

Tasmanian Government Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper

Submission from The Smith Family

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The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity which has supported Australian children and families experiencing disadvantage for more than a century. Our **vision** is a world where every child has the opportunity to change their future. Our **belief** is that education is one of the world's most powerful change agents and our **purpose** is to overcome educational inequality caused by poverty.

We take a **place-based approach** and are currently working in over 90 low SES communities across every state and territory. This includes in the South of Tasmania from Moonah through to Brighton, in the North around North-East Launceston to Georgetown and in the North-West in Burnie, Wynyard, Ulverstone and Penguin.

The children and young people we support

In FY22, we supported over **7,400** children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals in Tasmania. This included over **3,700** students in Tasmania on our long-term educational scholarship program, **Learning for Life**.

The *Learning for Life* program is highly **targeted**. Students in receipt of the scholarship, are likely to struggle to achieve educationally and move into work or further study post-school without support, as shown by the profile of **Tasmanian** students on the program:

- All are **financially disadvantaged**, as evidenced by having a Health Care Card or Pensioner Benefit Card.
- 27 percent are from an **Aboriginal** and/or Torres Strait Islander background.
- **47 percent** of *Learning for Life* students and 43 percent of primary carers have a **health** or **disability** issue.
- 57 percent of parents/carers have **not completed Year 12** or equivalent.
- The parent/carer of around 68 percent of students are **not in paid employment**.
- A quarter of students live in a household with **six or more** people.

Further information on *Learning for Life* is in the Appendix.

Partnering with the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People

The Smith Family is very pleased to be working in partnership with the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) on a data exchange arrangement. Built on a **shared agenda** that seeks to **improve** the educational and **post-school** outcomes of young people experiencing disadvantage, this initiative will see our front-line staff in Tasmania having access in **real-time** to educational data (such as school attendance and achievement) held by the DECYP on *Learning for Life* students. This will enable our staff to provide more **timely** and **targeted support** when students are struggling, including those at risk of disengaging from school, as well as reinforcing when good progress is being made.

This submission

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Youth Jobs Strategy Discussion Paper*. We appreciate that this work is being led by both the Minister for Education, Children and Youth and the Minister for Skills, Training and Workforce Growth. Our research and practice experience highlights that such **collaboration**, along with input from other portfolios, will be key to ensuring better educational and employment for young Tasmanians, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

This submission draws on our work supporting young people and families in Tasmania and across Australia, as well as our long-term research with them. Of particular relevance is our **Pathways, Engagement and Transitions** (PET) research project¹. This three year project is exploring the pathways and factors affecting **post-school transitions** of young people experiencing disadvantage. The young people participating in the project were in Years 10 or 12 in 2020 and on the *Learning for Life* program, and live in every state and territory.

More than 3,000 young people have participated in longitudinal surveys in 2021, 2022 and 2023 as part of the PET project. In addition, 60 young people have participated in in-depth interviews over the same years. As such, PET offers **unique insights** on the experiences and destinations of young people in their first years post-school, how these experiences change over time, what factors have helped or hindered young people's successful navigation of work and study transition pathways and what more they think could be done to strengthen their pathways. The PET research offers the **voices of many young people** experiencing disadvantage for consideration in the development of the Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy.

Principles of the Strategy

The Smith Family is supportive of the principles identified in the discussion paper with their emphasis on: young people at the centre; strengths based approach; life-long learning; flexible, contextualised and seamless support; outcomes focused; evidence, accountability and continuous improvement.

The principles include a focus on wellbeing and safety, and this could be interpreted as including valuing a positive sense of **identity** and **culture**, which is identified as a key domain in the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth's (ARACY) **Wellbeing Framework for Children and Young People** ('the Nest'). There may be value however in including a principle which explicitly articulates the importance of identity and culture, given it impacts on young people's participation both at school and in the workplace.

The discussion paper notes that **collaboration** is a key to the success of the Strategy and one of the principles is *connected and seamless*. This principle will require deep and sustained partnerships across a range of areas and levels of government and the community and business sectors. It will also require **innovation** and **new and stronger partnerships** across these sectors. Community service organisations are **already playing** a role in supporting young people's post-school pathways and have deep expertise in this area, particularly for young people experiencing disadvantage. The Smith Family believes this should be more explicitly articulated in the principles.

¹ See <https://www.thesmithfamily.com.au/media/research/reports> for published reports from the Pathways, Engagement and Transitions research project.

Better understanding the post-school pathways of young people experiencing disadvantage

The PET research provides **contemporary** and **longitudinal** insights on the post-school pathways of young people experiencing which can help inform the Youth Jobs Strategy. The vast majority of young people who participated in the project were in work and/or study after leaving school. For those who were in Year 12 in 2020 for example, 85 percent were in work and/or study in 2022, with a further 11 percent looking for work, volunteering, doing an unpaid traineeship or internship or working in a family business.

However only 57 percent of this Year 12 cohort were **fully engaged** (35 hours a week or more), and many who were working only were working **two or more jobs**, and/or **wanted more hours** of work and/or had **looked for a new job** in the month before completing the survey.

For those young people who were working only, the most common occupations were in retail and sales, labouring and other construction and transport, distribution and warehouse roles. This data suggests that many of these young people are in **precarious, low-wage occupations** with **unclear progression opportunities**.

The PET research also highlights the **dynamic nature** of young people's post-school pathways, with two in five young people surveyed having a different level of engagement in work and/or study post school in the second year post school, compared to the first year after Year 12. The interviews suggested this is an under-estimation, with 32 of the 33 young people who were in Year 12 and participated in an interview having changed their level of engagement between the first and second year post school.

Taken together the PET data highlights the importance of helping young people experiencing disadvantage, and young people more generally, to be supported to develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that will prepare them over time for *careers*, rather than a *job*.

Supporting more young Tasmanians to complete Year 12 or equivalent and complete tertiary education

The rapidly changing labour market highlights that there are significant opportunities for young people as Tasmania continues to focus on economic growth, including in new industries. **Educational attainment** is a critical foundation for young people being able to enjoy the benefits of these opportunities both in the short and longer-term. The PET data confirms a wide range of research showing that completion of **Year 12 or equivalent** is strongly related to post-school engagement in employment, training and further study. Three in four young people who were in Year 10 in 2020 and completed Year 12 were in work and/or study in 2023, compared to two in three young people in this cohort who did not complete Year 12.

The Smith Family notes and supports the policy efforts of the Tasmanian Government to both reform Years 9 to 12 curriculum and career education and increase the proportion of young Tasmanians completing Year 12. We also appreciate the challenges of this work, particularly in schools serving high proportions of young people experiencing disadvantage and note the decline in the **Apparent Retention Rate** from Year 10 to Year 12 in Tasmanian Government schools from 79.9% in 2021 to 76.1% in 2022. The Smith Family notes the impact of recent cost of living increases as being one factor which may be contributing to this decline.

We would also reinforce research showing the importance of efforts in both **primary** and **early secondary school**, focussed on improving attendance, achievement and engagement as key foundations for **increasing the Year 12 completion** rate.

Many of the employment opportunities that are or will be on offer in Tasmania require post-school education and training. The PET research highlights however some of the challenges young people experiencing disadvantage face in completing such **education** and **training**. For example, there was a decline in the proportion of young people who were studying between their first and second year post-school from 52 percent to 48 percent, with a range of factors including **financial pressures** impacting on young people's capacity to participate in and complete post-school study. These financial pressures came from needing to be **completely financially independent** and able to support themselves and/or the hidden financial costs associated with **unpaid tertiary placement requirements** as highlighted by Kim and Summer who participated in the PET research.

You pretty much have assignments back-to-back, and you've got placement as well that you're not allowed to work during, which is two weeks, then four weeks, then six weeks. So, you've got to think, "Can I go that...long without working for an income?". Kim

The reason I left the course it was more money-wise...I wasn't living at home. I was living with my partner... having to pay rent and bills...on top of buying food and all that stuff. Summer

Given the strong link between educational attainment and longer-term participation in the labour market and the type of employment that such attainment enables, it is problematic for young people experiencing disadvantage to not be engaged in post-school education and training.

Influencing the participation in employment of young people experiencing disadvantage

International research shows that being in work or training post school is heavily influenced by what happens to young people while they are **in school**. Young people who participate in multiple encounters with the world of work (eg career talks, workplace and VET visits, Job Fairs, work experience etc) while in school, are much more likely to be in employment, education or training in their 20s.

Many young people experiencing disadvantage don't have access to quality and sustained engagement with the **world of work** while at school. While noting policy efforts underway in Tasmania in this space, and the efforts of schools, The Smith Family's experience is that this is particularly challenging for schools serving large populations of young people experiencing disadvantage. This has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic and the recovery from it.

Strengthening the quality and depth of careers support provided to young people while they are at school, including their links with the world of work is the area which The Smith Family believes will have the **most positive impact** on young people's post-school pathways. It is also an **early intervention** approach so is more cost-effective.

There are a number of dimensions to enhancing this careers support which could be built into and/or enhanced in the work currently underway in Tasmania:

1. Strengthening young people's career management skills.

The PET research shows young people who were making successful transitions after Year 12 had strong career management skill sets. With these skills, young people were able to successfully identify and navigate available work and/or study opportunities and the many related systems designed to support post-school transitions. These career management skills included:

- **Strong personal management skills** - young people on well-defined pathways had clear ideas about their strengths, interests and motivations and a strong positive academic self-concept. Post-school, they had engaged in behaviours and demonstrated attitudes

- reflective of personal growth. They understand the value of strong interpersonal skills and since leaving school have been working on strengthening their social and relational skills.
- **Learning and work exploration skills** - young people on well-defined pathways were honing their knowledge of career opportunities and relating those opportunities to their academic self-concepts, personal interests, and skills. Most had considered the advantages and disadvantages of alternative pathways and investigated options before deciding on a particular pathway. They had accessed information and were strengthening their knowledge and understanding of the relationships between career aspirations and potential occupations, and had compared the requirements of those careers with their actual or potential education and skill levels.
 - **Strong career building skills** - young people who were successfully transitioning were using these skills to facilitate decision-making about appropriate work and/or study opportunities. Many had identified potential hurdles in their pathways and developed and implemented plans and strategies to manage and navigate these challenges. They were building or strengthening career identities and developing and implementing goals that are guiding and motivating them to achieve their desired longer-term outcomes. They are proactively strengthening their career-related social networks, and several had or were engaging in help-seeking behaviours by accessing support services to help them achieve their goals.

2. Enhancing young people's adult support networks and their knowledge and skills to support post school pathways

The PET and other research shows that strong supportive adult social networks created, initiated or highlighted various career development opportunities for some young people experiencing disadvantage. These networks included family and extended family members, friends, co-workers and managers, educational staff and placement supervisors.

For many young people who were working, supportive co-workers and managers had become increasingly important in their second post-school year, perhaps to a greater extent than this group might appreciate. These colleagues were helping them to settle into working environments and understand the relationship between learning, education and work options. Co-workers and managers were also actively progressing the learning experiences of these young people. For those who were studying, career-related work experiences created the nexus between classroom theory and practical application. A number of young people had employers who were financing or offering to finance additional study and training. For others, their managers had become a new source of advice and support with making career decisions.

3. Career related part-time employment, course placements, paid cadetships or internships

The PET research shows the value of providing young people with opportunities to explore their chosen pathways and further investigate the extent to which these pathways matched their interests, skills, and abilities, both while **at school** and in the period **post-school**. **Paid cadetships** or **internships** were key to enabling some young people to participate in further education and seen as opportunities for acquiring skills and providing exposure to potential employers, as identified by Eliza below. **Work-related opportunities** were seen by young people as teaching the realities and requirements of work, and helped young people to assess the extent to which their chosen pathway is a good fit for their skills, interests and abilities.

The best thing this year was definitely the (paid) internship... It was one of The Smith Family programs... Seeing what goes on in a major company... has given me a lot of insight into the industry and I met other interns who are completing or have already finished their degrees... There were like 35 other interns... It's really interesting to hear their perspectives.... We're all put in different areas, so I can hear what they're doing and compare it to what I'm doing... and see what I want to do.... There was also the other Smith Family interns who were working in different companies... who I could chat to about their experiences... I definitely have a strong focus on my studies after my internship. Eliza

Strengthening efforts in primary and early secondary education

In addition to a focus on strengthening careers support and curriculum in Years 9 to 12, there is also evidence showing the importance of working with children from a young age regarding careers. This is particularly important for children from vulnerable backgrounds, including those from low socioeconomic families and those in communities marked by high unemployment and/or low rates of labour force participation.

Children's **perceptions about certain jobs and careers** are formed and sometimes cemented at a young age. Children's **aspirations** are often shaped and restricted by gender stereotyping, socioeconomic background and who they know. These factors go on to influence the academic effort children put into certain lessons, the subjects they choose to study and the jobs they pursue. Aspirations are not only **embedded at a young age** but are also difficult to shift. For example, students who do not express Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) related aspirations at age 10 are unlikely to develop STEM aspirations by age 14 with longer-term consequences for their pursuit of science subjects and related careers.

Research with Australian children shows that their most popular careers are highly concentrated into a few occupations which reflect a celebrity focus (sportsman/woman), highly visible public service careers (teacher/lecturer, police), health (vet) and modern growth drivers (scientist). There is a major disconnect between the careers that primary-age children are most interested in and those that the economy needs. A similar misalignment is also evident among young people in secondary schooling, highlighting that career aspirations of children are not transient as is sometimes argued.

The Smith Family would argue that a Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy needs to ensure there are opportunities in the primary school curriculum: "Early intervention can be a very cost effective targeted way of raising children's aspirations and broadening their horizons. The evidence suggests that giving children the chance to meet volunteers from the world of work helps them to see the meaning and relevance of the subjects they are studying at school. Embedding experiences of real-world in learning and the school curriculum can lead to increased motivation resulting in increased educational attainment...volunteers play a key role in providing children with role models and tackling stereotyping around gender and ethnicity and help ensure that children at a young age don't start ruling out options for themselves. ...If children see the opportunities their learning can give them, they are more likely to have higher and broader aspirations...For young people, access to new and useful information about the labour market allows them to draw better links between their current and future imagined lives" (*Drawing the future*, 2018 pp.74-5).

Recommendations on what more can be done to strengthen the post-school transitions of young people experiencing disadvantage

Drawing on our own research and practice experience and that of other Australian and international research, The Smith Family makes the following recommendations on how to strengthen the post-school transitions of young people experiencing disadvantage:

- Greater **individualised support** while at school to help more young people to **complete Year 12**. This includes early intervention for those struggling with the academic and social demands of school and support for those with personal concerns which affect their engagement with school.
- Strengthen young people's access to more **comprehensive** and **personalised careers advice**, including in the middle years of school, and support to develop options for them to achieve their goals. This includes a **broader approach to careers advice**, including information about labour markets, employment pathways, skills that will be in demand in the future, alternative pathways and support to develop a range of options in case they face difficulties getting into their first choice. There should be a focus on exploring what a young person wants to do in life and options to achieve their goals, including more frequent support for those who do not have specific goals.
- Ensure a focus on **intentional career development** learning for young people of all ages and stages, including in the primary years, and continuing efforts to:
 - Help young people to articulate their career development skills and use a common language to describe those skills
 - Develop consistency in the quality and availability of career and transition services.
- Provide young people with **accessible information** on diverse career pathways and enhance efforts, both while they are at school and post-school, to encourage their increased participation in **Vocational Education and Training** and **apprenticeships**.
- Fund an expansion of high-quality **career-related, remunerated work placements**, cadetships and **internship** programs, which target young people experiencing disadvantage.
- Support **family members'** access to up-to-date labour market, education and training information and how they can support young people to develop their goals and plans to achieve them. This is important given family members are **key sources** of advice for young people, including those experiencing disadvantage.
- Investigate ways to formally increase the **social capital** and **career-related adult networks** of young people experiencing disadvantage, including through employers.
- Strengthen young people's access to timely and affordable **health** and **mental health** services, given the link between disengagement, non-engagement in work and/or study and poor health and mental health.
- Establish **mechanisms to facilitate quality partnerships** between schools, employers, members of the community, community organisations and tertiary institutions, as recommended by the second Gonski Review. School-community engagement is particularly important in **schools serving students experiencing disadvantage**, to augment the **learning opportunities, resources** and **networks** that schools can draw on to support students. **School-industry collaborations**, often mediated through not-for-profit organisations, can play a key role in improving education and employment outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage.

Conclusion

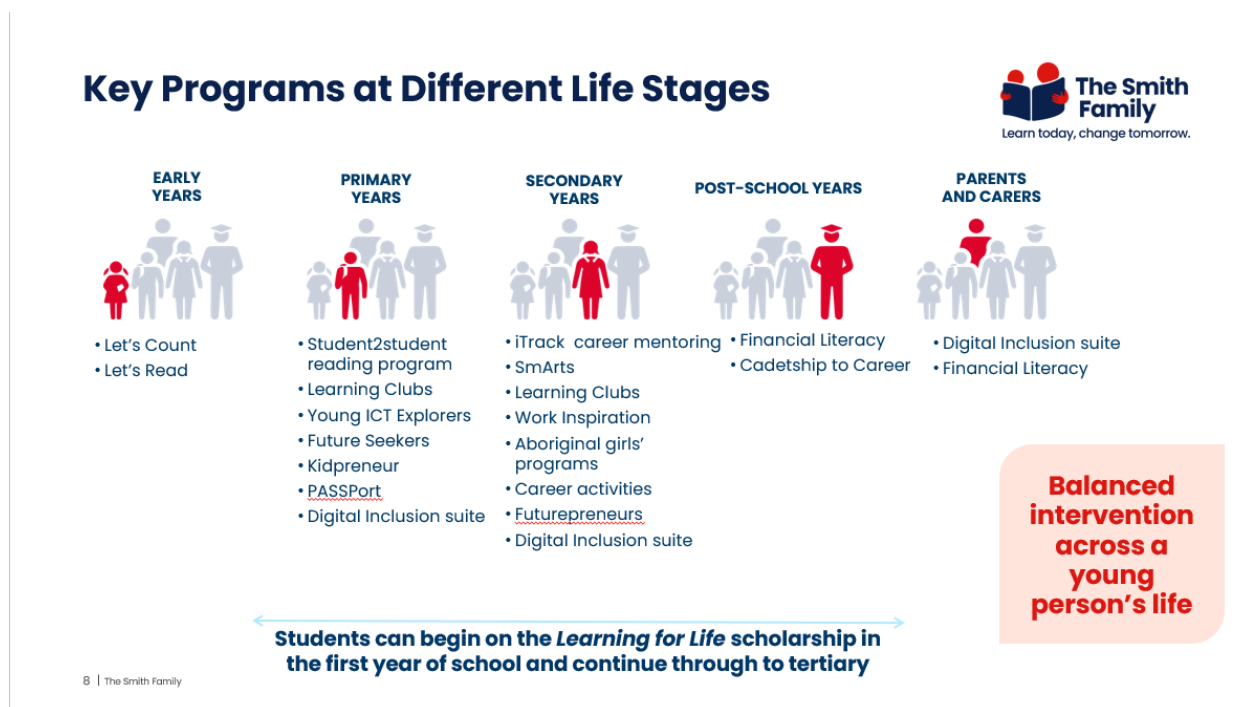
The Smith Family commends the development of a Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy and notes the significant efforts that will be required across a range of sectors to achieve its intent. The Smith Family looks forward to working with Government, educational institutions, business, philanthropy and the broader community to support more young people experiencing disadvantage to have positive post-school pathways and in turn contributing to the broader Tasmanian community.

1 Appendices

The *Learning for Life* program recognises that young people experiencing disadvantage benefit from **extra support to succeed at school**, complete Year 12, and go on to work or further studies. *Learning for Life* provides families and scholarship students with the following support:

- A **modest biannual payment²** to families to help them cover core education-related expenses such as books, uniforms and excursions.
- Support from a ***Learning for Life* Family Partnership Coordinator** (a Smith Family team member) who works with the family to support their child's long-term participation in education.
- Access to a range of programs to help ensure children's engagement in education. These include literacy and numeracy programs, learning clubs, mentoring and career programs and digital and financial literacy programs for parents/carers (see the Appendix for further details).

The *Learning for Life* Program Suite



² The annual *Learning for Life* payment to a family for a school student is \$478 and for a senior secondary school student is \$772.

Learning for Life Program Outcomes

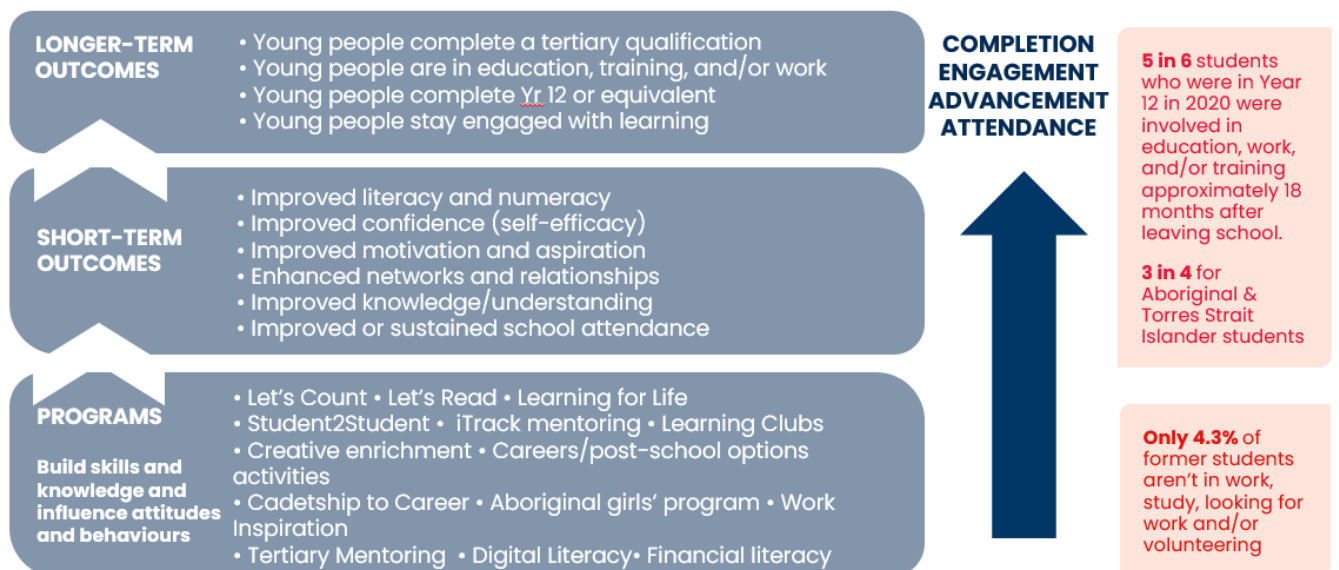
The Smith Family uses **Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA)** to measure the effectiveness of both our shorter programs and the *Learning for Life* scholarship program. OBA asks three central questions:

- How much did we do? (outputs)
- How well did we do it? (quality)
- Is anyone better off? (outcomes)

Data is collected for each of the shorter programs to answer each of these questions.

For each *Learning for Life* student, we track key longer terms outcomes, which research has shown are important – school attendance, school completion, post-school engagement in employment, education and training and for students on a tertiary scholarship, whether they complete a qualification. We have a unique longitudinal dataset on young people experiencing disadvantage and our analysis of this data is contributing to the Australian educational evidence base.

Measures of effectiveness



Current The Smith Family Partner Schools in Tasmania

The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* Program is partnering with around 50 schools across three Tasmanian regions, as shown in Table 1. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of these partner schools ranges from 788 to 998, where the national average is set at 1000. More than one third of the Tasmanian partner schools have an ICSEA of below 900.

Table 2: *Learning for Life*: Tasmanian Partner schools

South	North	North West
Austins Ferry Primary School	Brooks High School	Boat Harbour Primary School
Bagdad Primary School	East Tamar Primary School	Burnie Primary School
Bowen Rd Primary School	Glen Dhu PS	Havenview Primary School
Brighton Primary School	Invermay Primary School	Hellyer College
Campania District School	Kings Meadow High School	Montello Primary School
Claremont College	Lilydale District School	Parklands High School
Cosgrove High School	Mowbray Heights Primary School	Riana PS
East Derwent Primary School	Newstead College	Romaine Park Primary School
Gagebrook Primary School	Port Dalrymple School	Somerset Primary School
Glenorchy Primary School	Prospect High School	Table Cape Primary School
Goodwood Public School	Queechy High School	Ulverstone Public School
Herdsmans Cove Primary School	Ravenswood Heights Primary School	West Ulverstone Public School
Jordan River Learning Federation Senior School	South George Town Public School	Wynyard High School
Montrose Bay High School	St Leonards Primary School	Yolla (District)
Moonah Primary School	Waverley Primary School	
Rosetta Primary School	Youngtown Public School	
Springfield Gardens Primary School		
Windermere Primary School		