

# Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development



*Every child,  
every opportunity*

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every opportunity*



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## PREMIER'S FOREWORD

The Victorian Government believes that every Victorian child deserves the best possible start in life.

That's why one of my first decisions as Premier of Victoria was to establish the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The focus of the new department is firmly set on the wellbeing of Victorian children and their families—and its aim is to ensure that Victorian children have every opportunity to learn, to grow, and to experience a happy and healthy childhood.

The establishment of the department also marked the beginning of a new approach to learning and development—one which supports children and their families from birth through to adulthood.

We know that children's learning and development starts from day one and that their early experiences have a direct impact on their future wellbeing. There is now overwhelming evidence that giving children the best possible start in life improves their educational, social and economic prospects. Bringing together early childhood services and education has opened up opportunities that will benefit children at their most important developmental stages, and ensure smoother transitions into school.

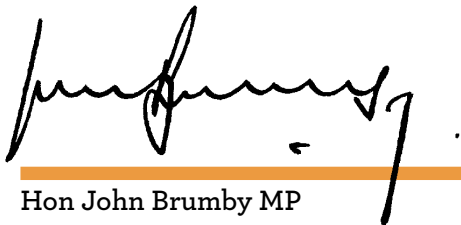
This Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development outlines these opportunities and articulates a new vision for Victorian education and early childhood development over the next five years.

The Blueprint renews our commitment to high quality education and early childhood services, and sets out concrete reforms to achieve this end. And it signals a new emphasis on fostering partnerships—with parents and families, and with local communities and businesses.

The Blueprint also recognises the fundamental importance of a quality education and early childhood workforce. It makes clear that we will support contemporary workplaces and careers, and a culture of leadership, learning and renewal across the entire learning and development system.

Our Government's investment in schools and early childhood services is making a real difference to children's learning and development across Victoria.

I want to encourage Victorian families to visit their schools and early childhood services and find out more about the great things that are happening for our children.



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Hon John Brumby MP

Premier of Victoria





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## MINISTERIAL MESSAGES

There is overwhelming evidence and increasing recognition that the early years of life have a profound impact on each child's future. Parents, families, the community and government are all vital influences on ensuring our children have the best possible start in life.

This Blueprint sets a new agenda for everyone involved in the care and education of children. It provides a framework for working together to provide the best possible opportunities for children in their early years.

The Blueprint draws on the wisdom and experience of people in the early childhood sector as well as the best available Australian and international research. I offer my thanks and appreciation to everyone who contributed.

Our aim is to ensure all children can participate in high quality early childhood services, and to provide extra support and early intervention where needed.

This means strengthening and forging new partnerships between early childhood services, families and communities.

We will also improve links between children's services and primary schools, so children make the best possible transition at this important stage of their learning and development.

Together, we are embarking on a new era in the health, wellbeing, learning and development of Victorian children. I look forward to working with you to give every child, every opportunity for a healthy and successful future.



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**Maxine Morand MP**

Minister for Children and  
Early Childhood Development



The greatest gift we can give our children is the solid foundation of a high quality education.

Victoria has a long and proud record in school education, including extensive reforms over recent years. This positions us well to be one of the world's best-performing education systems.

However our children's world is ever-changing and we cannot stand still if we are to prepare them for future economic and social prosperity.

We must help our children develop the knowledge, skills and learning strategies they need to deal with the vast amounts of information and range of technologies now available to them.

The Blueprint renews the Victorian Government's commitment to education as its number one priority.

We want every child to have every opportunity to succeed, no matter where they live or their socioeconomic circumstances. We also want all children to learn and make progress in every year of their schooling.

By drawing on lessons from across the globe, the Blueprint challenges us to extend our traditional ideas and practices in education.

This is not always easy but it is essential if our children are to thrive, learn and grow.

I thank everyone who gave of their time and energy to help develop the new agenda. I look forward to working with you as we enter this next phase of reform.



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**Hon Bronwyn Pike MP**

Minister for Education



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## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW



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## Context

The twenty-first century is increasingly complex, global and networked. The life chances of our children and young people in this world will depend in large part on the support they and their families receive early in life.

Across the world, governments and communities are recognising the need to renew and re-energise learning and development systems to better support families and prepare children for modern life.

Within Australia, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is leading a collaborative national approach to these issues, through a productivity agenda in which learning and development are central.

Here in Victoria, the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (the Blueprint) sets out the Government's five-year agenda for learning and development from birth to adulthood. It is the next generation of reform to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Blueprint builds on and extends recent policies and reforms, most notably

- the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003), which set a major capacity-building agenda in government schools to enhance the quality of school leadership, teaching and learning and the school curriculum, through initiatives such as
  - the Victorian Essential Learning Standards
  - the Effective Schools Model
  - the Performance and Development Culture
  - the School Accountability and Improvement Framework

- *Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood* (2007), which articulated a comprehensive framework for early childhood reform and drew on extensive contemporary research showing
  - the period from birth through to eight, and especially the first three years, sets the foundation for future social, physical, emotional and cognitive development
  - effort and investment in the early years yields the best outcomes for children and families
  - development is supported by healthy, safe and stimulating environments<sup>1</sup>
- the creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to pursue an integrated agenda for all Victorian children and young people
- the commitment of significant resources in the 2008 State Budget, to supplement the Government's major investment in school infrastructure through the Victorian Schools Plan.

### Current situation

Victoria has a strong record of achievement in education and early childhood development.

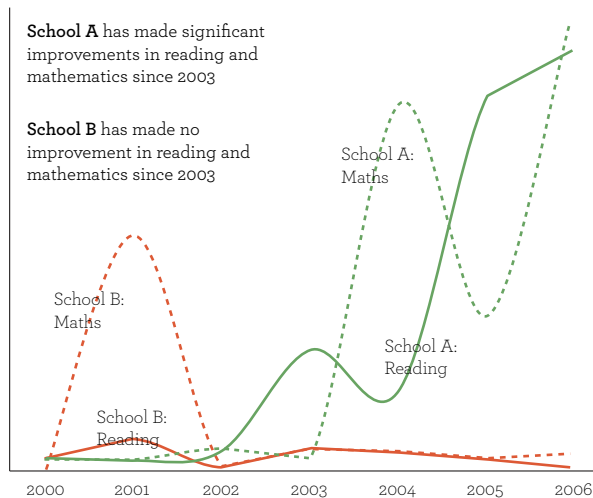
We have an accessible and high-quality set of universal services, including our Maternal and Child Health Service and kindergartens, with high participation rates.

We have a diverse child care sector, which the Government and the community increasingly appreciate as a key learning environment. We also have an extensive set of more targeted support services for children and families with additional needs.

Our school system performs well on international comparisons and has made significant improvements in the last few years, which position us well for international success. We have invested in leadership at all levels of the system, recognising its importance in driving improvement.

There is clear evidence that the reforms are paying dividends, but improvement is not consistent across all schools as this graph shows.

### AIM Year 5 Maths and Reading Mean Scores (2000–2006)



**We now need to build on the success of these models and frameworks to make ours one of the world's finest school systems, integrated with the best performing early childhood system.**

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## Overview

The key elements of the Blueprint are set out below. Each element is explained in more detail in later sections of this document.

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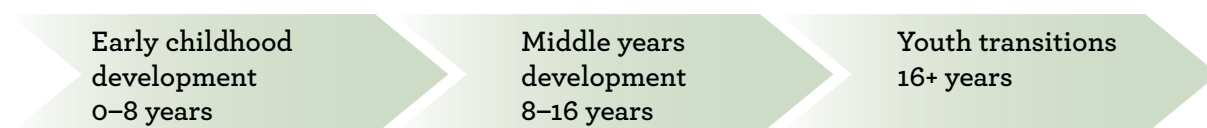
## Blueprint Overview

### Vision

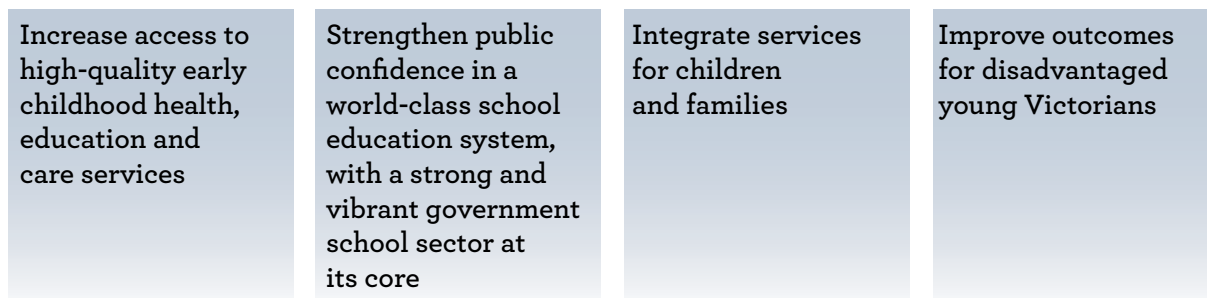
Every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities

### Mission

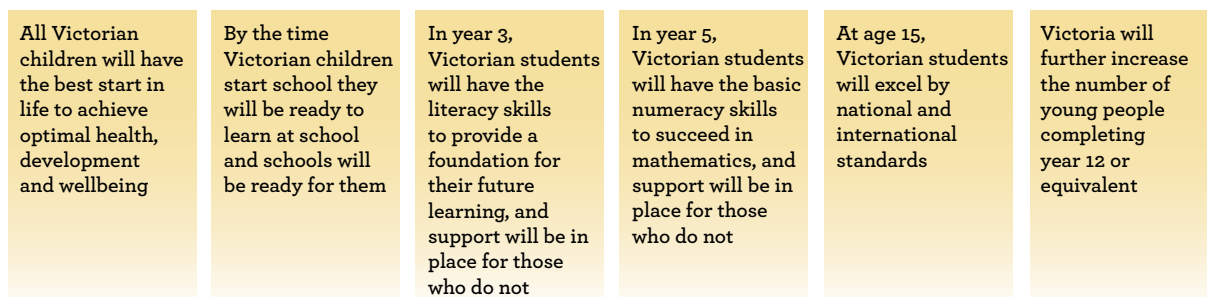
Ensure a high-quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian



### Priorities



### Goals



### Strategies



### What is new about the Blueprint?

The Blueprint is a new approach based on the outcomes we want for all children and young people from birth to adulthood, rather than on any distinction between early childhood services and schools.

It encompasses both education and early childhood services and government and non-government schools.

For the first time, we articulate shared goals for all Victoria's children and young people, as a basis for collaboration between families, schools, early childhood services and the broader community. A shared understanding of our goals will provide the basis for intervention where they are not being achieved.

Our new mission is to provide high-quality universal learning and development opportunities, with a view to Victorian children and young people excelling by international standards. We recognise the needs of those who are at risk of being left behind.

The Blueprint recognises that some groups, especially Koorie children and young people and, more broadly, children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, are over-represented among low achievers and under-represented among high achievers. We need to implement a strategy to reduce the effects of the disadvantages they face.

In support of these goals, **we will create a more integrated learning and development system, bringing together education and early childhood development.** This new system will be characterised by a focus on quality at all levels.

**We will improve transitions between early childhood services and schools.** In early childhood development, we will emphasise learning and the qualifications of staff. We will work with the Commonwealth Government to achieve greater integration between care and education.

In school education **we will pursue a stronger systemic approach to school improvement in government schools** based upon driving improvement through the role of regional networks, and stronger interventions in schools where performance needs to improve.

**We will promote partnerships between government and non-government schools,** consistent accountability frameworks and greater transparency about performance and provision from all schools regardless of sector.

Working in partnership will be a characteristic of our new approach. **We will engage parents and communities as the first and most enduring influences on children's development.** We will also work in partnership with the thousands of dedicated leaders and staff in Victoria's schools and children's services. It is only by supporting their efforts that we can make the changes outlined in the Blueprint.

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## SETTING THE DIRECTION

The Blueprint brings together a new vision and mission along with challenging goals and priority areas for reform.

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### What we aim to achieve

As we embark on a new phase of reform, it is important to be clear about our vision for children and young people.

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### Vision

**Every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities**

This vision focuses squarely on the outcomes we want to achieve for young Victorians. It also concentrates on developing the unique talents and abilities of every young Victorian.

Our vision is underpinned by the belief that every child is important and we must have clear and high expectations for all children. All children are able to progress in their physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, although rates and types of progress will be different for individuals.

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### How we intend to achieve the vision

Our vision articulates the outcomes we want to achieve for each child. Our mission identifies how, as a system, we can achieve this vision in a consistent and coordinated way.

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### Mission

**Ensure a high-quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian**

Victoria is well placed to fulfil this mission, through the new focus on integrating education and early childhood development and our strong record of achievement across these areas.

Directions emerging from international research and successful improvement strategies provide guidance on how we can make further improvements.

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### Priorities

The vision and mission will be pursued through four priorities which capture this new direction for our learning and development system.

**Increase access to high-quality early childhood health, education and care services**

**Strengthen public confidence in a world-class school education system, with a strong and vibrant government school sector at its core**

**Integrate services for children and families**

**Improve outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians**

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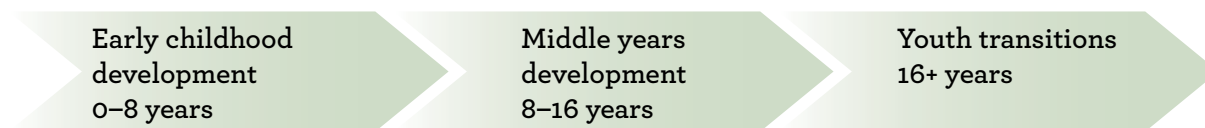
### Meeting changing needs

Our support for children and their families recognises that needs change through different stages of life. Our learning and development system must adapt to meet these needs and ensure appropriate support for children, young people and their families.

This requires a lifecycle approach to children and young people's development and learning from birth to adulthood.

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### Lifecycle approach to children and young people's development and learning



This approach begins before birth and extends from the health of mothers and babies through to the transition from school to further education, training or employment.



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## Goals

Across these phases of development, we commit to the following new and ambitious goals for Victoria's children and young people.

Children and young people develop differently and, for a range of reasons, some will require additional support. We must intervene strongly and effectively to support all children and families if progress is less than expected.

We will use system-wide performance measures to track our progress. These measures will continue to be developed, along with specific targets, to reflect ongoing efforts at the national level through the COAG Productivity Agenda.<sup>2</sup>

**All Victorian children will have the best start in life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing**

**By the time Victorian children start school they will be ready to learn at school and schools will be ready for them**

**In year 3, Victorian students will have the basic literacy skills to provide a foundation for their future learning, and support will be in place for those who do not**

**In year 5, Victorian students will have the basic numeracy skills to succeed in mathematics, and support will be in place for those who do not**

**At age 15, Victorian students will excel by national and international standards**

**Victoria will further increase the number of young people completing year 12 or equivalent**

## Strategies for reform

The Blueprint outlines an integrated reform agenda designed to improve performance and promote excellence across Victoria's schools and early childhood services. It articulates specific actions to achieve our goals, organised under three major strategies.



## System improvement

We will ensure that all children and young people and their families have access to high-quality schools and early childhood services, through

- **Integration and transitions**

We will create a more integrated system that will be more convenient for families, will smooth the major transition points in the system, such as the transition from early childhood services to school, and will allow families to get the support they need

- **High-quality, accessible early childhood services**

We will improve the quality of early childhood services by emphasising the importance of learning and increasing the qualifications of staff. We will improve participation in early learning and health services

- **Excellent school education**

We will pursue a stronger systemic approach to school improvement in government schools based upon driving improvement through the role of regional networks, and stronger interventions in schools where performance needs to improve.

We will also promote partnerships between government and non-government schools, more consistent accountability frameworks and greater transparency about performance and provision from all schools regardless of sector.

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## Partnerships with parents and communities

We will ensure that parents and families are valued partners in their children's development and learning, through

- **Working with families, communities and business**  
Parents and families raising children must be supported by the whole community in this crucial undertaking. We will create strong partnerships between early childhood services, schools, the broader community and business
- **Opportunity for all Victorians**  
Some children and young people need extra or more individualised opportunities and support in order to achieve their best. We are embarking on further reform to ensure our schools and children's services are equipped to respond effectively to the needs of all children.

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## Workforce reform

We will ensure that schools and early childhood services have skilled and committed staff who are supported to deliver their very best, through

- **Modern careers and workplaces**  
We will encourage the best people to work in education and early childhood. For those workforces the Government employs, we will provide attractive and rewarding career structures and modern work practices
- **A culture of strong leadership and professional learning**  
We will engage the workforce in professional learning as part of an overall approach to service improvement. Leadership will be a major focus, as we know it is a major driver of improved performance.<sup>3</sup> People must be developed and supported from the moment they choose careers in learning and development.



<sup>3</sup> Barber, M. & Moushesh, M., 2007. *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*. McKinsey & Company, London

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## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

This section sets out the strategies and the specific actions we will take to achieve our vision.



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## Blueprint strategies and actions

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### System improvement

#### Integration and transitions

1. Co-location and integration
2. Improved transitions
3. New developmental frameworks

#### High-quality, accessible early childhood services

4. Quality early learning
5. Improved access
6. Better planning and coordination

#### Excellent school education

7. Quality teaching and learning
8. Government school improvement
9. Cross-sectoral strategies

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### Partnerships with parents and communities

#### Working with families, communities and business

10. Parenting support
11. Community hubs
12. Partnerships with business

#### Opportunity for all Victorians

13. Place-based approaches
14. Meeting diverse needs

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### Workforce reform

#### Modern careers and workplaces

15. Early childhood workforce development
16. Attracting the best people to teaching
17. High-performing school workforces

#### A culture of strong leadership and professional learning

18. Leadership development
19. Capacity building in early childhood services
20. Professional learning for teachers

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## SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

A key asset of the learning and development system is the system itself. With this large and talented workforce, physical infrastructure and relationships, there is potential to achieve extraordinary results with the available resources.

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## Integration and transitions

An integrated approach assists continued progress in children's and young people's development and learning.

Major transition points in the system are times of risk as well as opportunity. Greater integration through partnerships and collaboration is an effective way to link services and support children and young people at these times of transition.



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**Action 1: Co-location and integration**

We will promote co-location and integration of services in new and existing facilities where this meets local needs. State and Commonwealth Government initiatives create new opportunities to co-locate early childhood services on or near school sites.

Where co-location is not feasible, collaborative partnerships between schools and other services will be a strong focus.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- roll out Victorian and Commonwealth funding for multi-service children's centres
- implement the Commonwealth and Victorian Government commitment to early childhood centres on school sites.

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**Action 2: Improved transitions**

A major feature of an integrated system is that transitions are easy for children and families and involve the minimum possible disruption.

This applies whenever children and families move between services, but the initial focus will be on the transitions from kindergarten to school, from primary to secondary school and from school to further education, training and employment.

We will ensure all children entering school have a transition plan, consistent with the Early Years Learning and Development Framework. As children finish primary school, we will develop a transition plan for every child in year 6 that will travel with the child into year 7, at whichever secondary school their parents choose.

We will also improve the transition from school by strengthening school responsibility for monitoring young people's pathways until they complete year 12 or equivalent.

There will be greater expectations for accountability placed on schools to support their students to meaningful post-school pathways, and schools will be supported in this by Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs).

To more clearly signpost some pathways, we will develop and promote clusters of subjects within the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and/or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) that lead to further training and employment in specific industries.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- pilot transition plans for children entering primary school
- trial the Early Years Learning and Development Framework in selected sites
- develop further details on strengthening school responsibility for monitoring young people's pathways.

**Action 3: New developmental frameworks**

One foundation of a more integrated system is a clear and shared understanding of children's development and a shared language for discussing it.

Work is already underway on an Early Years Learning and Development Framework that will describe common goals for children from 0–8 years of age.

The framework will provide information about how children learn and develop. It will outline how early childhood professionals can use this information to improve their practice and outcomes for children.

The framework will be consistent with the Maternal and Child Health Service Activity Framework, which is organised around engaging with and responding to parents' needs, and with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards for school-aged children.

Building on this, we will develop a health and wellbeing service framework for children and young people from 0–18 years.

The framework will establish shared principles for how the Maternal and Child Health Service, school nursing and allied health workforces contribute to our desired outcomes for children and young people.

The framework will help prioritise resources to meet children's needs and assist early childhood practitioners and teachers through improved links to the broad range of health and wellbeing supports.

To support implementation of this framework in schools, we will reform the working arrangements for Student Support Services Officers (SSSOs). This will provide young people in schools with better access to the services they need, and provide SSSOs with more professional support, clearer management and accountability arrangements, and a more developed career structure.

This will also explore opportunities for coordination, professional support and career pathways created by bringing staff in similar professions in education and early childhood development into one department.

We will also develop a whole-of-government strategy for children and young people aged 0–18 with a disability or developmental delay.

This strategy will be underpinned by

- timely intervention and support
- a life cycle approach to services to address specific developmental needs and transitional stages
- better coordinated services across government agencies
- active support for children and their families to build their capabilities for more independent living.

This strategy will build on the current Early Childhood Intervention Reform project and the Government's commitment to 1000 additional Early Childhood Intervention Service places.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- consult on the Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- roll out the Maternal and Child Health Service Activity Framework
- roll out the Early Childhood Intervention Reform project and the first phase of 1000 additional Early Childhood Intervention Service places
- develop a whole-of-government strategy for children and young people aged 0–18 with a disability or developmental delay
- improve the career structure for Student Support Services Officers (SSSOs).

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### High-quality, accessible early childhood services

Our challenge is to improve access to high-quality early childhood health and development services for Victorian families.

Quality service provision in the early years can do much to assist those families and children who need extra support and has beneficial long-term effects on children's development.

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### Action 4: Quality early learning

To ensure children receive a quality learning experience wherever they are, we will develop an integrated approach to early childhood education and care. This will be done in cooperation with local government, the Commonwealth Government, service providers and the professional workforce.

This approach will focus on the care and development of children from birth, and will support parents' participation in work or study. An initial priority is to ensure that children can access quality learning opportunities while engaged in child care.

To promote quality in early childhood education and care in Victoria, we will improve staff-to-child ratios and the level and mix of staff qualifications through the review of the Children's Services Regulations 1998.

The revised regulations will apply to family day care and out of school hours care services for the first time and will link to the Commonwealth Government's quality commitment to guide service provision.

We recognise the need for effective and strong governance and management for early childhood education and care programs. We will strengthen kindergarten cluster management arrangements to improve governance, introduce greater innovation and fine-tune accountability and mentoring in cluster management arrangements.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- finalise new regulations for children's services.



**Action 5: Improved access**

All children should have access to high-quality early childhood services. We will increase participation so that a higher proportion of children benefit from a four-year-old kindergarten program in the year before they start school.

We will also improve participation in Maternal and Child Health Services, to respond to Victoria's unprecedented baby boom.

This will involve additional funding for the universal Maternal and Child Health Service, and for the Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service for families who need additional support.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- further improve participation in kindergarten and Maternal and Child Health Services.

**Action 6: Better planning and coordination**

We will integrate services for 0–8 year olds, with a priority focus on the most disadvantaged areas.

An important starting point has been the provision of free kindergarten through fee subsidies for disadvantaged four-year-old children and three-year-old Koorie children with parents on concession cards. This is being extended to children known to child protection services.

We will continue to draw the lessons from Victoria's Best Start partnerships. These partnerships represent world-leading practice and play a critical role in the integration of private, community and government services for families and in responding to 'what works' locally. Best Start partnerships will continue to be led by local government, and will have an expanded role in implementing government and local priorities.

We will support the leadership role of local government in improving early childhood services. Municipal Early Years Plans will be further developed as the local mechanism for aligning and coordinating government policy and local priorities for children aged 0–8.

Local government will have a key leadership role in responding to the expansion of early childhood services as a result of increased birth rates and Commonwealth Government commitments.

To drive continuous improvement we will develop and trial new mechanisms to recognise and share standout practice by local government and early childhood services.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- extend free kindergarten through fee subsidies for those children known to child protection services
- negotiate a partnership agreement between the Department and the Municipal Association of Victoria.

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## Excellent school education

The Government has a responsibility to assure quality and promote a culture of excellence in all schools across Victoria.

Our approach will be characterised by clear standards, high expectations for all schools and a focus on excellence in teaching and learning so that all children and young people progress.

We will ensure structures are in place to recognise and promote excellent practice and, where required, to lift performance.

We must realise the benefits of a statewide system. In our pursuit of excellence, we must utilise the collective resources of the system to ensure all parts of the system take responsibility for sharing knowledge and skills to support all schools to improve.

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## Action 7: Quality teaching and learning

We will increase our efforts to improve Victoria's performance in literacy and numeracy across all sectors, with priority given to quickly and effectively supporting students who fall behind.

The first step will be to set out more clearly Victoria's world-class approach to improving literacy and numeracy and support schools to implement this, including through teaching and learning coaches.

This will include developing a Differentiated Support Framework to provide guidance to teachers on responding to the range of student abilities and backgrounds they will find in any classroom.

It will also include developing literacy and numeracy among children and young people recently arrived in Australia, including those from a refugee background, who may have had interrupted schooling.

This will be coupled with action to intervene early where children and young people's performance in school falls behind expectations. An initial focus will be on accurate and timely assessment so students' progress can be monitored and support provided as soon as it is needed.

We will also continue and deepen implementation of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, which provide the basis for developing skilled, flexible, responsible and creative young people.

Initial areas of focus will be expanding the resources and opportunities for improving outcomes in mathematics and science, languages and unlocking the full potential of information and communications technology (ICT).

*In the next twelve months we will*

- release a statement on Victoria's approach to literacy and numeracy
- release strategies on mathematics and science, languages and the use of ICT.

**Action 8: Government school improvement**

We will improve access to a high-quality and broad curriculum in government schools by publishing clear standards for educational provision.

All students should be able to access programs covering the full range of strands of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, specialist and extracurricular programs, and a range of academic and vocational options in the post-compulsory years. This could be through access in their own school or in partnership with other schools or providers.

The standards for provision will give guidance and examples of how this can be achieved in rural areas, including through better use of technology.

Improved access will be underpinned by the Victorian Schools Plan to rebuild or modernise every government school in Victoria.

We will further strengthen the School Accountability and Improvement Framework for government schools. This will focus on embedding a performance culture, through clear standards, strong accountabilities and a collective commitment to take action where needed.

A more finely tuned approach to school management will be put in place to assess school performance against a balanced set of measures and to implement a broader range of strategies for school improvement. This approach covers the three major outcome areas of student learning, student wellbeing, and pathways and transitions. ‘Value added’ measures will be included as these are developed.

This approach will encompass urgent assistance for schools where students are not meeting expected standards. We will provide support to revitalise schools and allow teachers to produce their best. This could include mentoring from high-performing schools, additional professional development, or external management of staffing and resources.

To support this improvement effort, we will significantly expand the role of school networks, through the employment of new regional network leaders. These leaders will provide advice and assistance to all government schools and more intensive support to those schools where performance needs to improve.

Under a new network strategic plan, networks will collectively support all schools to improve and achieve better outcomes for the students in a network. We will investigate broadening this role to include a wider range of schools and early childhood services in the area covered by a network.

We will review governance in government schools to identify its role in school improvement. The review will also explore practical steps that can be taken to ensure governance is contributing to improved performance.

This review will examine new models of governance, including greater community and business involvement, alternative processes for appointing school council members and the role of school networks.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- publish standards for provision in government schools
- implement the enhanced School Accountability and Improvement Framework, with an increased role for school networks.

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### **Action 9: Cross-sectoral strategies**

Consistent with discussions with the Commonwealth Government through COAG, we will develop cross-sectoral strategies with a view to enhancing educational outcomes for all Victorian school students.

This is expected to include new partnerships with non-government schools to provide increased access to government support and resources, especially in school communities in low socioeconomic status areas.

These partnerships will include a more consistent and comprehensive approach to accountability for outcomes and reporting requirements across all school sectors.

This new approach will be developed in consultation with the Commonwealth Government.

The foundation of this will be a Victorian Action Plan to progress the National Goals of Schooling to apply across all schools.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- begin negotiating new arrangements with non-government schools, based on the National Goals of Schooling and the COAG productivity agenda.



## PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

High levels of parental involvement and strong communities are critical to children's development and learning. Children do best in safe and supportive environments.

Children's services and schools are partners in children's development and learning,<sup>4</sup> and should draw on the diversity of Victoria's communities in supporting children to thrive, learn and grow.

Education and early childhood development are among the most effective pathways out of disadvantage and social exclusion, and many high-achieving Victorians come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our challenge is to ensure this potential is available to all Victorian children and young people, regardless of their location or cultural background, or other possible barriers to success.

### Working with families, communities and business

Parents and families have the first and most enduring impact upon children's learning and development, health, safety and wellbeing.

Their role must be valued and they must be supported by the whole community to provide positive, stimulating environments for children's intellectual and social development.

Community groups and agencies, business and philanthropic organisations have a strong interest in improving outcomes for children and young people and helping them pursue academic excellence. It is important that schools and early childhood services make the most of these partnerships.



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**Action 10: Parenting support**

We will build the capacity of parents and carers in the home and community. This will include making available better information and support to assist children's health, learning and development.

This must be provided in ways that are most useful to parents, including in a range of community languages.

We will provide support to vulnerable families to create nurturing home environments, through evidence-based home learning programs.

During the school years, we will focus on parents as partners in their children's development and learning, including providing information on how families can assist with homework and other learning activities.

To help parents connect effectively to early childhood services, schools and communities we will draw on existing good practice to develop and publish material that supports schools and early childhood services to engage parents.

We will also encourage services to measure the confidence and satisfaction of parents, building on the existing parent surveys in government schools.

We will ensure parents have clear information at the right time about the progress of their child and the performance of schools.

We will improve the quality and accessibility of public information on the performance of government and non-government schools and early childhood services.

The Ultranet, an online system which will provide parents with detailed, up-to-date information on their children's learning, will be a major tool for government schools to engage parents. We will provide schools with training and coaching in using the Ultranet effectively and assisting all families to access it.

We are also committed to publishing on the internet information on the compliance of early childhood services with licensing requirements.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- initiate better information and support for parents and a program to assist vulnerable families to further develop their homes as positive learning environments
- publish guidance to schools and early childhood services on engaging with parents.

**Action 11: Community hubs**

We will promote schools and other children's centres as community hubs, through co-location and integration of services and increased community use of school facilities.

This will include seeking partnerships to fund multi-purpose facilities on school grounds.

We will develop broader partnerships, including with community agencies, to meet the full range of needs of vulnerable families.

Those children, young people and families who are most vulnerable will often be supported by a range of service providers and community agencies.

In partnership with the relevant specialist agencies, we will devote particular effort to identifying and assisting families who are experiencing difficulties, such as homelessness, postnatal depression, mental health concerns, drug and alcohol problems and family violence. The Government's ChildFIRST initiative will be the foundation for working with vulnerable families.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- roll out Victorian and Commonwealth funding for multi-service early childhood centres
- implement Commonwealth and Victorian commitments to early childhood centres on school sites.

**Action 12: Partnerships with business**

We will support partnerships between business and schools and early childhood services.

We will seek partnerships with large companies and business associations at the system level.

The initial focus will be on

- improving governance and leadership
- mentoring students and principals
- preparing young people for careers in priority industries, science, maths, engineering and business.

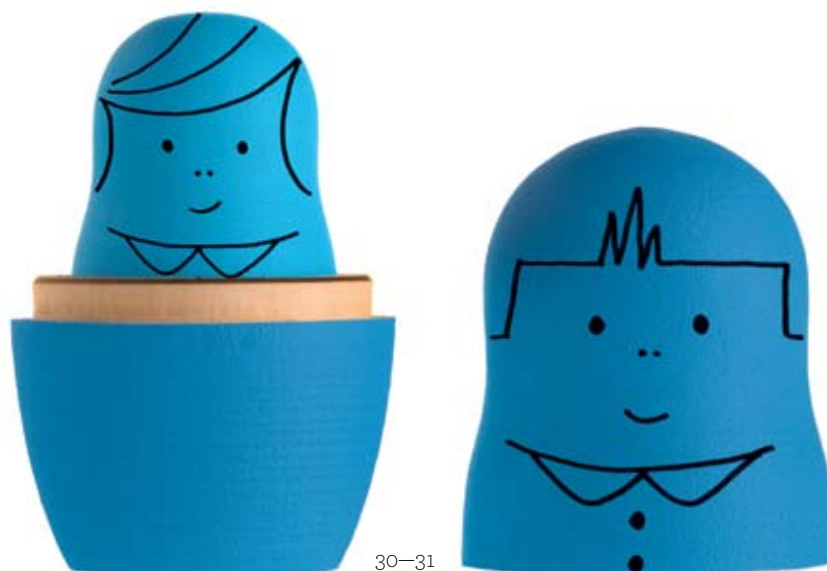
Supporting education regeneration projects in disadvantaged areas will be a major aspect of these partnerships.

At the local level we will establish or support existing brokerage arrangements to connect schools and early childhood services with businesses and other organisations, to provide access to additional expertise and richer opportunities for children and young people.

We will examine options for much greater business involvement in school management and governance, including examining the experience of academies in the UK and charter schools in the USA, particularly in areas where student outcomes could be improved.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- release a statement of priorities for the relationship between business and Victoria's learning and development system.



### Opportunity for all Victorians

Some children and young people need additional or more flexible development and learning opportunities and support in order to achieve their best.

We will ensure Victorian schools and children's services are equipped to respond effectively to the needs of all children. Leadership will be a major focus, as we know it is an important driver of improved performance.<sup>5</sup>

### Action 13: Place-based approaches

We will release a detailed strategy to improve development and learning participation and outcomes in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.

As part of the Victorian Schools Plan, we will pursue regeneration projects that rebuild schools and reconfigure educational provision within a locality.

These projects will mean radically rethinking education and early childhood services, including approaches to teaching, learning and development, physical spaces, governance, specialisations and partnerships.

Our approach will involve Commonwealth, State and local governments, government and non-government schools, early childhood services and local communities and business.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- release a strategy to improve participation and outcomes in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage
- continue implementing the Victorian Schools Plan, including regeneration projects.

### Action 14: Meeting diverse needs

We will put strategies in place to ensure that our system can meet the diverse needs of all our children and young people.

We will implement the Wannik strategy for Koorie students in Victoria, in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and the broader Koorie community.

Wannik combines a culture of high expectations for Koorie children and young people with a greater emphasis on provider accountability, strong leadership, and better engagement with Koorie parents and the community.

We will work with the Commonwealth Government to develop a complementary early childhood strategy for Koorie children and their families. This will build on the COAG commitment to improve access to quality early childhood education.

Early childhood services and schools often provide the first experiences of life in Australia for children and young people from a refugee background and their families.

We have recently committed to extend the kindergarten fee subsidy to children from refugee backgrounds, making kindergarten free.

We will build further on *Strengthening Outcomes - Refugee Students in Government Schools*, to assist schools to meet these students' highly specialised education and personal support needs.

We also recognise that we need to do more to support students who are homeless to remain engaged in education.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- continue to implement Wannik
- work with the Commonwealth Government to develop an early childhood strategy for Koorie children and their families
- develop a strategy to improve educational outcomes for students who are homeless.

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## WORKFORCE REFORM

There is clear evidence that the quality of the workforce is the major factor driving quality in schools and early childhood services.<sup>6</sup> Excellent service provision can only happen when the right people are attracted, recruited, and supported to do their jobs as effectively as possible.

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### Modern careers and workplaces

Early childhood services and schools face increasing competition in the labour market for talented people.

To continue to attract and retain the best people, we must provide career structures and working arrangements that are appealing and rewarding.

We will ensure that working arrangements offer clear, rewarding and flexible career pathways and allow staff to focus on what they do best. In the modern labour market, this includes the capacity to move in and out of different professions.

The Government can have most impact on those workforces it employs directly, notably teachers and other staff in government schools.

However, the Government can also help improve recognition of the importance of early childhood professionals.



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**Action 15: Early childhood workforce development**

We will develop a Victorian early childhood workforce strategy, consistent with national efforts, to focus on improved professionalism and sustainable capacity across early childhood services.

An important aim will be to increase qualification levels among early childhood education and care staff. A major priority will be attracting and retaining staff, including encouraging high-performing entrants into early childhood services.

There will be a strong focus on professional learning, on sharing best practice and, particularly in rural areas, on planning responses to skills shortages.

This work will build on the directions of the Maternal and Child Health Service workforce strategy, which has already made progress in a number of these areas.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- release an early childhood workforce strategy.

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**Action 16: Attracting the best people to teaching**

We will create a wider range of entry points for the teaching profession in government schools, including establishing a scheme to encourage high-performing graduates from other fields to enter teaching. This will be modelled on the best elements of existing successful programs, such as Teach First in the UK and Teach for America in the USA.

We will work with universities and the Commonwealth Government to enhance pre-service teacher education, with a focus on areas of shortage. Increasing the quantity and quality of practical placement will be an initial focus. As part of this, we will work with universities on entry requirements for teaching courses and ways to attract the highest quality applicants.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- recruit the first intake into the Teach First program, to commence teaching in 2010
- negotiate with universities and the Commonwealth Government on improved pre-service education.

**Action 17: High-performing school workforces**

We will develop and promote innovative work organisation in government schools. This will include new models of teaching and learning, such as greater cooperation and sharing of practice between teachers, and work practices that make the best use of flexible learning spaces and technology.

We will explore models for teachers to work with other professionals and para-professionals to deliver a wider range of learning experiences and allow teachers to focus on the areas where they have unique skills.

To reward and make the best use of effective teachers, we will undertake a major study of incentives, rewards and recognition.

We will develop a scheme of incentives to encourage effective school teachers and leaders to work in areas of high need and low performance.

We will enable school teachers to sustain their motivation by leaving the profession for periods of time to explore other career paths and returning to teaching enriched by those experiences.

We will assist a small number of government school teachers who have become disengaged to exit and commence new careers.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- trial innovative approaches to work organisation
- investigate rewards and incentives for effective teaching.

**A culture of strong leadership and professional learning**

Service improvement in school education and early childhood education and care must be driven by a culture of sustained professional learning across the system.

This is particularly important in a rapidly changing social and economic context, where the expectations of teachers and other professionals are also changing. There are many effective practices already in place, and a growing evidence base about what works best.

Leadership is a major contributor to excellence in schools and early childhood services, and deserves attention as a priority for professional learning.

We have recognised leadership as a major factor in school improvement, including through the Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders, which supports school leaders to understand and develop the critical elements of leadership.

We must ensure that people moving into leadership positions are well prepared and supported, including through coaching and mentoring, and that existing leaders have the support they need in all aspects of leadership.



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**Action 18: Leadership development**

We will establish a world-class Victorian Institute of Educational Leadership to support the development of the next generation of leaders. The institute will be a centre of excellence in the preparation and development of school leaders, and will help those aspiring to leadership to acquire and demonstrate the essential skills.

Initially the institute will deliver targeted leadership and development programs for regional network leaders, principals, assistant principals and aspiring school leaders. We will provide opportunities for leaders in the early childhood sector to access these programs, as well as programs tailored to their sector's needs.

As part of strengthening school leadership, we will legislate to allow executive contracts for school principals.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- establish the Victorian Institute of Educational Leadership
- legislate to allow executive contracts for school principals.

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**Action 19: Capacity building in early childhood services**

We will build capacity in early childhood services by developing techniques and models linked to the Early Years Learning and Development Framework and support professional learning for early childhood staff to use it.

Other professional learning priorities in early childhood include areas such as brain development research, assessment and management of common developmental and behavioural issues, family-centred practice, strength-based practice and working collaboratively with other disciplines and other services.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- provide professional development centred on the Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

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**Action 20: Professional learning for teachers**

We will provide access to effective professional learning for teachers in all sectors.

As a foundation for this, we will collect and share evidence on the characteristics of effective professional learning, including working in teams and learning from other teachers.

Professional learning will be closely linked to the workplace context and the sophisticated use of technology to develop skills and improve practice, including through the Ultranet.

A specific priority will be to disseminate an instructional model for teachers to support effective teaching practices in classrooms.

This will assist teachers and school leaders to refine and develop their knowledge around high-quality instruction and improve their capacity to translate it into practice.

*In the next twelve months we will*

- collect and share evidence on the characteristics of effective professional learning across all sectors
- disseminate an instructional model for teachers.

## APPENDIX 1

# COAG FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOLS

### Early Childhood Development

#### Aspirations

That children are born healthy and have access to the support, care and education throughout early childhood that equips them for life and learning, delivered in a way that actively engages parents, and meets the workforce participation needs of parents

#### Outcomes

- Children are born healthy
- Children acquire the basic skills for life and learning
- Children will benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children
- All children have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling
- Quality early childhood education and care supports the workforce participation choices of parents with children in the years before formal schooling

#### Indicative Progress Measures

- Proportion of children born of low birth weight
- Proportion of children with basic skills for life and learning, and who are vulnerable, as identified by the Australian Early Development Index
- Proportion of disadvantaged three year olds in early childhood education
- Further performance measures need to be identified for children aged 18 months to 3 years
- Proportion of four year olds accessing quality early childhood education
- Proportion of parents who can access the quality early childhood education and care services required for their preferred labour force participation

#### COAG Targets

- Universal access to early learning for all four year olds by 2013
- Halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years old within a decade
- In five years all Indigenous four year olds in remote Indigenous communities will have access to a quality early childhood education program

### Schooling

That all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy

- All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling
- Young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving
- Schooling promotes social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children
- Australian students excel by international standards
- Young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study

- Proportion of children enrolled in and attending school
- Literacy and numeracy achievement of year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in national testing
- Proportion of students in the bottom and top levels of performance in international testing (eg PISA, TIMSS)
- Proportion of the 19-year-old population having attained at least a year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate II
- Proportion of young people participating in post-school education or training six months after school
- Proportion of 18–24 year olds engaged in full-time employment, education or training at or above Certificate III

- Lift the year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- At least halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020

## APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

In April 2008 the Victorian Government released discussion papers on early childhood development and school reform which built on the opportunities created by the establishment of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Those discussion papers proposed a five-year reform agenda, founded on a new integrated approach to the health, wellbeing, learning and development of Victorian children and young people, to deliver the best possible outcomes from birth through to adulthood.

We wanted to hear the community's views on our reform proposals for Victoria's learning and development system. We sought feedback from young people, parents and families, teachers, principals and other school staff, child care workers, maternal and child health nurses, kindergarten teachers, and local community organisations.

The response was remarkable, with many people generously giving their time and ideas to help us refine the reform proposals.

Together with further research and advice from international experts, the feedback on the discussion papers has been invaluable in helping us develop the final Blueprint.

### The consultation process included

- A summit on 10 and 11 April 2008, with 283 attendees
- Forums during May in Traralgon, Geelong, Dingley and Moonee Ponds, with almost 700 attendees
- A series of Ministerial and stakeholder roundtable discussions attended by over 100 representatives of unions, experts and academics, business and other key stakeholder groups
- A dedicated Blueprint website, generating
  - Over 40,000 page hits
  - Almost 4000 downloads of the Discussion Papers Overview
  - Over 3000 downloads of the School Reform Discussion Paper
  - Almost 3000 downloads of the Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper
  - Over 170 website responses
- 160 written submissions
- Extensive feedback from local and international experts including Sir Michael Barber, Dr Ben Levin, Professor Barry McGaw, Professor Frank Oberklaid and the Reverend Dr Rufus Black.

**Overall the consultations indicated strong support for the vision and direction, the integrated 0–18 approach and the three areas of focus proposed in the discussion papers.**

#### **Feedback on the School Reform Discussion Paper strongly supported**

- closer partnerships with non-government schools
- stronger accountability across all school sectors
- initiatives to attract and retain high-performing graduates as teachers
- empowering principals to deal with underperforming staff
- recognising the importance of engaging with parents, families and communities
- schools as community hubs, including making available more guidance on partnerships.

#### **Feedback on the Early Childhood Development Discussion Paper strongly supported**

- a framework of common learning and development goals for children
- supporting vulnerable children and families to participate in early childhood services
- co-locating services towards an integrated service system
- a strong leadership role for local government in planning and coordinating early childhood services
- recognising the central role of parents and the contribution of communities in enabling every child to reach their potential
- improving service quality by regulating for, attracting and developing a more qualified workforce.

#### **There were some concerns about**

- ensuring school performance measures take into account a school's value-add
- ensuring that interventions support rather than punish schools
- the potential for sharper accountability to increase administrative burdens
- challenges in building the capacity of the early childhood workforce and providing appropriate remuneration
- finding an equitable approach to rewarding high-performing staff
- the fundamental shifts required to improve access through co-location of services
- the role of school councils in facilitating partnerships
- the need, when assessing performance, to focus on creativity and social development as well as on 'core' data like literacy and numeracy.

**All feedback has been considered in developing the final document.**

**A separate consultation report is available on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)**

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