



STRENGTHENING KINDERGARTEN CLUSTER MANAGEMENT PROJECT

The Kindergarten Cluster Management (KCM) model was introduced to Victoria in 2003, to provide professional employment arrangements for educators and to strengthen the management and delivery of community-based kindergarten programs. Since this time the KCM system has continued to grow and is a key strategy to build a stronger and more responsive kindergarten system across the state.

A KCM review by Deloitte Access Economics in 2014 found that cluster management works to directly support proven drivers of quality, including staff capability, teaching methods, pedagogy and a stable learning environment. It also identified opportunities to strengthen KCM by providing streamlined policy and an outcome-based process.

In response to the KCM review and recent policy reforms in the early childhood sector, it is timely to re-think KCM for the future. In 2014, the Department of Education and Training (DET) established the Strengthening Kindergarten Cluster Management Project. The project aims to:

- ensure the KCM service model directly focuses on delivering improved outcomes for children
- reinforce the leadership role of cluster managers in driving quality reform in the early childhood sector

- provide clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities of all of KCM service model partners (DET, parents, local government and KCMs), to enable them to undertake their role effectively and with confidence.

A KCM Reference Group has been established to facilitate sector consultation throughout the duration of the project. The group consists of a cross section of representatives from Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA), Municipal Association of Victoria, community-based and local government KCMs, and central and regional DET staff. The Reference Group has convened on four occasions to provide their on-the-ground knowledge and expertise to the project. There has been robust discussion of KCM policy issues and feedback provided to DET on key policy and operational issues.

ELAA has also been commissioned to undertake further consultation with independent kindergartens regarding perceptions and experiences of KCM. This work will broaden the feedback obtained through the KCM review regarding the benefits of KCM, along with factors which influence decisions to enter or exit a KCM arrangement.

A revised KCM policy framework is currently being drafted for consideration by Government. It will outline the vision

for KCM in Victoria, describe the elements and outcomes of a sustainable service model, highlight the stewardship role of DET and the role and authority of cluster managers and other KCM service model partners. One of the challenges in revising the policy is responding to feedback provided through the KCM review that identified the limited prescription in the current policy framework. This was found to be an impediment in some circumstances, but also enabled flexibility to tailor the support cluster managers provide to the unique needs of services.

DET will continue to work with the Reference Group and will consult further as the policy framework takes more shape.

The project is aiming to launch the revised KCM Policy Framework in the first half of 2015.

For further information about the project, please contact the DET Strengthening KCM Project Manager, Sarah Riddle on 9637 2254 or riddle.sarah.e@edumail.vic.gov.au.