet or by word of mouth. There was also a widespread view that this was a more significant problem early on in the program and communication has improved over time.

To take one example, Autism SA also has a register of parents of children with ASD, which was used to inform parents about the program. Although autism associations and government departments in other states and territories keep similar registers, registers were not always used to inform parents about Positive Partnerships.

Accessibility

Parents and carers reported they have not previously been able to access resources of such high quality. The content, support and delivery were widely praised. Stakeholders indicated that in the past parents and carers had to bear the often high costs of attending information sessions and workshops to gain knowledge and strategies for their child with ASD. Therefore, the program accessibility and program value for the participant was considered to be of a high standard.
**Barriers to participation**

While the program offers a good workshop free of direct costs to participants, a number of issues can be barriers to participation.

- The workshop runs beyond the time school finishes on both days. If parents cannot organise for their children to be picked up from school or looked after then some parents will not participate in the workshop.

- Parents and carers based in regional and rural areas may face greater challenges to participate in the workshop, if they have greater distances to travel and limited access to childcare and public transport services.

- The length of the workshop and the regional issues (both stated above) can impose costs on the participant. Childcare, travel and accommodation may be required for a parent/carer to participate in the workshop.

- There are a number of challenges related to reaching Indigenous families and communities. The current structure of the workshop has been described by a number of stakeholders as inappropriate for Indigenous communities. A more socially and culturally appropriate workshop for Indigenous communities would reduce the barrier to participation for them. It has been suggested that a more culturally appropriate format for Indigenous communities might involve community elders/leaders helping to plan or facilitate sessions based on the workshop.

The evaluation has given consideration to strategies to increase participation, which are detailed in the final chapter and reflected in the recommendations.

**5.2 Informing parents/carers about current, evidence based knowledge on ASD**

Parents and carers were asked to rate their knowledge of current evidence based approaches to improving their child’s learning needs before and after the workshop. The results are shown in Figure 5.1.
A clear improvement in self assessed participant knowledge is seen after involvement in the workshop. Prior to the workshop, 16 per cent of participants believed they had either a good or great deal of knowledge on current evidence based approaches to their child’s learning, while after the workshop this proportion increased to 68 per cent.

35 per cent of participants agreed to a good or great extent that they ‘gained access to ongoing support and services for children with ASD’, with a further 23 per cent agreeing to a fair extent. The remainder ranged from ‘not at all’ (16 per cent) ‘to a little extent’ (12 per cent) and ‘to some extent’ (14 per cent).

80 per cent agreed to a good or great extent that the workshops and information sessions covered the most important content, with 16 per cent agreeing to a fair extent.

On questions related to contact from the key local facilitator and/or mentor, 50 per cent of parents/carers had contact once a week or more, and a further 35 per cent once or twice a month.

These results show a significant improvement in the self assessed knowledge of participants, as a result of the workshop. The parent/carer workshop improved knowledge by a greater proportion than did the professional development workshop, although the parent/carer workshop participants had a lower level of knowledge at the outset.

**Program structure and content**

The workshop enables parents/carers of children of varying ages to attend, with parents/carers sharing a table with the parents of children of a similar age. Parents are also asked to nominate how long it has been since they received the ASD diagnosis. This assists the facilitators and the participants and is done in an appropriate way.
The structure of the workshops allows parents/carers to contribute what they know from experiences with their child, so they can then develop strategies (and gain advice from facilitators) for working with schools.

Workshop sessions on day one focus on the following topics:

- what have I learnt on my journey so far? What questions do you have?
- autism — what does it look like (general discussion of parent’s experiences, aided by a video)?
- developing strategies to use at home and school to improve your child’s learning outcomes (video about strategies when working with students with autism, asking participants to add additional strategies to the strategies matrix);
- creating positive partnerships through collaboration between teachers, teaching aides and visiting teachers (video and discussion);
- discussion of what teachers can provide for children with ASD. This session is aimed at providing parents/carers with a teachers perspective of educating a child with ASD;
- discussion of a ‘growth model’ for problem solving — designed to help in problem solving issues in working with the child’s school;
- reflection on where parents can find support in coping with the challenges of their child with ASD (close relationships, information relationships and professional relationships); and
- choosing an intervention.

Workshop sessions on day two focus on the following topics:

- managing transitions;
- positive behaviour support;
- communication strategy;
- making friends;
- networking (support groups);
- sexuality;
- siblings; and
- bullying.

Parents/carers were able to choose a number of sessions to attend, based on their own interest in topic areas.

Participants noted that there was a large amount of information to cover — especially on the first day of the program. Some parent/carers found the amount of information slightly daunting. However, comprehensive workshop materials enabled parents to refer back to information at a later date. Workshop materials were identified as a highlight of the program.
Parents and carers identified that the number of facilitators (usually four or five) enabled them to gain one on one information from facilitators. Facilitators were able to work in smaller groups with parents and carers in completing activities and in facilitating discussion. The need for more facilitators is more compelling in the parent/carer workshop — this is due to the varying backgrounds of parents and carers attending the program.

**Opportunities to discuss experiences**

Parents and carers found the opportunity to interact with other parents and carers with similar experiences invaluable. Parents highlighted being able to share information and strategies with other parents as being particularly useful. Additionally, parents of older children with ASD who attended were able to provide advice on their experiences in relation to transition and secondary school, to parents with younger children with ASD.

Parents identified that one of the best outcomes was bringing together parents from different schools and comparing experiences, available services and supports. This informed parents of the different resources and programs available through schools in their local area.

**Video examples**

Parents and carers found the video presentations about ‘what ASD looks like’ and ‘autism the school years’ helpful. Discussion following the presentation of videos was helpful to parents, and identified strategies for use in different situations.

**Program website**

The access to information via the Positive Partnerships website was important for parents and carers attending the program. Parents identified that this enabled them to refer back to information learnt in the sessions, as well as being able to access high quality, information. The quality and legitimacy of information was an important part of attending the program, as parents often felt overwhelmed by the amount of information on ASD on the internet. A significant number of parents noted that they referred friends, family and teachers to the Positive Partnerships website, although it was clear that not all participants used it to the same extent.

Overall, a commonly suggested improvement by stakeholders was that the parent/carer workshop should provide more information for older children with ASD. For example, there should be some workshops for parents/carers of teenagers — dealing with issues in later secondary school and beyond. This is an information and service gap of concern by a high number of parents — although DEEWR will need to consider the extent to which Positive Partnerships should fill this gap, compared to other sources of information.

The overall success of the parent/carer workshop is that it demonstrates a flexibility and capacity to support parents/carers of school age children, and stages of experience since obtaining an ASD diagnosis.

**5.3 Processes and strategies that enable effective parent, school and teacher partnerships**

Parents were empowered by Positive Partnerships to raise issues with their child’s school in a constructive way using the techniques suggested by the program.
When parents took this action, there were a number of examples from the participants who attended the focus groups, where this led to the school improving its performance. There were also a small number of cases where, despite their efforts, parents decided that the school would not meet the needs of their child and chose to change schools. In each case, the parents identified that Positive Partnerships gave them the confidence and resolve to take this major decision.

There have been numerous examples of the reduction in tension between a child’s family and school as a result of the parent/carer being able to better advocate for their child and engage more positively with their child’s school. Where this occurred, flow on effects resulted in the child’s learning needs being better met. One example described by a parent was the distinct decrease in aggression displayed by their child as a result of the parents and school working in partnership following participation by the parent in the workshop.

In survey results, the participants reported a significant increase after the workshop for a range of other knowledge areas. Having a good or great deal of knowledge of the process and strategies that enable effective parent/carer, school and teacher partnerships increased from 19 per cent to 81 percent (Figure 5.2).

![Figure 5.2: Knowledge of Process and Strategies that Enable Effective Partnerships](image)

Source: Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium survey

Having a good or great deal of knowledge of the education environment of which their child is a part increased from 37 per cent to 67 per cent (Figure 5.3).
Parents/carers whose child’s school had participated in the Positive Partnerships professional development workshop described the value of aligning their approaches with the child’s school environment. Specifically, the child’s individual education plan provided a shared approach to their child’s education. Additionally, the individual education plan reflects good practice, which emphasises the importance of a child centred approach to education (Chapter 2).

One of the most useful tools learnt through the parent/carer workshops was the characteristics matrix. This matrix was developed with parents/carers in one of the workshop sessions. The matrix is designed to be helpful for sharing information about their child with the school and the different teachers a child may have. The matrix describes a child’s characteristics and the impact of each of these in areas such as communication, socialisation, flexibility of behaviours, sensory issues and learning styles. The matrix may also describe ways of calming the child in challenging situations that may occur in the school environment. During this workshop session, facilitators were able to work with different tables of participants to assist parents/carers with this activity.

**Parent/carer partnerships**

Most parents and carers described the value of networking with other parents/carers and how the workshop helped them develop these networks. This is consistent with good practice, which states that parent/carer education should help identify supports available for parents and carers (Chapter 2). This has been important both for support and for knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing has allowed parents to learn things such as what to expect as their children get older (from parents of older children) and different parenting strategies. These benefits were supported by views from other non-participant stakeholders.

Despite this, some stakeholders reported that participation in the follow up networking activities was low. Parents highlighted ‘day to day complexities’ as the main reason for not continuing to participate in networking following the workshop. These complexities included time constraints and finding care for their child in
order to attend follow up networking. 14 per cent of the participants (up to December 2009) completed the online follow up survey. Of those who did complete this follow up survey, 36 per cent indicated that they gained access to ongoing support and services for their children.

Whilst networking participation was reasonably low, it would also be unrealistic to expect every workshop participant to be actively involved in post workshop networking activities, especially given the demands that parents face raising a child with ASD and raising a family. Therefore, on balance the post workshop network activities and support is considered to have a reasonable impact — taking account of feedback provided in focus groups.

In summary, parents found networking with other parents and carers during the workshops to be highly beneficial. Many parents and carers could not find the time or chose not to participate in networking after the workshop. Consultation highlighted that parents and carers found access to online information to be most useful when seeking additional support and information.

**Key local facilitator role**

Feedback from stakeholders indicates that the key local facilitator role presented more challenges than that of key local professionals. key local facilitators were often drawn from the parent/carer group. Some parents reported this was a significant additional responsibility. Others stated there was limited response from other participants for face to face networking. In some instances a parent network already existed and these continued on and were not altered significantly by Positive Partnerships. This also highlighted the importance of Positive Partnerships being known to these networks as a way of reaching the right potential audience.

5.4 **Equipping parents/carers with specific information and strategies**

This section draws together three program objectives, outlined in Table 5.1:

- equipping parents/carers with specific information and strategies on how they can be effective advocates to support their child’s learning whilst negotiating the education environment;
- providing information to parents/carers about their local school system’s processes to support their child’s learning at all stages of their educational pathway; and
- helping parents/carers understand ways to maximise their child’s learning in the home environment.

Consultations with parents and carers and other stakeholders revealed the program had a range of impacts on their behaviour, including the way the parents/carers began interacting with their child’s school, and the strategies parents/carers used to help their child’s learning environment at home.
The survey results indicate that parents/carers had mixed views about the extent to which their ‘practical skills in parenting/caring for children with ASD’ was enhanced. 40 per cent agreed with this proposition to a good or great extent, 23 per cent to a fair extent and the remainder between ‘not at all’ (17 per cent) and a little or some extent (21 per cent). Similar results were recorded for a question that asked about knowledge rather than practical skills, with the following proportion of respondents having a good or great deal of knowledge:

- of specific information and strategies on how they can advocate to support their child’s learning within that environment — increased from 18 per cent to 79 per cent;
- of their local school system’s processes to support their child’s learning at all stages — increased from 25 per cent to 56 per cent;
- of strategies to maximise your child’s learning in the home environment — increased from 27 per cent to 77 per cent; and
- of strategies to deal with their child’s key transition stages at school — increased from 17 per cent to 62 per cent.

**Advocacy in the school environment**

The program is having a significant impact on participant capacity to interact and form productive partnerships with their child’s school and school leaders. The workshop has been described as empowering parents/carers to advocate for their child as well as teaching them to appreciate their school’s perspective. Consequently, the parents/carers become better able to engage with the school system and advocate for their child. One parent described the development of communication between the parent, child and school as ‘half the problem solved’. This network development is enhanced if both the parents/carers and teachers of the child participate in the Positive Partnerships program.

The collaborative approach to educating children with ASD has been acknowledged as a good practice (Chapter 2). Consequently, parents/carers whose child’s school participated in the Positive Partnerships professional development workshop often felt more confident that their child’s learning needs were being met and were more comfortable approaching the school. Additionally, parents and carers felt that their child’s routine and environment was more consistent with that at home, since participating schools knew more about the behaviour of children with ASD, and had learnt to support positive behaviours rather than chastise negative behaviours.

**Learning in the home environment**

Good practice suggests that effective parent/carer education should include information and strategies for application in the home setting (Chapter 2). The Positive Partnerships parent/carer workshop does provide such strategies as well as new tools and processes to enable parents and carers to maximise their child’s learning in the home environment. This information — and the ability to refer back to the workshop folder — was described by a number of parents and carers as being of educational benefit to their child. While some participants acknowledged they had rarely referred to the folder, in most cases participants agreed that it is a useful resource that is referred to relatively frequently.

A number of parents developed 'communication books', using materials provided by the program. The book is then used to help communicate with other children — at places such as childcare, kindergarten and school — who will be interacting with their child. This booklet outlines some of the issues and differences that their child faces and teaches other children to have a greater understanding of their behaviour.
5.5 Summary and conclusion

As demonstrated by the survey results, the most notable areas of improvement related to knowledge of evidence based approaches to learning strategies for parent/carer–teacher partnerships, and advocacy strategies. While not as pronounced, knowledge improvements are also seen in the following areas by virtue of better pre workshop knowledge of the participants. These areas included the education environment, the school system process, home environment strategies and transition stage strategies.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of evaluation findings in relation to each objective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent/carer workshop objective</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Informing parents/carers about the most current evidence based knowledge on ASD and how this directly impacts on their child’s learning.</td>
<td>The information and content offered by the workshop is clearly evidence based and current. Parents/carers indicated that they highly valued the current, evidence based information provided in the program materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Assisting parents to understand the processes and strategies that enable effective parent, school and teacher partnerships.</td>
<td>One of the most successful outcomes of the parent/carer workshop has been the strategies learnt by parents/carers to develop partnerships with their child’s school. Learning of such processes and strategies has had a positive impact on the parents/carers, their children and the school environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Equipping parents/carers with specific information and strategies on how they can be effective advocates to support their child’s learning whilst negotiating the education environment of which their child is a part.</td>
<td>The other important impact from the parent/carer workshop is the empowerment that parents/carers develop to advocate for their child. Numerous examples of this were cited in stakeholder consultations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Informing parents/carers about their local school system’s processes to support their child’s learning at all stages of their educational pathway.</td>
<td>Parents/carers were provided with information about systems and processes within schools, and most importantly, what they could work with the school to achieve. This included services and/or programs that could be accessed through schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Helping parents/carers understand ways to maximise their child’s learning in the home environment.</td>
<td>Evidence from parents/carers and other stakeholders suggest that parents are learning new ways to assist the learning environment for children with ASD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6
Efficiency of Positive Partnerships

This chapter considers the efficiency of Positive Partnerships

6.1 Funding arrangements and expenditure (inputs)

Positive Partnerships is contracted to receive funding of $22.9 million from the Australian Government over four years.

The program also draws on support from school communities, parents and carers of children with ASD, state and territory government departments and Catholic and independent school sector representatives. Each of these provides inputs to the activities that comprise the program. However, for the evaluation of efficiency the focus is on output relative to Australian Government funding. Table 6.1 sets out annual funding to the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Budget (inc. GST)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$6,629,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>$4,684,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$7,499,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$4,053,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$22,867,292</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium Services Contract

The analysis and discussion of the program funding in this chapter is based on financial data provided by the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium. This comprises actual expenditure in 2008 and 2009 and budgeted expenditure for 2010 and 2011. The budget figures for 2010 and 2011 are applicable at November 2010. The consortium's budgets for 2010 and 2011 may increase depending on activity and operating costs, while remaining within the overall funding level, specified in Table 6.1.

Funding can be broken down to the range of program activities the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium performs to support and deliver the program workshops. Table 6.2 lists the expenditure/budget for each calendar year from 2008-2011. Also listed are the proportions of each activity as a percentage of the whole expenditure/budget for that year. The table also lists unit costs to deliver the whole program and to deliver each of the workshops (professional development and parent/carer).

1 Funding levels provided each year under the consortium’s agreement with the Australian Government are different from actual and budgeted expenditure amounts for each year. As with any large program, funding flows are affected by timing, variations in activity and other operational considerations.
Table 6.2

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS EXPENDITURE/BUDGET, 2008-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmarking metric</th>
<th>2008 Expenditure</th>
<th>2009 Expenditure</th>
<th>2010 Budget</th>
<th>2011 Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$'000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$'000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of total expenditure/budget</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>219.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>480.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>169.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative travel and accommodation</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>172.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program delivery</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Delivery team salaries and fees</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1,740.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD Venue hire and program related travel</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>813.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC Delivery team salaries and fees</td>
<td>103.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1,383.0</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC Venue hire and program related travel</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>638.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program material development</td>
<td>651.8</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>1,038.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website and online development</td>
<td>164.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>217.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>490.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>1,162.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion, marketing</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>109.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>255.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2,030.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>8,183.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Unit cost (using ‘Program delivery’ cost)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per day of workshop</th>
<th>Per participant per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All workshops</td>
<td>$13,746</td>
<td>$465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD workshops</td>
<td>$18,725</td>
<td>$520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC workshops</td>
<td>$11,256</td>
<td>$427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACG analysis of the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium Positive Partnerships financial data
Note: PD – professional development workshop, and PC – parent/carer workshop
Project management is divided into three components, namely:

- salaries of those employed by the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium to manage the program such as team leaders, the secretariat, and the leadership team;
- consultant fees of additional personnel to assist program management; and
- travel and accommodation expenses.

Project management expenses show an initial proportion of 14 per cent in 2008, which then drops to just above 10 per cent for the following two years. This is as would be expected for a new project where the management task is significantly higher in the first year of operation than in the second. The project management expenses are budgeted to be over 20 per cent in the final year (2011).

Program delivery expenditure are comprised of:

- delivery team salaries and consultation fees, which includes workshop facilitation and network support; and
- venue hire, and team travel.

In Table 6.2 this expenditure is shown for program delivery as a whole, and for delivery of the professional development and parent/carer components. The program delivery salaries include 35 per cent of the program management salaries. This represents the proportion of program management time spent on program delivery.

Program delivery expenditure was low in the first year of the program (16 per cent), but increases for subsequent years (over 55 per cent for 2009 and 2010 and just under 50 per cent in 2001). This pattern reflects that the first year accounted for only a handful of workshops being delivered but involved most of the program material development.

Positive Partnerships has a notable evaluation component and this is reflected in the funding dedicated to this purpose. Evaluation constitutes 3 to 5 per cent of annual expenditure. The final year of the program is budgeted to involve significant program evaluation.

Program material costs were initially high, comprising almost one third of the total expenditure in the first year of the program. These reduced considerably in 2009 (13 per cent) and are expected to be negligible in its final year. This expenditure pattern is as would be expected. There is an initial cost of developing workshop content, followed by a reduction as it is maintained over time.

The expenditure to support online program delivery is 6 to 8 per cent of total expenditure. However, actual expenditure in 2009 was significantly lower than 2008 expenditure and lower than budgeted expenditure in subsequent years. This could indicate that the budget for online expenditure in 2010 and 2011 is higher than what will be needed.
Administrative costs are high for the program’s first year (24 per cent), which is expected when starting up such a program. The program administrative costs plateau at approximately 15 per cent for the following three years. Administration costs include: rent and utilities; communication; administrative meetings; general problem solving; travel for administrative staff; report writing and filing costs; and accounting and administrative funds.

### 6.2 Outputs

Outputs are the direct product of program inputs and activities. In the context of efficiency, the focus is on the cost of transforming inputs into outputs and whether this represents good value for money. The outputs represent ‘where the money goes’ and in the case of Positive Partnerships, the money goes towards the delivery of professional development and parent/carer workshops. The types of outputs considered here include the total number of workshops delivered, the number of participants and schools that participated in the program, which are listed in Table 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP OUTPUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools represented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/carer workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants – Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants – Day 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Professional development

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium was contracted to deliver 34 professional development workshops for a minimum of 904 teachers and school staff across 2008 and 2009. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium exceeded this requirement, delivering 35 workshops, with a total of 1269 participants.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium expects to deliver 33 professional development workshops for up to 1000 teachers and school staff across 2010 and 2011. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium is on track to meet this requirement, having held 16 workshops for almost 600 teachers and school staff as of July 2010.
**Parent carer**

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium was contracted to deliver 62 parent/carer workshops for a minimum of 3125 parents/carers across 2008 and 2009. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium exceeded the number of workshops (81) but fell short of the number of participants (2656). The agreement forecasted 50 participants per parent/carer workshop, but the average achieved so far is just over 33.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium expects to deliver 76 parent/carer workshops for up to 3100 parents/carers across 2010 and 2011. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium is on track to meet this requirement, having held 25 workshops for 851 parents/carers as of July 2010.

**Workshop locations**

The professional development and parent/carer workshops were delivered across the country in metropolitan, regional and rural area, and across each education sector. The breakdown of the workshops up to April 2010 is shown in Table 6.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction (total)</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Parent/carer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aust. Capital Territory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisdiction (total)</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>1502</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region (total)</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Parent/carer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/rural</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region (total)</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>1502</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School sector (up to July 2010)</th>
<th>Professional development</th>
<th>Parent/carer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School sector (up to July 2010)</strong></td>
<td><strong>684</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Numbers refer to completed workshops at April 2010 as this is the latest available jurisdictional breakdown (unless otherwise noted) whereas, Table 6.3 is up to July 2010.
Workshop delivery by state/territory indicates a spread across each state/territory that is broadly proportionate to state population. The highest number of workshops was delivered in NSW (28 workshops for 1,351 participants) and the lowest number of workshops in the ACT (three workshops for 123 participants).

Approximately half the workshops were conducted in regional or rural areas with the other half being delivered in metropolitan cities.

62 per cent of workshop participants were from government schools, with the remaining participants having come from Catholic and independent schools.

6.3 Benchmarking

Benchmark comparison of a program performance against other programs offers a comparative indication of program efficiency. It involves comparing the performance of a program over a range of metrics with those of other programs or a best practice standard. Benchmark metrics utilised for the efficiency evaluation here include the proportion of program costs spent on each of the activities listed in Table 6.2. Also considered is the unit cost of training, i.e. the cost of providing a workshop to an individual participant.

Two other Australian Government programs with features in common with Positive Partnerships were compared. The programs were chosen because they have similarities with Positive Partnerships and financial data could be obtained for each. The precise position of these programs relative to best practice is not known. The value of the comparison lies in their similarities with Positive Partnerships rather than them representing a known best practice standard.

Table 6.5 lists the expenditure in dollars and the expenditure as a proportion of total costs for each activity of Positive Partnerships (2009) with the other programs. The table also lists the unit cost of delivery for each of these programs. 2009 Positive Partnerships finances were chosen for benchmarking analysis since it is the latest year in the program for which we have actual expenditure (as distinct from budgeted estimates). Following the table, the performance of Positive Partnerships is compared to the other programs for each activity.
# Evaluation of Positive Partnerships

## Table 6.5

### PROGRAM EXPENDITURE BENCHMARKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benchmarking metric</th>
<th>Positive Partnerships Expenditure 2009</th>
<th>Program 1 Expenditure FY 2008-09</th>
<th>Program 2 Program expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$'000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$'000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of total expenditure/budget</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management/governance</td>
<td>822.5 10.1</td>
<td>1,013.1 23.7</td>
<td>150.0 26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>480.4 5.9</td>
<td>859.4 20.1</td>
<td>117.2 20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td>169.8 2.1</td>
<td>40.4 0.9</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration related travel and accommodation</td>
<td>172.3 2.1</td>
<td>113.3 2.6</td>
<td>32.8 5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program delivery</td>
<td>4,575.5 55.9</td>
<td>2,224.5 52.0</td>
<td>312.4 54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery team salaries and fees</td>
<td>3,123.8 38.1</td>
<td>1,253.2 29.3</td>
<td>175.4 30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue hire and program delivery related travel</td>
<td>1,451.7 17.7</td>
<td>488.5 11.4</td>
<td>22.0 3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support grants</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program materials and development</td>
<td>1,038.7 12.7</td>
<td>563.6 13.2</td>
<td>46.2 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website and online development</td>
<td>217.9 2.7</td>
<td>323.7 7.6</td>
<td>16.5 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>1,162.2 14.2</td>
<td>578.3 13.5</td>
<td>45.7 7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion, marketing</td>
<td>109.4 1.3</td>
<td>38.4 0.9</td>
<td>5.5 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>255.1 3.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8,183.3 100.0</td>
<td>4,286.9 100.0</td>
<td>576.3 100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unit cost (according to ‘Program delivery’ cost)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per day of workshop</th>
<th>Per participant per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$16,459</td>
<td>$13,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$473</td>
<td>$738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$11,526</td>
<td>$141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACG analysis derived from financial information provided through DEEWR
Program management is 10 per cent of Positive Partnerships expenditure, compared to 24 and 26 per cent for the other programs. This is mainly due to Positive Partnerships assigning less expenditure to the salary component of program management. Positive Partnerships instead allocates management salaries to program delivery. For Positive Partnerships relative to the other programs, this reduces the salary component in project management but increases the salary component in program delivery.

Program delivery typically constitutes the largest expenditure of the programs compared, accounting for over half the total expenditure in each case. Positive Partnerships has the largest share of expenditure on program delivery, although only by a small margin. The difference is more significant when the salary component is compared, with Positive Partnerships at 38 per cent compared with 29 and 30 per cent for the other programs respectively.

Positive Partnerships and program one each spent close to 13 per cent of expenditure on program materials and development. This means that in its second year of operation, Positive Partnerships share of expenditure was comparable to a program that has been operating for a number of years. Program two had the advantage of adapting material from an earlier program; which logically explains its share of expenditure on this item being relatively lower, at 8 per cent.

Administration costs for Positive Partnerships in 2009 make up 14 per cent of total costs that year. This is the highest of the three programs, being similar to program one but significantly more than program two (8 per cent).

Positive Partnerships spends a significantly greater proportion of its funding on evaluation activities (3 per cent), compared to program one and program two, which both spend negligible amounts in this activity. The inclusion of ongoing evaluation in the budget from the outset reflects good practice. While the extent of evaluation being undertaken is extensive, it relates to an area of disability that is in need of good quality data and evaluation. The promotional expenditure of Positive Partnerships is consistent with the other two programs.

**Unit cost of delivery**

The unit cost of delivery provides a useful efficiency benchmark. Table 6.5 compares cost per workshop day and cost per participant day (the other programs offered one day workshops, while Positive Partnerships offers two and four day workshops).

- Positive Partnerships has the highest cost per workshop day ($16,459) followed by program one ($13,016) and program two ($11,526).
- Positive Partnerships is middle ranked per participant day ($473). Program two is $141, while program one is $738.

Program’s two costs reflect that this program required minimal program material development costs and that it offered no additional participant support. Program two had higher participant numbers (50 participants per workshop) compared to Positive Partnerships (34 participants per workshop) and program one (18 participants per workshop).
6.4 Efficiency of Positive Partnerships

The benchmarking analysis in conjunction with stakeholder views from the focus groups and consultations provides an overall picture of the efficiency of Positive Partnerships. The efficiency of the program with respect to a range of program activities and components is presented below.

Administration of Positive Partnerships (including governance, planning)

There are many program delivery models. Different models are discussed in Chapter 7. Broadly speaking, the extent to which delivery models are administered centrally relative to the degree of local delivery flexibility can vary significantly. Commensurate with this, the level of government (federal, state, local) that retains oversight and the level of involvement in the program that this oversight entails can also be highly divergent.

It is not a matter for this evaluation to comment on the inherent level of efficiency of various models. However, it is possible to observe certain characteristics of any program that encourage efficiency, regardless of the model used. These include, minimising duplication of effort and administration and taking care to ensure that expenditure is well targeted and proportionate.

In the case of Positive Partnerships, certain features of the program’s design and administration have encouraged efficiency, while there are also opportunities for efficiency improvement in some areas.

Program delivery

As program delivery accounts for over half the expenditure of the Positive Partnerships program, any adjustments or potential savings to this item would significantly improve program efficiency.

Efficiency is a function of the level of output produced relative to inputs. In the case of the parent/carer component, the level of output in terms of the number of participants to attend the workshops has been less than hoped. Increasing participation to an average of 50 parents/carers per workshop would represent a significant efficiency improvement assuming the same level of input.

For the professional development workshop, it is important to ensure that those people who attend the sessions are in the best position to benefit from the workshop. As discussed in Chapter 4, it would appear that based on 2009, the program is achieving an appropriate mix of teachers, school leaders and other participants. However, in previous years, there was evidence presented in the focus groups to suggest the mix has not always been appropriate.

The use of facilitators is generous. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium Team Manual and Operational Guidelines (AAETC updated 2010) advise that the parent/carer workshop has between three and five facilitators (one team leader and team members plus a key local facilitator). The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has advised that the professional development workshop has three or four facilitators. This accords with the project team’s observations at a parent/carer and a professional development workshop.
While there are advantages to having a number of facilitators, it is likely that the program could be delivered with fewer facilitators without unduly compromising quality. The cost of facilitators is usually met by Positive Partnerships but may be met by state education authorities who provide facilitators at no cost to the program. Even when this occurs, there is still a cost involved (although it may fall to the state rather than the Australian Government) so this does not alter the main point regarding the potential to improve program efficiency in this regard.

Given the audience attending, it is reasonable to expect that the parent/carer workshops require more facilitators than the professional development workshops. The parent/carer workshops are more likely to include people who are unaccustomed to a workshop style session. It is advantageous, although not essential, for a facilitator to be available for the small group discussions that occur.

**Program material development**

The program material development was coordinated from a national level, which avoids the potential duplication of effort that occurs when program materials are developed at a state (or lower) level. National level material development also makes the most of a limited pool of experts, which impacts favourably on the quality of the materials.

The web offers an efficient way of providing course delivery and distributing course information. Stakeholders consistently spoke favourably of the Positive Partnership’s website. There is a balancing act between providing information online and maintaining quality and access. This can be achieved through appropriate quality assurance and the use of mixed modes of delivery comprising both online and face to face modules. This is discussed among the options explored for Positive Partnerships into the future in Chapter 7. Clearly, any relative increase in the use of online learning has the potential to offer significant efficiency benefits.

**Travel and accommodation**

Stakeholders offered varying views about travel and accommodation expenditure. The analysis does not indicate that travel and accommodation is notably higher for Positive Partnerships than for the other programs, either in administrative related travel or program delivery related travel. However, there is an opportunity to improve efficiency related to the number of observers attending the workshops, particularly when the observers travel from interstate. The observers usually attend in preparation for facilitating sessions themselves. While this may be desirable, it is not essential, and minimising travel undertaken for the purpose of observing workshops would improve program efficiency.

**Evaluation**

The evaluation process of the program has been well organised and is a valuable tool for determining the impact of the workshops on the participants. By obtaining, the participant’s self assessed knowledge of ASD and their impressions of the workshops both before, immediately after and three to six months after the workshops, the evaluation process has been able to capture information to both improve and validate different aspects of the program. The survey also has the potential to point toward areas that should be a focus of ongoing improvement.
6.5 Summary and conclusion

The efficiency analysis indicates that Positive Partnerships is reasonably efficient. There are opportunities for efficiency improvement, but this would be the case for any program. The efficiency findings should be considered in conjunction with the evaluation’s recommendations (detailed in Chapter 7), which suggest a strategy to increase the coverage of Positive Partnerships via amendments to the delivery model. Although a relevant consideration, improving efficiency is not the driving force behind the recommendations. The changes will however enable more people who will benefit from Positive Partnerships to be exposed to the program at less cost per participant.
Chapter 7

Positive Partnerships for the future

This chapter identifies options for the program into the future and provides recommendations.

This chapter discusses the ongoing need for Positive Partnerships. Based on the assumption that the need for the program to continue is accepted, improvements to specific areas of the program are discussed. Alternative governance and administration models are considered, including the sustainability of these models and a suite of recommendations related to the future of Positive Partnerships are put forward.

7.1 Ongoing need for Positive Partnerships

Overall, the evaluation considers there is an ongoing need for a program with the objectives of Positive Partnerships and this program provides an appropriate platform for advancing those objectives for these reasons:

- the increasing prevalence of school aged children with ASD;
- there are likely to be educational benefits to children with ASD from a nationally consistent, evidence based approach to professional development and parent/carer workshops; and
- the knowledge deficit in schools relating to ASD, which is in part a reflection of teacher training and the ongoing trend towards including children with ASD in mainstream settings.

Diagnosis of children with ASD is increasing and this is expected to continue. There is also an ongoing trend towards mainstream schooling of children with ASD, driven by government policy and parental choice. A recent NSW report (General Purpose Standing Committee No.2 2010) highlighted a 165 per cent increase in the incidence of students with autism in NSW government schools, between 2003 and 2009. Education systems are obliged under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 to provide equitable opportunities for children with disabilities and this is reinforced by COAG commitments. Parents of children with ASD are placing higher expectations on schools, and are indicating a willingness to initiate litigation to ensure that schools meet their obligations.

Data on ASD prevalence and forecast growth are patchy. However, the last major Australian (AABASD 2007) report identified growth in the period from 2003 to 2005 and an overall ASD prevalence for 6-12 year olds of 62.5 per 10,000, as summarised in Table 7.1. International experience suggests a steadily increasing number of children diagnosed with ASD (see for example http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US-autism-6-17-1996-2007.png).
Table 7.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>13-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2,037</td>
<td>7,308</td>
<td>2,352</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td>8,469</td>
<td>2,847</td>
<td>2,775</td>
<td>9,999</td>
<td>3,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,456</td>
<td>8,746</td>
<td>2,807</td>
<td>2,890</td>
<td>10,114</td>
<td>3,363</td>
<td>3,355</td>
<td>11,814</td>
<td>4,112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders 2007, The Prevalence of Autism in Australia: Can it be established from existing data?

As Positive Partnerships has shown, working better with children with ASD and their families can result in schools generally improving their practices for all children with disabilities. Stakeholders had a consistent view that more needs to be done to provide good quality support for schooling children with ASD. Furthermore, stakeholders consider this is an ongoing challenge, requiring a multifaceted approach. This approach needs to consider teacher education at university, among other things.

The benefits of a national approach are significant. In addition to providing national consistency in both administration and content, this also enabled a leading group of experts to be drawn together in devising the program. Consequently, Positive Partnerships is viewed as a desirable and appropriate intervention towards tackling this significant policy challenge. However, a number of stakeholders suggested improvements to increase participation relative to program cost, and to improve integration with other programs.

The primary improvement identified by the evaluation is to ensure the program achieves maximum coverage relative to expenditure — so it is accessed by as many of those who need it as possible. Furthermore, many stakeholders consider there are opportunities to better link Positive Partnerships with existing programs. Stakeholders also made a number of suggestions about the evaluation of longer term program impacts and outcomes.

Some stakeholders, particularly autism associations and some school sector representatives, emphasised the opportunity for Positive Partnerships to connect with existing programs. These stakeholders emphasised that the content of Positive Partnerships complements other courses. The issue mainly relates to ensuring that information can be obtained from one place, and that the courses themselves have consciously related their content. The Helping Children with Autism package is assisting in this regard, by funding autism associations to provide information, but stakeholder views indicate that further attention is needed.
Meeting the needs of disadvantaged families and communities

Stakeholder feedback, particularly related to the parent/carer stream, emphasised the need to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged families. There is a strong view that the program will benefit from directing more effort to reaching parents at greatest risk of disadvantage, who may be known to the community, but who are currently unable to attend. These may include parents from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, parents who are uncomfortable in a formal learning environment and parents who cannot access or afford child care.

In the delivery of Positive Partnerships, the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has considered good practice models for program delivery to disadvantaged communities, including culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous populations. This has included the mapping of significant culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous communities to better inform program targeting, and the development of guidelines for Positive Partnerships facilitators in the delivery of education to culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous parents and carers.

In recommending that Positive Partnerships should continue to provide introductory level information about teaching children with ASD and developing partnerships between parents/carers and educators on a broad scale, the evaluation has also highlighted a need for more advanced programs to be developed and implemented. The evaluation has considered if this should form part of Positive Partnerships, but has determined it would be appropriate for this to occur outside Positive Partnerships for now. Positive Partnerships should focus on developing a foundational level of ASD knowledge amount teachers, other school staff, parents and carers. This includes the development of specific programs to provide greater support in delivering educational outcomes for children with disability in culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous communities — where communities may benefit more from a general disability focused program than from an ASD specific program.

Consideration could also be given to providing funding support for parents and carers to attend Positive Partnerships.

7.2 Possible improvements

Improvements are considered in these steps:

• confirming the need for Positive Partnerships;
• considering the strategy for Positive Partnerships;
• considering how the strategy could affect the program delivery model.

The governance, administration and funding model is discussed separately, but with consideration of the above. These considerations are represented in Table 7.2.
Table 7.2

HIGH LEVEL FINDINGS FOR POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there an ongoing need for Positive Partnerships that justifies</td>
<td>Yes, based on: * increased prevalence among school age children; * benefits of a national approach; * the knowledge deficit that exists and the lack of other programs that are addressing this deficit; and * the high quality of Positive Partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continuation of the program?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What should be the strategy for targeting Positive Partnerships if it</td>
<td>Broad coverage of the program to maximise the number of teachers and other school staff with at least a baseline of understanding of ASD and with the skills and expertise to work effectively with families in improving the educational outcomes of children with ASD. Broad coverage of parents and carers of children with ASD to improve their relationship with their children’s teachers and schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is to achieve improvements in educational outcomes for students with ASD?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the consequences of such an approach?</td>
<td>EITHER: * A significant increase in funding, which is unlikely to be feasible in the current climate. And would result in the model having logistical constraints. OR * Maintaining national development and management but with changes in the delivery model: * increase trainer the trainer local delivery approach; * increase online delivery; and * introduce a whole school delivery model.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Allen Consulting Group

Further to Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 and the discussion above, improvements are identified in relation to the following areas.

- *Defining strategy*: deciding on a broad based or targeted strategy, which in turn has implications for other changes that may be made.
- *Alternative delivery approaches*: to ensure that within the available resources, the program maximises the number of people who access the program, without undermining quality and effectiveness.
- *Improving integration*: ensuring that Positive Partnerships is cognisant of and integrated with existing programs and courses, where possible. This in turn contributes to a multifaceted approach to improving knowledge and practice in the education of children with ASD.
- *Long term evaluation*: while Positive Partnerships has been subject to extensive ongoing evaluation, a significant challenge is to quantify the impact on educational outcomes. Observations are made on how this could be achieved.
Strategy

In defining the strategy for Positive Partnerships, two models are apparent. There is a model of broad based coverage and a model of targeted coverage.

- A broad based coverage strategy would explicitly seek to reach the maximum number of teachers and relevant school staff in as many schools as possible and every parent/carer of a child with ASD.

- A targeted coverage strategy would seek to provide a comprehensive program throughout Australia to teachers and school staff and parents/carers who choose to attend.

At present, Positive Partnerships has a targeted strategy. This observation is based on there being a target number of participants within the current agreement between the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium and DEEWR. While this will reach a significant number of schools and parents/carers, it is not intended to reach the majority, of teachers, schools and parents/carers. In a targeted strategy, it is particularly important that the people who will benefit most from Positive Partnerships are given the opportunity to attend.

Even considering economies of scale and the efficiencies that are achieved through the program being bedded down, a broad based strategy would be costly under the current model. It would also have practical limitations, because of the extended period of time that the professional development workshop requires absence from school. On this basis, if a broad based strategy is adopted, this will require alteration of the delivery model to reduce cost.

It is possible to implement this broad coverage approach without experiencing a decrease in quality of the information and training provided to teachers, other school staff, parents and carers. There are many examples of education programs delivered on a broad scale with appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. By maintaining the development and update of program materials at a national level and implementing a rigorous quality assurance process for training delivery, it is possible to maintain levels of quality to a level that is comparable to what Positive Partnerships has delivered to date. The evaluation recognises that this will require ongoing management and support.

Options for altered delivery, which are outlined below, could equally be applied to a targeted strategy, which was seeking to reduce delivery cost compared with the model funded under the current agreement. In addition, a number of these approaches could be incorporated in the existing model and run concurrently. The approaches are not mutually exclusive, however two of the approaches are considered less appropriate for the parent/carer workshop.

Alternative approaches to delivery

Train the trainer local delivery

Positive Partnerships participation is based on attending a session at a specified time and place. A variation on this model could be for Positive Partnerships to train a far greater number of people locally to deliver the program content. Both the professional development and parent/carer workshops could adopt this approach.
This approach is a natural extension of the current model. Positive Partnerships has built a national pool of people with ASD expertise. These individuals are most commonly attached to state and territory education authorities and autism associations. They have been seconded to state and territory delivery teams, or recruited as key local professionals or key local facilitators. Many of them have continued to pass on ASD information to schools and parents. This model will provide a structure in which such individuals are empowered to present Positive Partnerships in their community within a national support structure.

For the professional development workshop, those being trained would be in disability service coordination roles or similar across an education sector or region. For the parent/carer stream, those being trained would include representatives from the state or territory autism association or other appropriate community organisations. Once trained, they would be responsible for local delivery of Positive Partnerships in the community. They could be given flexibility in how they deliver the program, or program modules, within some established minimum requirements and parameters.

This approach would extend the use of existing local expertise and resources. It would be more flexible and more likely to reach more participants at less cost. The challenge in this approach would be ensuring a reasonable degree of consistency and quality assurance. If local delivery is not managed, then quality control could be an issue. To manage the model, there would be an ongoing need for administrative support for maintaining program materials, the website, coordination of Positive Partnership trainers and general quality assurance.

Making use of this valuable resource of local ASD expertise will assist in maintaining the integrity and quality of Positive Partnerships at the point of delivery. This approach to delivery also has the potential to complement school based and module based delivery, discussed further below.

**Increasing online delivery**

Positive Partnerships presently uses a combination of face to face and online delivery. For the professional development workshop there is also a project. The mix could be altered to increase the share of online delivery relative to face to face. Taking this further, a completely online module could be offered.

Face to face delivery is viewed as an attribute of Positive Partnerships. The duration of the face to face professional development workshop is however relatively long compared with many other professional development programs. The duration is such that Positive Partnerships would of itself fulfil the annual teacher registration professional development requirements in those jurisdictions that require this for annual registration renewal.

Face to face delivery is important for both streams, but it is particularly important for the parent/carer stream. Participants in the professional development workshop are almost certainly going to be comfortable in working online, whereas participants in the parent/carer stream may not. Those who are most disadvantaged, and who have the most to gain from Positive Partnerships, are more likely to be unaccustomed to working online.

For this reason, this approach is considered highly appropriate for the professional development workshop, but less appropriate for the parent/carer workshop.
In New South Wales, an online disability learning module (including modules with an ASD focus) is available to all teachers in government schools. This learning module has been purchased and adapted to the New South Wales context from a version delivered to teachers in the United Kingdom. The existing availability of an online professional development workshop for teachers is a relevant consideration regarding the development of a Positive Partnerships online module.

Online delivery (at varying levels) has the ability to complement each of the delivery approaches outlined by the evaluation.

Whole school delivery model

A modified version of the professional development workshop could be presented in schools. It would not be possible to deliver the current four days of face to face professional development workshop, so this would need to be adapted to provide an overview of Positive Partnerships and introduce the key tools and strategies. This could be a stand alone offering for school staff generally, or targeted specifically at those in leadership positions, including year level coordinators. Training for school staff may focus on practical strategies for educating children with ASD, including adapting curriculum, whilst training for school leaders may focus on achieving an autism-friendly school environment. The sessions could be provided during student free days, in staff or faculty meetings, or after school. School based delivery would also allow more focused content and strategies to be provided to secondary schools, where circumstances often require alternative strategies to be implemented in order to achieve positive outcomes for children with ASD.

This model is named whole school delivery because it is well suited to achieving a whole of school approach to working well with children with ASD. This in turn contributes to school cultures that are empathetic and embrace difference. Furthermore, much of Positive Partnerships is applicable to children with special needs generally, which suggests the program is well suited to achieving cultural change of this kind.

This approach is also a means of marketing Positive Partnerships because it spreads awareness of the Positive Partnerships brand to more people within each school that participates. Among the possible approaches, the sessions could take the form of an introduction, with an invitation for the school to send key representatives to the full session.

This would overcome the difficulty that some school staff — including those in senior positions — will have in taking sufficient time away from school to participate in Positive Partnerships. This approach may also be better suited to secondary schools because a presentation could be made to faculty leaders.

Possible disadvantages of this approach are that the school based version would be less comprehensive. There may be limited opportunities to include Positive Partnerships during a student free day because there is usually considerable competition for this time (due to the national curriculum and other initiatives). However, combining the whole school approach with the other models discussed here (particularly module based and online delivery) would assist in overcoming these issues.
Module based delivery

The professional development workshop comprises five modules and the parent/carer workshop comprises four modules. These could be offered as individual sessions of shorter duration (half a day to a day each). It could be possible for someone to undertake all modules separately and receive a certificate of completion.

In the case of the parent/carer workshop, this would effectively mean that what the content covered in the first day would instead be offered as separate short modules. There may not be a need for the second day for people undertaking individual modules. It would also be possible to offer the first day only in its current form, but dispense with the second day.

The advantage of breaking the professional development and parent/carer workshops into modules is increased flexibility and access. More people can find half a day or a day than can find two or four full days. The disadvantage would be that the integrated and comprehensive nature of the program would be compromised. However, the program would still offer all modules and encourage people to complete them all.

The question over the second day of the parent/carer workshop is somewhat different. While this day is clearly beneficial, the option of removing it would only be attractive if there was an objective to reduce the cost of the program.

Emphasising that the approaches described here are complementary, the modules could be offered online; in whole school delivery and from locally trained presenters. The mixed approaches will complement staff and their current knowledge, provide consistent information and approaches across school environments, and encourage a whole of school approach to generating an autism friendly culture.

Integration with other programs

Currently, Positive Partnerships is not designed to be adapted to fit with other programs or frameworks. There is an opportunity to improve the integration of Positive Partnerships as the program evolves further.

The possible integration of Positive Partnerships into teacher training at university level is one such opportunity. Although this would require discussion with individual universities, the professional development workshop can already be used for credit in postgraduate teacher programs. More impact could be achieved if undergraduate teaching students could be exposed to Positive Partnerships. While this may not be possible, the evaluation has identified a widespread view that teaching degrees need to better prepare graduate teachers for the educational needs of children with disabilities.

There could be an option to integrate aspects of the program into existing training and information sessions offered by autism associations. This is likely to involve Positive Partnerships materials being partially incorporated, although there are different degrees to which such an approach could be taken.
Long term evaluation

Positive Partnerships has as an objective of improving educational outcomes of children with ASD. This is an appropriate objective. However, it is difficult to measure the extent to which a particular program impacts on the educational outcomes of children with ASD for these reasons:

- individual capabilities and characteristics of children with ASD are different, and educational progress therefore needs to be assessed on assessing individuals;
- it is difficult to conceive of how a control group could be established given the uniqueness of each child with ASD; and
- other factors may impact on educational outcomes apart from a teacher or parent/carer being exposed to Positive Partnerships, such as home life and social pressures.

It would take a long time scale and a carefully designed and intensive research methodology to conclude that improvements in educational outcomes are caused by participation in Positive Partnerships. A possible methodology could be based on following the progress of a manageable number of children with ASD using interviews with the child, teacher and family over a number of years.

7.3 Future organising models for the program

The Positive Partnerships model is a consortium approach, with funding allocated from DEEWR. The structure of the current arrangements was described in Chapter 1. Briefly, the developed state and territory committees, comprising representatives from the government, Catholic and independent sectors. These committees are responsible for planning and coordinating program implementation in each jurisdiction. The major considerations of the state and territory committees are the location, timing and participation (between sectors and schools) in the workshops. They are also involved in recruiting facilitators, key local professionals and key local facilitators.

The advantages of the model are:

- it provides national consistency in course content and delivery;
- the course benefits from the expertise of the consortium, which is drawn from different sectors and comprises a range of ASD knowledge and skills;
- collaboration between the three school sectors;
- simplicity in funding, with payments being made to one party (the consortium) rather than to multiple funding recipients; and
- the consortium has the capacity to ensure the contracted output levels are delivered in each state and territory — ensuring national coverage.

The potential disadvantages of the model include:

- increased administrative costs associated with national coordination of effort;
- dates chosen for a workshop may not take account of all local considerations; and


• lack of flexibility to accommodate state and territory government initiatives.

**Alternative models**

There are a number of alternatives to the current model. These alternatives include a devolved model, a DEEWR run model and a fee for service model. These models are described briefly below. In each case, it is assumed that the Positive Partnerships website will need to be maintained, and the program will continue, although program delivery could be modified. Program delivery options were detailed separately from organising models. While each may influence the other, they are distinct considerations.

The relative advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternative models is considered as a basis for providing findings and recommendations about Positive Partnerships into the future.

**Devolved model**

A devolved model could take different forms, but the feature would be that funding is allocated directly to the education system responsible for implementing the program. DEEWR would channel funding to the respective state and territory education departments, the Catholic sector and the independent sector (noting that the latter does not organise itself as a sector, so in practice, this would involve funding being provided to individual schools or to the independent schools associations). The respective education sectors would be responsible for implementing the program in their schools.

As a variation on the devolved model, funding could be directed through the state and territory autism associations. This could involve one of the autism associations being designated with responsibility for dispersing funds — either to each autism association or direct to each funding recipient. Under such a model, the autism associations would in effect be a consortium, similar in some respects to the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium. The autism association in each state/territory would coordinate the Positive Partnerships workshops in each jurisdiction.

Advantages:

• gives each sector flexibility in implementing Positive Partnerships; and
• enables integration with existing programs.

Disadvantages:

• administrative complexity for DEEWR;
• risk that funding will not be allocated to Positive Partnerships as intended;
• loss of national consistency and therefore integrity of program content and delivery;
• loss of control of program outputs (number of sessions conducted); and
• not all the state and territory organisations may have the interest or capacity to manage the program.
**DEEWR run model**

Under this model, a DEEWR secretariat would undertake the administration role presently performed by the consortium. An advisory panel would be needed to advise on changes to course material and ensure the program is retaining its currency and standards. DEEWR would require a local coordinator in each state and territory. This would most likely be a committee comprising representatives of each education sector, as is in place under the current arrangement. The role of DEEWR would be considerably more intensive than at present, as it would be involved in planning and coordinating the program, in addition to dispersing funds nationally.

Advantages:

- DEEWR has control of the program; and
- national consistency is maintained.

Disadvantages:

- likely to be relatively costly, given overheads involved in running the program from a government agency;
- if government priorities change, DEEWR has to manage ramifications for staff; and
- may not be well received by state and territory education departments, which may limit uptake and therefore program impact.

**Fee for service**

This would involve a fee for service being charged to program participants to meet or offset the cost of providing the program. The program is presently publicly funded. Participants do not pay any form of attendance fee. If any costs are incurred, these are incidental (such as travel and childcare for parents/carers and costs incurred by the school for educators, including the provision of a relief teacher).

The program is publicly funded recognising the public benefit resulting from the program. It is the case however, that other programs and conferences are provided on a fee for service basis, sometimes to recoup costs or to satisfy a commercial objective. Clearly there is a demand for high quality information to assist in providing children with ASD with good quality educational outcomes. Consequently, there is an option of offering the program on a fee for service basis to recover costs, or offset program costs.

Advantages:

- reduces cost to government;
- establishes a revenue stream that can be used for ongoing program marketing and development; and
- recognises the commercial value of Positive Partnerships’ intellectual property.

Disadvantages:

- likely to result in a significantly less people attending the program; and
• those who are less likely to attend, will often be those most in need of the program.

Overall the evaluation considers that the organising model needs to be capable of supporting implementation of the recommendations. This suggests either a consortium based or DEEWR run model is preferable to a devolved model. Of these a consortium based is likely to be viewed more favourably by external stakeholders and better suited to the demands of local delivery.

7.4 Recommendations

Overall, the evaluation considers that Positive Partnerships, or a program with similar objectives, is needed. This need is based on the increasing number of school aged children being diagnosed with ASD, the deficit in knowledge about delivering good educational outcomes for children with ASD that exists at present, the high quality of the materials and the benefits of a national approach.

However, for the program to be sustainable, it is considered likely that the model of delivery will need to provide greater reach for a reduced unit cost. The following recommendations provide guidance as to how greater impact may be achieved whilst maintaining the high quality, evidence based approach on which Positive Partnerships is based.

*It is recommended that Positive Partnerships continue beyond the current agreement with the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium.*

*It is recommended that Positive Partnerships adopts a model based on broad coverage — meaning that the program seeks to reach as many of those who would benefit from the program as possible, while being accompanied by quality assurance mechanisms to maintain the quality of the information and training provided.*

*It is recommended that in adopting this model, there are clear targets relating to the coverage of Positive Partnerships and the percentage of teachers/school staff that need to attend if there is to be a significant impact on educational outcomes nationally.*

*It is recommended that the delivery model be altered to enable this model to be practical and affordable.*

*It is recommended that the alterations to the delivery model include the following features:*

- *Retain national development/maintenance of materials — making efficient use of subject matter experts, minimising duplication of development costs and ensuring national consistency in materials which reduces confusion for teachers, other school staff and for parents and carers of children with ASD.*

- *Train the trainer local delivery — which would involve Positive Partnerships training more people locally to deliver the program and providing them with support to do so.*

- *Increasing online delivery — increase the proportion of online delivery relative to face to face for the professional development workshop.*

- *Whole school delivery — a modified version of the professional development workshop be presented in schools, which could be a stand alone offering for school staff generally, or targeted specifically at those in leadership positions.*
Module based delivery — the modules could be offered as individual sessions of shorter duration (half a day to a day each). It would be possible for someone to undertake all modules separately and receive a certificate of completion.

It is recommended that the program is provided nationally with Australian Government funding. Public funding marks an important recognition from government about the need for greater support in delivering improved educational outcomes for children with disability.

It is recommended that Positive Partnerships continue to be directed at providing introductory level information about teaching children with ASD and developing partnerships between parents/carers and teachers, to ensure maximum coverage of teachers, school staff and parents/carers of children with ASD. In line with this approach, it is recommended that more advanced programs dealing with specific issues be developed outside the Positive Partnerships initiative.

It is recommended that a nationally managed, locally delivered approach be retained, as this is administratively efficient and enables effective maintenance of course materials and the website, and draws on the expertise of existing organisations, such as state and territory autism associations.
Appendix A
Evaluation framework

A.1 Introduction

This evaluation framework describes the planned approach to the evaluation of the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package.

Following this introductory section, the next chapter maps out and describes the framework in more detail.

Evaluation focus

The Helping Children with Autism package is the Australian Government’s response to the increasing prevalence of children diagnosed as having an ASD. The package is a cross-portfolio initiative being implemented by DEEWR and two other departments. The lead agency is FaHCSIA and the other agency is DoHA. Total funding of the Helping Children with Autism package is $190 million over five years from 2007-08 to 2011-12, and the DEEWR component is valued at $23.3 million.

The overall objectives of the Helping Children with Autism program are to provide:

• earlier and more accurate diagnosis of children with ASD;
• increased access to early intervention programmes for children and school students with ASD; and
• further support services for these children and students.

This project is evaluating the DEEWR component of the Helping Children with Autism package.

The DEEWR component of the Helping Children with Autism package

DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism initiatives comprise:

• Professional development component – professional development for a minimum of 1,800 teachers and other school staff working with school age children with ASD; and
• Parent/carer component – workshops and information sessions for a minimum of 5,800 parents and carers of school students with ASD.

Background

Over the last three decades, there has been an increase in the ascertainment rate (number of children correctly diagnosed) of children with ASD (DoHA 2006). According to Centrelink data, the estimated prevalence of ASD for Australian children aged six to 12 years is 62.5 per 10,000 (MacDermott et al 2007, p.8). Similarly, a steadily increasing demand for services, disproportionate to the general growth in population, has been reported by specialist agencies in Australia (DoHA 2006).
ASD refers to a range of neurological disorders which share common symptoms, including Autistic Disorder, High Functioning Autism, Asperger Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) (RCN 2009; Prior and Roberts 2006). The characteristic symptoms of ASD include a triad of impairments involving difficulties, delay and/or deviance in:

• social interactions and relationships;

• communication and language development; and

• repetitive behaviours and restricted routines (RCN 2009; Prior and Roberts 2006).

The severity of symptoms and level of functioning for sufferers is highly variable. However, research indicates that early intervention can be beneficial, especially as children’s early years are critically important for learning (RCN 2009; Prior and Roberts 2006; MacDermott et al 2007, p.4). Education services offered in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania have demonstrated that children with ASD can move successfully into a mainstream environment, provided tailored strategies to assist them manage their environment are employed (MacDermott et al, p.4). In essence, high quality education and assistance can improve the educational outcomes of children suffering from ASD.

ASD not only affects the behavior and development of young people, it can also negatively impact on overall educational and social attainment.

Participation in education

Between 1981 and 2003, the number of students with disability, including those with ASD, attending school increased (AIHW 2008b, p.18). Among five to 20 year olds with disability, school attendance rates increased from 72 per cent in 1981 to 80 per cent in 2003 (AIHW 2008b, p. 19). Further, over the same period, there was a greater trend toward students with disability attending mainstream, rather than specialist, schools and classes (AIHW 2008b, p.19).

These trends in participation in education may reflect the inclusive practices and policies underpinning the Australian education system. In particular, section 22 of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it unlawful for educational providers to discriminate against current or potential students on the grounds of disability, except in special circumstances. Under this Act, educational institutions are required to make reasonable adjustments to ensure students with disability have equal access and opportunities to participate in mainstream classes and schools.

Overall, the increase in the number of students with ASD attending mainstream schools is likely to create future demand for services, specialist support and education, both at the school and parent/carer levels. In this context, it is important to ensure that the needs of students with ASD, their classmates, teachers, parents and carers are being met. This is what the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package is seeking to achieve.
A.2 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of evaluating DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism initiatives is:

…to assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved, identify learnings and possible improvements and inform decisions about future directions.

DEEWR Request for Quote

At the time of appointing the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium to conduct the program, it was agreed that an independent evaluation would take place at the end of the second year of delivery. This evaluation is the independent evaluation.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium has been undertaking formative evaluation of the program to support continuous improvement in delivering the initiative. Data collected during the formative evaluation will be available to assist the summative evaluation.

The department’s contract with the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium was for three years with an option to extend for a further two years. With the extension, the contract will be in place until June 2012. This evaluation’s findings are not a direct input into the contract extension process. It is however expected that the findings of the evaluation will be considered as part of the Australian Government’s deliberations about the future of Helping Children with Autism beyond the five year current funding period.

A.3 Audiences for the evaluation

DEEWR is the primary audience for the evaluation’s reports. The reports are also expected to be received by the Advisory Committee and the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium. DEEWR may publish the reports on its website.

Reporting strategies

The final report will include clear findings and recommendations which respond to the evaluation questions. The recommendations will be practical and actionable by DEEWR. The Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to provide comment on the draft final report during a presentation to the committee in September 2010.

A.4 Ethics

This evaluation will accord with the Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (Australasian Evaluation Society 2006). A detailed list of the AES guidelines for the conduct of ethical evaluations can be found at www.aes.asn.au.

As well as codifying ethical standards, the guidelines reflect many of the standard practices that ACG adopts when undertaking projects. Some of the guidelines are particularly relevant to this evaluation and a selection of these are summarised below, along with the strategy for managing these considerations.
Table A.1

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<tr>
<th>Principle and AES reference</th>
<th>Guideline</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Commissioning and preparing for an evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle: All persons who might be affected by whether or how an evaluation proceeds should have an opportunity to identify ways in which any risks might be reduced.</td>
<td>Look for potential risks or harms (A5)</td>
<td>The decision to undertake an evaluation or specific procedures within an evaluation should be carefully considered in the light of potential risks or harms to the clients, target groups or staff of the program. As far as possible, these issues should be anticipated and discussed during the initial negotiation of the evaluation.</td>
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<td>In this instance, the evaluation will involve focus groups with parents and teachers. The subject matter is potentially sensitive. Care will be taken to conduct the focus groups, the other stakeholder consultation and the survey in a manner that recognises this.</td>
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<td><strong>Conducting an evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle: An evaluation should be designed, conducted and reported in a manner that respects...those affected by and contributing to the evaluation.</td>
<td>Obtain informed consent (B12)</td>
<td>The informed consent of those directly providing information should be obtained, preferably in writing. They should be advised as to what information will be sought, how the information will be recorded and used, and the likely risks and benefits arising from their participation in the evaluation. In the case of minors and other dependents, informed consent should also be sought from parents and guardians.</td>
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<td>This guideline is relevant to both the stakeholder consultation and the survey. In both cases, informed consent will be sought. In agreeing to participate in response to an appropriately detailed invitation to do so, those directly providing information will provide informed consent that they wish to do so.</td>
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<td><strong>Reporting the results of an evaluation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principle: The evaluation should be reported in such a way that audiences are provided with a fair and balanced response to the terms of reference for the evaluation.</td>
<td>Report clearly and simply (C18)</td>
<td>The results of the evaluation should be presented as clearly and simply as accuracy allows so that clients and other stakeholders can easily understand the evaluation process and results…</td>
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<td>The evaluation report will report in a manner that presents information, findings and recommendations clearly and simply.</td>
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A.5  Risk management

The following risk register describes identified evaluation risks and proposed management strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Management strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Measuring appropriateness</td>
<td>Appropriateness is difficult to measure. It is however possible to examine the model used for the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package and compare this to alternative models. On this basis, the appropriateness of the current model compared with alternatives can be assessed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determining sustainability</td>
<td>Sustainability is understood to refer to the ability of the program to be maintained beyond the current contract period. There are likely to be options for the extent to which the program will require government funding in the future. The less government funding, the more self-sustaining the program. Early in the project, the objective for sustainability will be discussed with DEEWR and the Advisory Group so this can be examined with an appropriate frame of reference during the evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining effectiveness</td>
<td>As with any evaluation of an educative program, attributing causality is difficult. Given this difficulty, the evaluation will focus on the association between the program and its impact. The data strategy described below (Section 2.5) provides a basis for ensuring there is adequate data for the collection of evidence during the evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing efficiency</td>
<td>Efficiency is often best assessed in terms of the efficiency of the model being used compared to the likely efficiency of alternative models. However, such analysis invariably involves a degree of subjective judgement. Several techniques will be used to assess efficiency, as described above, which represent a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivities related to the collection of information from clients</td>
<td>ASD is a potentially sensitive topic for many stakeholders, particularly for the parents/carers of children with ASD and possibly also, for the teachers of children with ASD. Information collection from stakeholders will be undertaken in a sensitive and professional manner. The input of the Advisory Group and DEEWR will be utilised to assist in this process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data gaps</td>
<td>Despite the best intentions and planning there may be some data gaps which limit certain findings, particularly related to higher level outcomes. To the extent possible, this will be addressed by careful planning of all components of the information gathering phase of the evaluation. We will also draw upon data and experience of the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium formative evaluation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey response</td>
<td>Despite the formative evaluation involving a large survey component, this evaluation is expected to require its own survey of parents/carers and teachers. As with any survey, the effectiveness of this instrument is compromised if a poor response is achieved. This will be addressed through careful survey design, appropriate targeting of the survey at the relevant population and good communication of the purpose and benefits of the survey.</td>
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A.6 Other matters

Governance

DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism Advisory Committee will act as a reference group for the evaluation. Organisations represented on the committee are:

• Australian Education Systems Officials Committee;
• Independent Schools Council of Australia;
• National Catholic Education Commission;
• Australian Parents Council;
• Australian Council of State Schools Organisations;
• Australian Association of Special Education;
• Australian Special Education Principals’ Association; and
• Representative of parents and carers of children with ASD.

Two meetings with the Advisory Committee are planned: first, to assist in finalising the evaluation framework; and second, to receive feedback on the draft final report.

Resources

The Allen Consulting Group will undertake the evaluation, with the assistance of DEEWR’s Student Access Section, Inclusive Education Strategies Branch.

Timeframe

The evaluation is scheduled to conclude in September 2010. Table A.3 shows a summary of the project stages and a summary project timeframe.
A.7 Conceptual approach

Our overall conceptual approach to the evaluation is represented in Figure A.1.

Figure A.1

**EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH**

![Evaluation Framework Diagram]

Source: The Allen Consulting Group

This chapter describes each element of the framework. In doing this, the framework:

- provides a definition of the three criteria of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency for the purposes of this evaluation;
- aligns the evaluation questions with the criteria to which they are most relevant, recognising that some questions relate to more than one criterion;
- describes some of the measures that will be used, and whether they relate to outputs or outcomes;
- details the evaluation questions to be considered; and
- describes data sources and data management.

In order to conduct our analysis, it is important that we develop a clear understanding of the data required and data sources. Table A.4 identifies a typical example of how we would achieve these aims — noting these activities cover the project requirements identified in the DEEWR Request for Quotation documentation. The table should be read in conjunction with the data strategy described at section A.11.
### Table A.4

<table>
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<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA AND INFORMATION SOURCES</th>
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<td><strong>Criterion</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Appropriateness</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
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</table>

Source: The Allen Consulting Group

#### A.8 Appropriateness

Appropriateness refers to whether the program is the optimal way of targeting a particular problem or community need.

The evaluation will address the *appropriateness* of DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism initiatives in meeting the Australian Government’s priorities of building productive partnerships between schools and families to improve the educational outcomes for school-aged children with ASD.

Consequently, the assessment of appropriateness will explore the relationship between program delivery, program objectives and the outcomes government has sought from the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism program.

#### Community need

The number of children with ASD in Australian schools is increasing. Teachers and other school staff need skills and knowledge, as well as the support of parents and carers, to improve the educational outcomes of these children. Parents and carers of school aged children with ASD need information, skills and strategies to work in partnership with teachers and other school staff to support the education of their child (DEEWR 2007).
**Government priorities / policy**

The government is seeking to encourage positive partnerships between families and schools for children with ASD.

**Desired outcomes**

The outcome being sought by the DEEWR components of Helping Children with Autism is to improve educational outcomes for school-aged children with ASD.

**Program objectives**

The objectives of the DEEWR components of Helping Children with Autism are to:

- increase the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff who are working with students with ASD (professional development component); and

- assist parents and carers of school aged children with ASD in developing productive partnerships with their child’s school teachers and school leaders.

**Assessing and measuring appropriateness**

The extent to which these program objectives and desired outcomes address community needs is the basis for assessing appropriateness. Consequently, appropriateness is an overarching criterion that examines whether the design of the government’s model is well suited to addressing the area of need.

The appropriateness of each component part of DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism program relates to the following factors:

- **validity** — ability of the model to meet client, community and government requirements:
  - if implemented will the program as described improve educational outcomes for children with ASD?

- **consistency** — interaction of the DEEWR components of Helping Children with Autism with existing government initiatives:
  - is the program consistent with other government initiatives (within DEEWR and the two other parts of Helping Children with Autism)?
  - does the program reinforce the other government initiatives?

- **sustainability** — ability of the DEEWR components to be sustained after the funding period:
  - could the program continue with a lower level of Australian Government funding than that provided during the term of the contract?
  - could the program continue with a lower level of Australian Government oversight than that provided during the term of the contract?
**Appropriateness evaluation questions**

**Validity related**
To what extent do DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism initiatives align with current Australian Government priorities and the government’s education reform agenda?

What would be the consequences (e.g. for teachers, schools, parents/carers and students) of not offering the support provided through the program?

**Consistency related**
In what ways does the program fit with other Australian Government initiatives?

What are the options for integrating the program into existing learning and support structures for teachers and parents/carers?

**Sustainability related**
What trends are likely to impact on the program in the future?

How sustainable is the program beyond the current funding period?

**Appropriateness related evaluation risks**

Appropriateness is difficult to measure. It is however possible to examine the model used for the DEEWR components of the Helping Children with Autism package and compare this to alternative models. On this basis, the appropriateness of the current model compared with alternatives can be assessed.

Sustainability is understood to refer to the ability of the program to be maintained beyond the current contract period. The extent to which DEEWR would like the program to be self sustaining will need to be clearly defined to enable sustainability to be considered as part of the assessment of appropriateness.

**A.9 Effectiveness**

Effectiveness considers program objectives and desired outcomes compared with actual outcomes. By measuring outputs, this can give an indication of the extent to which outcomes are achieved.

Our assessment of effectiveness will focus on how effective the program has been for each of the target populations:

- children with ASD:
  - is there evidence that the program has contributed to improved learning outcomes for these children?

- teachers and other school staff:
  - is there evidence that the understanding, skills and expertise of teachers and other school staff about educating children with ASD has improved?
  - is there evidence that practice in schools has improved as a result?

- parents and carers of children with ASD:
is there evidence that the ability of parents to form productive partnerships with their child’s school and school leaders has improved?

– is there evidence that practice in schools has improved as a result?

**Actual outcomes and impact**

In assessing effectiveness, we will attempt to measure the actual impact of the program. Outcomes are often difficult to quantify. Consequently, output measures will be used to quantify the program’s outputs and provide an indication of the extent to which outcomes are being achieved or are on track to being achieved.

**Assessing and measuring effectiveness**

The theory behind this program is that improving the knowledge of parents / carers and teachers through training and workshops will lead to improved educational outcomes for children with autism.

In assessing effectiveness, the evaluation will assess whether stakeholders attribute improved educational outcomes to DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism program. If the additional support provided through the component parts of the Helping Children with Autism program delivers a net benefit to ASD students, their teaching and non-teaching support staff, parents and carers, then the initiative has been effective.

Some of the information collected from the formative evaluations may be useful as proxy indicators where other measures of outcomes are not available. For example, these indicators could relate to the number of sessions and participants, the geographic coverage, the number of schools that have participated, the Key Local Professionals and Key Local Facilitators established, the engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse people and the engagement with Indigenous communities.

**Effectiveness evaluation questions**

Have DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism components been effective in funding activities that address the needs of students with ASD, their parents and school communities?

To what extent has the program contributed towards DEEWR’s overall objectives and strategic goals?

Which of the following factors have influenced the implementation of the program and in what ways have they influenced implementation:

i. stakeholder consultation;

ii. communications and promotions;

iii. recruitment and selection of participants;

iv. face to face training;

v. online training; and

vi. post-training professional networking and support?
To what extent have indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities participated in the program?

What are the stakeholder perceptions of the program?

What has been the impact of the program?

How adequate are the existing performance indicators?

How could the current performance indicators be improved, including through the development of new indicators?

In what areas can program delivery be enhanced or improved?

What are suggested strategies for doing this?

Effectiveness related evaluation risks

As with any evaluation of an educative program, attributing causality is difficult. Given this difficulty, the evaluation will focus on the association between the program and its impact. The data strategy described below (Section A.11) provides a basis for ensuring there is adequate data for the collection of evidence during the evaluation.

A.10 Efficiency

Efficiency considers the cost of outputs relative to inputs. By comparing the efficiency of a program with other programs, conclusions can be reached about the relative efficiency of each program. A program becomes more efficient if it delivers more output for less cost. Costs may include administrative, monitoring and program costs for government; and administrative, compliance and reporting costs to schools. Program governance may also be an important efficiency consideration. Good governance should encourage streamlined and transparent decision making.

Inputs

Inputs are the resources a program has available to it. The inputs to this program include the $23.3 million funding over five years and the resources of the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium. The program also draws on the resources of many people throughout school communities, parents and carers of children with ASD, state and territory government departments and the Catholic and independent school sector representatives. Each of these provides inputs to the activities that comprise the program and lead to the impact of the program.

Outputs

Outputs are the direct product of program activities. Some of the outputs of this program have been listed briefly in the above discussion of effectiveness. In the context of efficiency, the focus is on the cost of transforming inputs into outputs and whether this represents good value for money.

Assessing and measuring efficiency

Efficiency measures for this evaluation include the following:
- benchmarking program expenditure through comparison with a similar program;
- ratio of administrative to program costs — providing for efficient use of administrative program funds allows a greater share of program funding to support recipients, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the program;
- comparison of program outcomes to expenditure — this helps to assess value for money by weighing up the benefits of the program against its cost of operation and delivery. It can also identify areas where spending can be improved; and
- on-going compliance and reporting — which ensure that the program funds are well targeted, but without being too complex or onerous.

**Efficiency evaluation questions**

Is the program an efficient means of addressing Australian Government priorities?

To what extent does the program provide value for money in terms of Commonwealth investment?

How efficient are current governance, administrative and reporting arrangements?

How efficiently have government resources been used, considering issues such as program expenditure, participation and administration cost and whether savings could be made or outcomes improved for the same cost?

**Efficiency related evaluation risks**

Care should be taken in the use of efficiency measures. No two programs are precisely the same, so comparative analysis through benchmarking is invariably compromised. Efficiency is often best assessed in terms of the efficiency of the model being used compared to the likely efficiency of alternative models. However, such analysis invariably involves a degree of subjective judgement. There is an expectation that analysis of efficiency will achieve a quantifiable level of detail that is not always practical or desirable for educative programs. This risk will be addressed by using several techniques in assessing efficiency, as described above, which represent a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.

### A.11 Data strategy

**Data sources**

The sources of data and information for this evaluation are:

Qualitative analysis, comprising:
- stakeholder consultation — comprising up to ten focus group consultations and approximately 50 interview type meetings;
- written submissions — which can be submitted to the evaluation website;
- case-study analysis — derived from the stakeholder consultation, case studies will be developed to illustrate the impact of the program; and
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Document analysis — involving a review of literature related to education of children with autism, including the role of parents/carers and teachers in this process.

Quantitative analysis, comprising:

- analysis of survey data undertaken already for the formative evaluation; and
- survey analysis generated for this evaluation, based on surveying a teacher sample and a parent/carer sample.

**Stakeholder consultation**

Effective strategies for stakeholder consultation are required to manage input and sustain the involvement of key individuals. We are acutely aware of the practicalities involved in consulting with a large number and diverse range of stakeholders on a national level. For this project, the number, range, and geographic location of stakeholders means that a variety of different tools should be used to collect valuable stakeholder information, both in a meaningful and cost effective way. For this reason, we propose to undertake a number of consultation methods. Table A.5 below, outlines the range of different measures we propose to utilise in undertaking stakeholder consultations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools Used for Stakeholder Consultation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Survey or submission | Survey | Stakeholder views captured through a survey | Survey | Allows for a large range of stakeholders to provide input | • Those not able to attend workshops  
• Any interested party |
| | Submission | Usually in response to specific questions or framed by terms of reference. | Submission | Reduces the need for multiple meetings in large or disparate organisations. |  
• Parents and carers  
• Teaching and non-teaching staff  
• Principals and the executive  
• Representative bodies |
| Focus groups | Workshop-style meetings comprised of a number of invited participants. Participants take part in a workshop, where feedback is provided on specific items, with participants often breaking into smaller groups for discussion. | Useful forum to test hypotheses and elicit feedback on proposed best-practice arrangements. |  
• Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium representatives  
• Policy advisors |
| Face to face meetings | Face to face interview type meetings. | Allows for ready exchange of ideas and clarification of points. |  
• Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium representatives  
• Policy advisors |

Table A.6 and Table A.7 propose provisional organisational arrangements for workshop sessions, by stream. Note that some of these meetings may be conducted as one-on-one sessions if they are not suited to a workshop format.
Table A.6

STREAM 1: PARENT/CARER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Potential participants</th>
<th>Sub-group</th>
<th>Focus/ anticipated outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parents and carers           | Parents and carers who have participated in workshops                                   | Representatives from all school settings (primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings) | • Perspectives on current arrangements, how well the program is meeting its objectives  
|                              | Parents and carers who have not participated in workshops                                | Representatives from all school settings (primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings) | • Perspectives on current arrangements, how well the program is meeting its objectives  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • How well does the program meet parent/carer needs  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses of program  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Impact on children  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future directions  
| School level actors          | • Teaching and non-teaching staff                                                      | Representatives from all school settings (primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings) | • Operational and strategic perspectives of the impact of current arrangements  
|                              | • Principals and the executive                                                        |                                                                          | • Perspectives on how well program is meeting its objectives  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future possibilities and reform options  
| Representative bodies        | • State and territory autism associations                                               |                                                                          | • Perspectives on current arrangements and how well program is meeting objectives  
|                              | • Parent, principal and special education associations                                  |                                                                          | • How well the program meets parent/carer and children’s needs  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses of program  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Impact on children  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future directions  

Table A.7

STREAM 2: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Potential participants</th>
<th>Sub-group</th>
<th>Focus/ anticipated outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School level actors          | • Teaching and non-teaching staff                                                      | Representatives from all school settings (primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings) | • Operational and strategic perspectives of the impact of current arrangements  
|                              | • Principals and the executive                                                        |                                                                          | • Perspectives on how well program is meeting its objectives  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • How well the program meets staff needs  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future possibilities and reform options  
| School community             | Parents and carers                                                                      | Representatives from all school settings (primary, secondary, special and mainstream settings) | • Perspectives on current arrangements and how well program is meeting objectives  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • How well the program is meeting children’s needs  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses of program  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Impact on children  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future directions  
| Representative bodies        | • State and territory autism associations                                               |                                                                          | • Perspectives on current arrangements and how well program is meeting objectives  
|                              | • Parent, special education and principal associations                                  |                                                                          | • How well program is meeting parent/carer and children’s needs  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Strengths and weaknesses of program  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Impact on children  
|                              |                                                                                        |                                                                          | • Future directions  

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**Project website**

When justified by the project’s scope and duration, project websites provide a highly effective means of ensuring greater transparency and stakeholder engagement. A project website will be established to provide information about the project, and to collect written submissions.

Stakeholders will be invited to lodge comments addressing key issues in DEEWR’s Helping Children with Autism package. Comments will be guided by an issues paper. Comments may be in the form of a formal submission or commentary in the form of an email.

**Literature review**

The literature review will inform the evaluation of research related to educational outcomes for children with ASD and the relationships between parents/carers of children with ASD and schools/teachers.

As well as examining the Australian experience, the literature review will explore:

- the ways in which systems and programs are arranged and delivered in selected other countries; and
- the ways in which they collaborate in order to improve educational outcomes for school-aged children suffering from ASD or similar impairments in development.

Examples of the international literature include:

- Inclusion development programme: Supporting pupils on the autism spectrum (United Kingdom);
- Parent information and training programs (United States);
- Parent Education: help! (New Zealand);
- Specialist Teacher Workshops (New Zealand);
- Autism Spectrum Disorders Resource For Teachers (New Zealand);
- Individual Education Plans (Canada); and

Examples of the Australian literature include the following, not that this is just a sample of the relevant literature and the focus here is on documents with an operational focus. The literature review will expand on this significantly:

- Quill, K A 1995 Teaching children with autism: Strategies to enhance communication and socialisation;
- Gardner J, Grant J, Webb P 2001 Autism for all teachers: A teacher's guide to working with students with autism spectrum disorder;
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108

• Dodd S, Brennan L and Collins M 2005 Transition to school. NSW: Autism Spectrum Australia;
• Disability Services Commission 1999 Autism: The school years. Perth WA: Disability Services Commission;
• Tullemans A 2004 Working with Teachers; and

**Data management**

The evaluation will gather a large quantity of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data from primary sources — stakeholder consultation, focus groups and written submissions — will be analysed to identify themes, which relate to the three criteria and the evaluation questions. This will be summarised into a level of detail that is amenable for use in the report-writing phase of the evaluation. The literature review will draw on secondary sources and will also develop themes that relate to addressing the evaluation questions.

Quantitative data derived from participant questionnaires will be provided by the formative evaluation team. Participants have completed a questionnaire prior to each session, at the conclusion of each session and as a follow up to each session three months later. No sampling has been undertaken as all participants have been surveyed. The response rate would be expected to have been high for the pre and post session questionnaire but somewhat lower for the follow up questionnaire three months later.

The evaluation team will review the data collected by the formative evaluation team and identify if there are data gaps for the purposes of this evaluation. We will consult with DEEWR in the development of a survey instrument for this evaluation and in determining a target population and sampling strategy.

**Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium survey of participants**

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium conducted surveys before, during and at several points after the professional development workshops. Surveys asked participants to rate their knowledge on various aspects of teaching children with ASD. To gauge the impact of Positive Partnerships on teacher knowledge this evaluation has analysed three of the surveys conducted with professional development workshop participants: pre-workshop, post-workshop and one of the follow up surveys.

The survey sample was 2045 respondents completing 4090 surveys (before and after the workshop).

The survey asked participants to self-assess the extent of their knowledge, and in following surveys the ‘extent of improvement in their knowledge’, of different areas relating to educating children with ASD, using a five point scale (this scale is used in all survey results reported in this evaluation, in chapters 5 and 6):

• 0 – not at all;
• 1 – to a little extent;
• 2 – to some extent;
• 3 – to a fair extent;
• 4 – to a good extent; and
• 5 – to a great extent.
Appendix B

List of stakeholders consulted

B.1 Stakeholders consulted

As part of the Allen Consulting Group’s evaluation of Positive Partnerships, a large number of stakeholders were consulted. Stakeholders included program participants and non program participants. Consultations were conducted in every state and territory. Consultations were conducted using face to face individual interviews, group meetings and focus groups (for program participants). Additionally, a professional development workshop and a parent/carer workshop were observed.

The following tables detail the stakeholders consulted and the timing of consultations.
### Table B.1

**CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED WITH NON PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Date (2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Catholic Education Commission of NSW Association of Independent Schools Autism Spectrum Australia (Adrian Ford)</td>
<td>4 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Education and Training Department of Human Services Autism Spectrum Australia (Julie Hook and Karen Jones)</td>
<td>20 April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Office for Government School Education Autism Victoria</td>
<td>3 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic Education Commission</td>
<td>24 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance at PD teacher training</td>
<td>22 April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training Catholic Education Commission Independent Schools Queensland Autism Queensland</td>
<td>9 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Department of Education Association of Independent Schools Tasmania Catholic Education Office Autism Tasmania</td>
<td>15 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Autism Asperger ACT Department of Education and Training Catholic Education Office</td>
<td>16 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Autism SA Department of Education and Children’s Services Department for Families and Communities South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools Association of Independent Schools</td>
<td>31 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training Department of Health and Families (Children’s Development Team) Catholic Education Office (teleconference) Association of Independent Schools (teleconference)</td>
<td>18 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Autism WA Department of Education and Training Catholic Education Office Association of Independent Schools</td>
<td>1 April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other stakeholders</td>
<td>FaHCSIA DoHA Judy Brewer (previous ACSSO board member) Peter Davis (previous ACSSO board member) Jenny Branch (previous ACSSO board member) Mary Thomson, Autism Teacher Training Institute Children with Disability Australia (requested consultation)</td>
<td>5 May 5 May 30 April 4 May 30 April 6 May 27 May</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Association of Independent Schools VIC, indicated that they could not comment due to change over of administration of the program within the association. Association of Independent Schools ACT did not wish to comment on the program.
Focus groups were conducted in ten locations in four states, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland. Focus groups were conducted in both metropolitan and rural locations. A large number of participants from each area were invited to attend focus groups, however the number of participants indicates the number of participants in the focus group on the day.

Table B.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Date (2010)</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>No. participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bairnsdale, Gippsland, VIC</td>
<td>PC, rural</td>
<td>19 May</td>
<td>11 am</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traralgon, Gippsland, VIC</td>
<td>PD, rural</td>
<td>19 May</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland, Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>PC, metro</td>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutherland, Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>PD, metro</td>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Gambier, SA</td>
<td>PC, rural</td>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>11 am</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Gambier, SA</td>
<td>PD, rural</td>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woolloongabba, Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>PD, metro</td>
<td>24 May</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toowoomba, QLD</td>
<td>PC, rural</td>
<td>25 May</td>
<td>10 am</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toowoomba, QLD</td>
<td>PD, rural</td>
<td>25 May</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box Hill, Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>PC, metro</td>
<td>18 May</td>
<td>11 am</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: PC – PC component, PD – professional development workshop

Workshops observed:

- Day one of a parent/carer workshop was observed in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne in October 2009; and
- Day one of a professional development workshop was observed in Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne in April 2010.

Members of the DEEWR Advisory Committee included representatives from the:

- Australian Association of Special Education;
- Australian Special Education Principals Association;
- Australian Parents Council;
- Australian Council of State School Organisations; and
- Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders.
Appendix C

Jurisdictional overview of ASD programs and services

C.1 Overview of jurisdictional arrangements

The following table provides an overview of ASD professional development or parent carer information programs and services in different jurisdictions in Australia.
### Table C.1

**JURISDICTIONAL OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS AND/OR SERVICES BY STATE/TERRITORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Teaching workforce development programs for ASD</th>
<th>ASD parent/carer information and support programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **New South Wales** | • Training programs for pre-school and school staff, delivered by Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW.  
• AutismPro, delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia, a web-based program helping families and service providers working with young children with ASD to choose and implement effective objectives and activities.  
• Behaviour intervention service, provided by Autism Spectrum Australia for families, carers, schools and non-government agencies who support children and adolescents with a disability to have challenging behaviours.  
• Online Learning, provided by the Department of Education and Training, a ten week online, self-paced professional development course. Modules on varying aspects of disability, including Autism. | • Autism Advisor Program, part of the Helping Children with Autism package and delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia, providing parents with information and support to assess a range of early intervention options  
• Footprints Program, “Stepping into Learning”, funded through DADHC and delivered by Autism Behavioural Intervention NSW, providing services for families who cannot access services due to financial reasons – strong focus on parent training and education.  
• Behaviour Support workshops, delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia.  
• Diagnostic Assessment Service, delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia.  
• Autism Spectrum Australia someone to turn to, parent support network. |
| **Victoria** | • Western Autistic School Professional development through the Autism Teaching Institute (nationally accredited autism specific training courses for teachers at the Vocational Graduate Diploma level)  
• Regional Autism Consultation and Training networks (ReACTs), through the Autism Consultation and Training NOW (ACTNOW) Strategy, to identify and response to autism specific training and consultation needs in a local areas.  
• DEECD workforce initiatives Early Childhood Intervention Services, including incentives for graduates to work in Early Childhood Intervention Services, for Early Childhood Intervention Services staff to work in rural areas and scholarships for Early Childhood Intervention Services staff to undertake further study  
• DHS Disability Services accesses training for accommodation, behaviour intervention and case management staff  
• Office of the Senior Practitioner provides training, workshops and consultation to disability support works and families about support strategies to reduce behaviours of concern | • DHS regional intake response service, provides information about supports and services for people with a disability and their families, including those with ASD.  
• Information services provided by Autism Victoria, Association for Children with a Disability and Carers Victoria.  
• Disability online <www.disability.vic.gov.au>, providing information on service options.  
• Office of the Senior Practitioner, provides assistance to access additional service supports for families.  
• DEECD regional Early Childhood Intervention Services central intake service, provides information for young children with a disability and their families.  
• Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and University Child Psychiatry services, conducting assessment for complex ASD presentations, refers to services for early intervention, respite and support. |
## Evaluation of Positive Partnerships

**State/territory** | **Teaching workforce development programs for ASD** | **ASD parent/carer information and support programs**
--- | --- | ---
Queensland | • ‘Supporting Individuals with ASD’, a new component of the Disability Certification IV training  
• Catholic Schools Victoria run their own professional development for teaching children with ASD  
• Autism Victoria provides professional development for teaching children with ASD | • Mental Health and Drugs Division, reducing waiting lists for complex ASD assessments.  
• ReACT comprehensive parent training programs and regional action plans, targeting local service gaps.  
• Autism Early Learning Centre, at La Trobe University Children’s Centre, including playgroups for children with ASD and the provision of web-based information and face to face information and support sessions for parents.

Western Australia | • Teacher and other professionals education, professional development provided by Autism Queensland.  
• Professional services delivered by the Autism Association of Western Australia, such as consultancy to agencies supporting people with autism and advice regard inclusion. Autism WA runs 1 day training sessions, reaching 120 teachers each year.  
• Visiting teacher service, delivered by the Department of Education. Based on a referral basis (60 per term), specialised teachers work with school, teacher and child for a school term to development strategies for learning and education plans. Professional development is delivered to the whole school during this process.  
• Positive behavioural support program, delivered by the Department of Education.  
• Two university courses, providing training related to Autism.  
• Autism consultants, provided by the Catholic Education Office, delivering targeted professional development to schools, as requested.  
• Professional development workshops, Association of Independent Schools provides information sessions on a casual basis, regarding Autism. | • Personalised school services, tailoring individual programs to the individual needs of a student with ASD, their family or school.  
• Variety of workshops facilitated by Autism Queensland.  
• Advisory visits, Autism Queensland provide visits to a child’s educational setting.  
• Centre Based HomeAQtion, provided by Autism Queensland, focusing on areas of concern a family may have within the home setting.  
• Family services provided by the Autism Association of Western Australia. Running 9 parent workshops (2 days in length) annually.  
• Autism Advisor program, as part of the Helping Children with Autism package, delivered by the Autism Association of Western Australia. Provides information and support to families and carers of children with autism.  
• Autism Association of Western Australia Early intervention program, including state and commonwealth funded places in the program. The association also provides ‘interim support for families’ to assist families awaiting diagnosis or a place in an intervention service.

South Australia | • School Inclusion Program provides support to schools for students with an | • Family workshops, run by Autism SA, including introductory

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Note: The Allen Consulting Group
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<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Teaching workforce development programs for ASD</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Capital</td>
<td>ASD, also providing professional development and other short term educational programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Professional development</strong>, provided by Autism SA to schools/teachers on a fee basis. Autism SA are also developing an intensive course to be delivered to teachers and school leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Training and Development</strong>, a range of training options including training for parents and professionals. Training tailored to the needs of a workgroup or organisation.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Professional learning days</strong>, provided by the Catholic Education Office. Run intensives on topics such as ASD and visual education on a term by term basis.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Team of professionals that work with schools</strong>, provided by the Catholic Education Office, on a need basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Professional development</strong>, delivered by Autism SA to Independent Schools, on behalf of the Association of Independent Schools. Association of Independent Schools also run key teacher days, which have included a focus on Autism. Association of Independent Schools provide crisis management services (behaviour support and occupational therapy services to schools in need.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>In Schools Specialist Support program</strong>, delivered by the Association of Independent Schools, aimed at building the capacity of school staff and providing them with assess to professionals. Program for all students with disability, although a large number are children with Autism.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Training, supported by the Department of Education and Training</strong>, often collaborate with Autism SA to provide teacher training, as well as supporting staff to attend conferences in relation to Autism.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Professional development for teachers and other professionals</strong>, provided by the Centre for Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorders (Autism Asperger ACT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Professional development</strong>, provided by the Department of Education and Training. Training includes the development of individual learning plans, and training for executive staff who have a role in organising supports for children with disability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Essential training for children with disability</strong>, provided by the Department of Education and Training. Content derived from Positive Partnerships, using skills matrix in assessing all children with disability.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Australian Capital     | ASD parent/carer information and support programs                                                                 |
|                        |sessions for new families working with difficult behaviours and helping their child with ASD.                        |
|                        | • **Parent Support Networks**, a number of family support groups in metro and country areas.                         |
|                        | • **Early Development Program**, playgroups, foundation skill group, kindergarten and transition support.            |
|                        | • **Information sessions open to parents and carers**, provided by Autism Asperger ACT. Have also produced a book for parents and carers, listing services that may be needed in various areas. |
### Evaluation of Positive Partnerships

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
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</table>
| Tasmania        | • Understanding Autism, making relationships with individual with Autism, as part of Autism Tasmania.  
• Teacher resources, available online <www.do2learn.com/>. | • Early days workshops run by the Parenting Research Centre for families and carers of young children with ASD (part of Helping Children with Autism)  
• Playconnect Playgroups, designed to help families with children with ASD, helping them connect with other families as a form of support.  
• Autism Advisor Service, Autism Tasmania.  
• Family Support Co-ordinator, Autism Tasmania.  
• Autism Advisor program (Helping Children with Autism).  
• Early Days workshops, by the Parenting Research Centre (National Coordinator) (part of Helping Children with Autism).  
• Carers NT, provide services such as counselling, advice, advocacy, education and training to improve the lives of carers.  
• Autism NT, provides advice for parents of children with ASD (up to the age of 6). |
| Northern Territory | • Early days workshops run by the Parenting Research Centre (National Coordinator) (part of Helping Children with Autism).  
• Carers NT, provide services such as counselling, advice, advocacy, education and training to improve the lives of carers.  
• Autism NT, provides advice for parents of children with ASD (up to the age of 6). | |

Source: Stakeholder consultations
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