

Compulsory years of education

Education in Victoria is compulsory for children aged from six to 15 years. This section discusses the provision of education and associated services for these students.

The first five years of schooling (P–4) are referred to as the early years and are chiefly concerned with developing in each child the essential skills and knowledge necessary for ongoing progress in education. Literacy and numeracy are widely recognised as foremost among these foundation skills.

During the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9) students grow from childhood to adolescence and consolidate competency in literacy and numeracy while developing physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. They attain a greater breadth of knowledge and learning, including extending their capacity for creative and critical thinking.

Blueprint for Government Schools

The *Blueprint for Government Schools* provides the framework for an effective Victorian government school system. Its objective is that all government school students, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their social or economic status, are entitled to a high-quality school education and a genuine opportunity to succeed. The Blueprint is set within the context of a transparent and rigorous accountability framework that focuses on three priority areas for reform: recognising and responding to diverse student needs, building the skills of the education workforce to enhance the teaching–learning relationship, and continuously improving schools. The Blueprint identifies seven Flagship strategies that provide a basis for continuous improvement in schools, with learning as the central focus:

Recognising and responding to diverse student needs

- 1 Student learning
- 2 Developing a new resource allocation model

Building the skills of the education workforce to enhance the teaching–learning relationship

- 3 Building leadership capacity
- 4 Creating and supporting a performance and development culture
- 5 Teacher professional development

Continuously improving schools

- 6 School improvement
- 7 Leading Schools Fund

These Flagship strategies provide a shared vision, a focus on teaching and learning and professional leadership, set high expectations and accountabilities, and provide for robust, stimulating and secure learning environments. Effective teachers, leaders, schools and regions and the central office value and contribute to a culture of learning and improvement at all levels of the system.

Progress made during 2005–06 in implementing the initiatives of each strategy is detailed below. Further information on the Blueprint is available at www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/blueprint.

Recognising and responding to diverse student needs

Student learning

An integrated package of curriculum materials, guidelines, advice and resources has been developed and is being progressively implemented to assist schools in making decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting.

Highlights

- In a survey completed by 78 per cent of schools in November 2005, over 85 per cent indicated that the Curriculum Planning Guidelines, Principles of Learning and Teaching, and Assessment Advice have been of value. Responses to the Flagship Strategy 1 survey have been analysed and used to inform the development of resources for schools such as professional learning modules and the Curriculum Planning Guidelines.
- The Victorian Essential Learning Standards have been validated and were provided to schools for implementation during the 2006 school year.
- In 2006, all schools planned and implemented programs consistent with the English and Mathematics domains and will be reporting student progress against them.
- To assist teachers in making accurate and consistent judgements of student progress, the new English and Mathematics standards were accompanied by progression points for each dimension of the English and Mathematics domains.
- The Curriculum Planning Guidelines continued to be strengthened through the publication of models that demonstrate the range of ways in which the Victorian Essential Learning Standards are being implemented across the State.
- In response to feedback from schools, Curriculum Planning Modules were developed to support the development of curriculum programs consistent with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards at both the whole-school and program cohort level.
- The Principles of Learning and Teaching professional learning program had an additional 400 schools participating in 2006, following successful implementation in 2005. A suite of resources was developed in 2005 to support the program, including the Principles of Learning and Teaching online Professional Learning Resource. Evaluations conducted with participating schools in 2005 showed that 97 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the resource increased awareness of effective teaching.
- Assessment and reporting advice based on current research and best practice was developed and made available to schools.
- Assessment Professional Learning Modules were developed and published online to assist schools in implementing the assessment advice.
- A Professional Learning Package focusing on Student Learning was implemented across all regions. The package seeks to assist schools and clusters to develop professional learning programs at the local level to support implementation of the Flagship Strategy 1 initiatives. The package consists of a coherent suite of policies, resources and tools including the Curriculum Planning Modules, the Principles of Learning and Teaching online Professional Learning Resource and the Assessment Professional Learning Modules.
- In August 2005, the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training announced the introduction of plain English Student Report Cards into all Victorian government schools. Software and associated training and support to facilitate the implementation of the new Student Report Card was developed and rolled out to those schools introducing the report cards in June 2006.
- In September 2005, the Knowledge Bank website was remodelled to provide improved user accessibility and content management. The site now houses over 400 case studies and Teacher Professional Leave reports, a significant collection of professional practice and knowledge.

Developing a new resource allocation model

The Student Resource Package was launched in January 2005 and replaced the School Global Budget. Funding allocation is now student-focused rather than expenditure input-focused.

Highlights

The refinements and additions included in the Student Resource Package in 2006 consolidated the reforms to school funding that were introduced in the Student Resource Package 2005.

Key features and achievements of the package in 2006 include:

- inclusion of funding for Multicultural Education Aides into overall English as a Second Language program funding
- consolidation of Access to Excellence funding with Secondary Literacy funding to form the new Secondary Equity funding initiative that targets Years 7–9 students most in need
- incorporation of VET in Schools funding
- review and assessment of the needs of 65 schools deemed as non-traditional settings. Research was undertaken during 2005 to determine appropriate funding mechanisms for multi-campus colleges, multi-site primary schools and those schools with less than six years of secondary schooling
- incorporation of languages funding into core per student funding rates and bases from 2006
- as announced in the 2005–06 State Budget, targeting of New Equity funding to the most disadvantaged schools based on the Student Family Occupation index for Years 5–9 students
- targeting of Language Support Program funding to P–10 students to enable all schools to provide programs to assist students with language needs
- provision of Information Technology Grants funding to all schools to support the Department's target of a computer to student ratio of 1:5.

Building the skills of the education workforce to enhance the teaching–learning relationship

Building leadership capacity

In 2005–06, several development opportunities were offered to enhance the leadership capacity of aspiring leaders, leadership teams and members of the principal class.

Highlights

- Over 150 high-potential leaders participated in the Accelerated Development for High Potential Leaders program, which aims to

improve succession planning and promote mobility and learning across the government school system.

- Approximately 140 first-time principals received mentoring support from highly skilled principals to assist them to become more effective managers of themselves and other people.
- One hundred and one experienced principals were provided with 10–15 hours of individualised coaching to enable them to strengthen their individual leadership capabilities through reflective learning.
- Sixty-one principals joined the Development Program for High Performing Principals. Participants are encouraged to look beyond their own school and to view themselves as system leaders who value the collective responsibility for transforming all schools within the system.
- The Guidelines for the new Principal Class Performance and Development process were distributed in November 2005. All Principal Class officers are now using the new process that aligns with the school's strategic priorities.

Creating and supporting a performance and development culture

The accreditation scheme for performance and development culture in schools is now in its second year. The accreditation process is based on a Self-Assessment Framework which is verified by an external verifying body. The objective is to have all schools accredited by 2008.

Highlights

- A total of 85 schools have now been accredited.
- In 2006, 54 reference schools are supporting others in working towards accreditation.
- Over 350 schools have registered their intention to be accredited during 2006.
- A range of tools was developed to assist schools in using the Self-Assessment Framework and to support the enhancement of their performance and development culture.

Teacher professional development

Programs were funded to provide teachers and school services officers (SSOs) with opportunities to build their capacity and consolidate their practice. Major professional development initiatives included Induction and Mentoring for Beginning Teachers and Teacher Professional Leave. Refresher courses for teachers returning to government schools were also delivered as part of the Teacher Supply and Demand strategy.

Highlights

- Over 1430 teachers participated in Day 1 and Day 2 of the Teacher Mentor training program in 2005.
- To further develop their skills and expertise, between four and ten weeks' Teacher Professional Leave was undertaken by over 700 teachers in 2005–06.
- Ten refresher courses were delivered in metropolitan and regional locations in 2005 with 293 teachers participating.

Continuously improving schools

School improvement

The new School Accountability and Improvement Framework was successfully introduced to schools in 2006. The new accountability arrangements support schools to use the best information to make judgements about current performance, and to choose the key strategies that will lead to improved student learning, engagement and well-being, and successful transitions and pathways.

The framework is an integrated and flexible system of school accountability designed to assist schools to improve outcomes by:

- focusing on the key issues that will impact most on the performance of a school
- recognising that all schools are not the same – they face different challenges and operate in different environments
- streamlining the work of school leadership teams
- aligning internal accountability within the school (principal and teacher performance and development) with the external accountability requirements (to their community and the Department)

- separating accountability for performance (student outcomes) from compliance (with legislative and regulatory requirements).

Highlights

- A new streamlined school self-evaluation process was used successfully by 336 schools in 2005.
- Further improvements to the school review process, including enhanced reviewer training and quality assurance processes, were initiated.
- A road test by a group of 33 schools trialed a new approach to school strategic planning and a rollout of the new approach to a further 303 schools was implemented.
- A new annual implementation planning process was developed and rolled out in all government schools.
- Policy guidelines and support materials for a new simplified annual reporting format, better suited to the needs of the school community, were developed and implemented.
- An evaluation of the framework as it applies to specialist and alternative-setting schools, with appropriate modifications, was undertaken.
- Further improvements to opinion survey tools and processes for students, parents and school staff were made.
- Further support to improve outcomes in those schools where student outcomes are below expected levels through the Targeted School Improvement program was provided.

Leading Schools Fund

The Leading Schools Fund continued to support whole-school transformation of government schools in the secondary sector through:

- implementing innovative organisational models to improve student outcomes
- innovation in infrastructure design to improve teaching and learning, including ICT facilities
- system-wide sharing of school improvement models
- the development of local solutions to education provision issues.

The fund, now in its final year, has provided \$162 million to employ 450 additional teachers and to redevelop or build new facilities and to support ICT infrastructure.

The focus of the project is now on sustaining whole-school transformation and understanding how school design and facilities can underpin contemporary pedagogical approaches and practices.

Highlights

- 162 schools with a secondary component received funding through the three Leading Schools Fund phases with an average allocation of 2.6 additional teachers per school (for three years) and an average allocation of \$348,000 per school for capital works.
- 24 project facilitators worked with more than 78 primary and secondary schools on education provision issues and to develop provision models. Models included:
 - different design and delivery of curriculum
 - flexible approaches to the use of teaching spaces
 - integration of ICT within teaching and learning

Student programs

In addition to initiatives under the *Blueprint for Government Schools*, the Department has continued with the implementation of programs targeting learning for students in early and middle years, Koorie education, English as a second language (ESL), languages other than English (LOTE) and strategic partnerships.

Early years

Early years initiatives support continuous improvement in student achievement in literacy and numeracy in Years P–4.

Highlights

- The Government target of an average of 21 students in P–2 classes, which was met in February 2003, has been exceeded each year since then. In February 2006, the average P–2 class size was 20.8 students.

- 100 per cent of government schools have an early years numeracy coordinator.
- Funding was allocated to all primary schools to support early years literacy coordination.
- Reading Recovery programs were delivered in approximately 80 per cent of schools with Year 1 enrolments. Over 88 per cent of participating students successfully completed the program with the help of strategies that allowed them to participate fully in reading and writing activities in the classroom.
- Literacy and Numeracy Week was celebrated in September 2005 with many school-based and regional activities. Web-based literacy and numeracy materials were provided to Victorian schools.
- Almost 130,000 Years 3–9 students registered to participate in the inaugural Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge in 2005 and almost 60,000 students completed the challenge by reading 12 books over the six-month period of the challenge. The challenge has been extended to include early years students in 2006 and challenges Years 3–9 students to read 15 books over a seven-month period, and Years P–2 students to read or experience 30 books over seven months.

Middle years

Middle years programs aim to improve student learning in literacy and numeracy, and the attendance and retention rates of students in Years 5–9.

Highlights

- An extension of funding to 70 clusters of primary and secondary schools in 2006 was made to enable every school with middle years students to continue to participate in the Schools for Innovation and Excellence program, which encourages and supports innovation in curriculum development, and learning and teaching in the middle years.
- Case studies of clusters conducted in 2005 and analyses of student literacy data indicated a close correlation between teacher professional learning and a general positive trend in outcomes for those schools that have been involved in a cluster over time.

- In 2006, additional funding has been allocated to identified schools to enable the employment of up to 805 additional teachers to support improvement in literacy for students with greater needs.
- Clusters formed through the Schools for Innovation and Excellence initiative have provided strong support for other reform initiatives of the Department.

Key initiatives

Koorie education

Koorie education initiatives are designed to support improved educational outcomes for Koorie students and increase all students' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and issues.

Highlights

- Devolution of management and operational responsibility for Koorie support workers to regional offices has supported better coordination of support for Koorie students at a local level, with a particular focus on improving attendance.
- Three video-conferencing pilots resulted in positive outcomes in numeracy and literacy skills for Koorie students. The Koorie Literacy Link and the Koorie Middle Years Link operated in 33 schools while the Koorie Middle Years Numeracy Link was implemented in eight school communities.
- Victoria's four existing Koorie Open Door Education campuses in Glenroy, Swan Hill, Mildura and Morwell were federated into a single college – the Victorian College of Koorie Education P–12. The federation has enabled greater collaboration and sharing of resources and best practice across the previously dispersed colleges.
- The Yachad Accelerated Learning program was implemented at four schools in the Shepparton area. The aim of the program is to raise the skill level and self-esteem of under-achieving Indigenous students through an accelerated learning process.

- A total of 2172 students from 57 schools attended the Croc Festival held in Swan Hill. The Festival engages young Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and promotes awareness about health, education and careers through workshops and activities that utilise sport, visual and performing arts.

English as a second language

ESL initiatives focus on improving support for new-arrival ESL students, including those in isolated settings, and provide ongoing support for up to seven years.

Highlights

- Intensive ESL programs were provided for 1880 newly arrived students in English language schools, centres and outposting programs. An additional 232 students were supported by the visiting outposting program.
- A further 150 students were supported through new arrival programs in Geelong and Shepparton, and the isolated ESL Students program in regional Victoria.
- Bridging programs were established and sustained in schools in the metropolitan area to provide support to students with little or no previous schooling. Additional English language tuition was provided to aid their transition into mainstream curriculum.
- Funding was allocated to 352 primary schools, 88 secondary schools and ten primary–secondary schools to support ESL learners.
- Funding continued to be provided to schools for 238 FTE multicultural education aides.
- A total of 7729 on-site and telephone interpreting assignments were provided in 69 languages, and 262 documents were translated into 39 languages for government schools.

Languages other than English

LOTE initiatives are designed to further integrate quality languages education into programs delivery by all schools. The following initiatives support the provision of LOTE programs for all students in Years P–10.

Highlights

- Twenty-one languages were taught in government primary and secondary schools, and 44 languages were provided through the Victorian School of Languages.
- Funding was provided for over 33,000 students learning a total of 50 languages in after-hours community languages schools.
- Grants were provided to 12 language teacher associations to support teachers in the implementation of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the Principles of Learning and Teaching.
- Regional Project Officers for Languages supported the establishment of language networks to facilitate the sharing of expertise and resources.
- Funding was allocated for the provision of appropriate teacher training and professional learning programs.

Strategic Partnerships

The Strategic Partnerships program provides funding to 82 cultural and scientific organisations and professional teaching associations to facilitate dynamic partnerships with school communities. The program connects learning and teaching with communities and practice beyond the classroom. These partnerships contribute to teacher professional learning and promote diverse learning and teaching strategies that foster the development of lifelong learning. A new funding model was introduced in 2006 to support a greater emphasis on student learning outcomes.

ICT and e-learning in Schools

The Department continued to roll out its e-learning strategy for the integration of ICT in teaching, learning and school management practices across all stages of schooling.

The strategy incorporates six components:

- professional learning
- content development
- leadership
- partnerships with industry
- research

Highlights

- The Government announced in the 2005–06 Budget that \$89.3 million would be provided to upgrade every Victorian government school to four megabits per second (Mbps) fibre-optic broadband over a four-year period. Rural schools will particularly benefit from significant improvement in online access, administration and communication with other schools and trainer providers. This initiative is currently underway and will ensure that, by the end of 2006, every school is upgraded to an improved minimum standard. This will improve the efficiency and reliability of access to today's technology-rich environment while removing the technological divide between metropolitan and regional schools.

The upgrade is occurring in two phases:

- by the end of 2006, all Victorian government schools will have a high-speed broadband capacity connection of at least two Mbps
- by the end of 2008, all Victorian government schools will be provided with a four Mbps optical fibre connection.

This exciting initiative will open up new opportunities for schools by supporting and improving learning, teaching and administrative functions. Two school clusters, Far East Gippsland and the Yarra Valley e-Learning Community, are a part of the Broadband Innovation Fund initiative of Multimedia Victoria.

- \$1 million of capital funding has been made available to trial the use of interactive whiteboards in Victorian government schools. Several significant trials of interactive whiteboard technology around the world have indicated that it is potentially a very powerful tool in the improvement of educational outcomes. The trial is being conducted in 22 schools, working in clusters. The Assessment Research Centre is undertaking a formal evaluation of the trial. Once the evaluation is complete, recommendations will be made to inform the future use and rollout of interactive whiteboards.

- The Minister for Education and Training has approved an ICT professional learning strategy of \$1.25 million. This funding encompassed a number of components including improved use of student learning data by teachers, Digital Learning Portfolios, implementation of reporting software and focusing school leadership on ICT. This professional learning strategy will support teachers to use ICT for teaching, learning and assessment.
- Twenty-eight schools were funded through the Creating e-Learning Leaders program to showcase the use of ICT to improve teaching and learning. Participating schools provide mentoring and professional learning programs for their own teachers and teachers from other schools.
- As of May 2006 over 4000 teachers in Victorian government schools have participated in the Intel® Teach to the Future Essentials program.
- All government schools have access to the Digital Creation and Content Resources package, including learning objects from the Le@rning Federation and Kahootz, a three-dimensional authoring software program.
- The new Teacher ICT Capabilities Resource, ePotential, will support schools in determining staff attitudes and skills in ICT, establish ICT professional learning goals, and provide a bank of resources to improve classroom integration of ICT. Year 10 students in government schools can apply for 2006 Student ICT Fellowships which link successful students with an industry mentor.

Multicultural education

Multicultural education initiatives support schools to provide culturally inclusive programs, promote an appreciation of Victoria's diverse cultural heritage, and foster mutual respect and inter-cultural understanding.

Highlights

- Over 4000 students participated in Courage to Care exhibitions and workshops.
- Ninety-eight primary and secondary schools received grants to conduct Cultural Diversity Week community activities.
- Primary and secondary students from across the three sectors participated in the Cultural Diversity Week Quest.

School innovation in teaching: science, mathematics and technology

The School Innovation in Teaching program builds upon Science in Schools introduced in 2000. The primary objective of the program is to foster a culture of innovation and creativity in the teaching of science, mathematics and technology to:

- improve the teaching and learning of science, mathematics and technology
- increase the level of student scientific, mathematical and technological literacy
- encourage more students to study post-compulsory science, mathematics and technology.

The 210 primary and secondary schools participating in the Leading Change program this year are involved in school-based professional development initiatives and a range of community partnerships.

Health, sport and physical education

Health, sport and physical education initiatives promote and support the teaching and learning of health, physical, sport and traffic safety education. A key focus was the continued promotion of the benefits of physical activity and healthy eating habits for students and the wider community.

Highlights

- Over 1100 Health and Physical Education teachers participated in an extensive range of professional learning opportunities to build their knowledge of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards in the important area of health and physical education.
- Professional learning opportunities were again offered to support primary and secondary teachers implement effective sport education programs.

Pacific School Games

The Department hosted the 7th Pacific School Games from 26 November to 4 December 2005. Over 3500 students and officials from all Australian states and territories and 20 Pacific Rim countries attended the Games.

Students from 10 to 19 years of age competed in events in track and field, swimming, diving and basketball. Competitions for students with a disability were also conducted within the overall Pacific School Games schedule of events.

Over 1200 students, teachers and other volunteers assisted in the delivery of the Games, and over 3000 students performed throughout the week and at the opening and closing ceremonies.

Gifted and high-potential students

The Minister for Education and Training approved the development of up to ten additional Select Entry Acceleration Learning program schools, strategically located to improve equity of access for gifted students. Seven schools have commenced preparation for student intake into these new programs from 2007.

School councils

School councils play a key role in influencing the effectiveness of government schools in Victoria. Informed and empowered school councils have significant potential to build community capacity. Blueprint reforms are dependent on all members of school communities working together to support students to achieve their best. School governance arrangements are a critical factor.

The *Review of School Governance in Victorian Government Schools* was completed in July 2005 and the Minister for Education Services announced the outcomes to school council presidents, principals and stakeholders in March 2006. The Minister accepted all recommendations arising from the review.

Several recommendations relate specifically to the legislative framework within which school councils operate and have been incorporated in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

Other recommendations relate to the support and training to be provided to school councils. A training and support framework has been developed and \$550,000 has been allocated to implement the recommendations.

Support for families

Low-income families continued to receive support through the Education Maintenance Allowance. The allowance is paid in two instalments each year. To be eligible for the allowance, a parent or guardian must be eligible to receive a Centrelink pension, allowance or benefit under the *State Concessions Act 1986*, or be a Veterans Affairs pensioner or a foster parent on the first day of Term 1 and Term 3 respectively.

Eligible parents of primary students received \$205 per year. Eligible parents of secondary students received \$410 per year.

During 2005–06, the parents and guardians of approximately 200,000 students received the allowance. The Education Maintenance Allowance will be indexed annually to the local consumer price index to ensure that future increases in the payment reflect the increase in the cost of living.

Services to students

The differential and diverse learning needs of students are supported through a strengthened and systematic approach to student wellbeing that encompasses school and classroom-based approaches, student welfare support structures and links to community agencies.

Student wellbeing

The Victorian government school system supports all students with additional learning needs by ensuring that the appropriate supports, initiatives and educational adjustments are in place to enable every student to succeed.

Highlights

- *It's Not OK to Be Away*, the Department's attendance strategy, was published in February 2006, promoting the importance of regular school attendance and its positive impact on student learning outcomes.
- First aid training in anaphylaxis management for Victorian government schools was established, and an anaphylaxis training, education and management strategy commenced.
- The anti-bullying resource *Safe Schools are Effective Schools* was published in May 2006. This resource incorporates policies, strategies and case studies for the whole school community, and highlights the importance of providing safe, secure and stimulating environments for all students.
- Phase 3 of the Primary Welfare Officer initiative was implemented successfully with 450 schools with the highest needs now having a primary welfare officer.

Drug education

Drug education initiatives support schools to provide effective, ongoing prevention programs for all students. The Department conducts research and develops evidence-based resources for schools to ensure the quality of statewide drug education.

Highlights

- In 2005, 700 schools completed their three-year cycle review and prepared new action plans to enhance and improve their drug education programs. In 2006, the three-year review and planning cycle has been replaced with a four-year cycle to align with the new School Accountability and Improvement Framework. This means that schools will integrate their drug education review and planning process into the new school planning arrangements.
- In 2005, 75 per cent of government schools reported at least one member of staff participating in drug education professional development.
- In 2005, 82 per cent of Victorian schools reported involvement of parents in their drug education programs, and 87 per cent reported involving community agencies.

- Surveys developed as part of the Drug Education Evaluation and Monitoring project were implemented in a further 100 schools. The surveys assisted these schools to evaluate the effectiveness of their drug education program.
- As part of the Parent Engagement in Schools Strategic Plan for 2004–2008, all schools received copies of the brochure titled *Parent Involvement in Drug Education: Guidelines for Schools*. The Engaging Parents from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds project was also implemented to assist schools to better involve parents in drug education curriculum and welfare issues.

Students with disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities provides schools with additional resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities who may attend a special school or a regular school. A systematic approach is being used to design and develop programs and strategies to support students with special needs through targeted programs that strengthen the capacity of schools, families and regions to improve educational outcomes for all students.

A strengthened approach to meet the needs of students with a language disorder has been successfully implemented statewide. This approach acknowledges that all schools have students requiring support and aims to build the capacity of schools and teachers to provide appropriate program and learning experiences that will improve the oral language skills of students with a language disorder.

Number of students individually supported through the Program for Students with Disabilities in government schools, February 2006

Regular schools	9,419 FTE students
Special schools	7,252 FTE students
Total	16,671 FTE students

Facilities and infrastructure

Emergency and security management

The Department coordinated the installation of 50 new and replacement alarm systems in schools during 2005–06. Approximately 94 per cent of government primary and secondary schools are equipped with alarm systems.

The Department's emergency management support and advice to schools regarding critical incidents emphasises the importance of linking recovery activities to the school's emergency plan, in line with a whole-of-government approach. To assist in this process, the Department has developed a number of new resources, including *Dealing with Threatening Behaviours & Threats in Schools* and *From Crisis to Recovery: Responding to Critical Incidents*. These resources assist school communities in dealing with a variety of issues that may confront them. The Department also undertook a significant coordination role in supporting school and regional recovery processes during the Mildura tragedy, when six secondary school students died in a road accident.

The Department continues to run workshops in emergency management and emergency planning for senior school staff. Representatives from more than 150 schools have attended these workshops in the past twelve months.

There were five significant school fires during 2005–06, Gowrie Street Primary School Shepparton, McKinnon Secondary College, Traralgon Secondary College, Wandin North Primary School and Wangaratta West Primary School.

Student transport

The free school bus service, administered by the Department of Infrastructure on behalf of the Department of Education & Training, conveys approximately 71,500 students daily throughout Victoria.

Conveyance allowances are paid to eligible students to assist with travel costs where access to a free school bus service is not available, or for travel to the nearest free school bus or public transport service.

The Department also provides transport for students attending specialist schools. In 2005–06, approximately 6350 students were transported by bus and taxi to these schools at a cost of approximately \$34 million.

Asset projects

The 2005–06 State Budget committed \$287.28 million in new capital funding for school education. This funding directed:

- \$30.6 million to Leading Schools Fund projects, including funds for investing in excellence and for rural learning campuses
- \$37 million to seven new schools or stages thereof
- \$57.09 million to replacing relocating schools
- \$145.45 million to modernising and improving existing school sites, including the provision of funds for replacing facilities damaged or destroyed by fire (including \$12.54 million for School Improvement projects)
- \$9.84 million for assets to support better education and training
- \$7.3 million for VicSmart broadband network for government schools.

School regions

The nine regional directors are responsible for supporting and building the capacity of regions and schools to deliver high-quality educational services and improved student outcomes through continuous school improvement. Effective regions value and contribute to a culture of learning and improvement at all levels of the system.

Regional offices, in partnership with central office, play an important part in the implementation of the Government's school education reform agenda by:

- providing leadership to translate the system's aspirations into reality for students in schools
- managing and supporting schools to provide a high-quality education for all students

- developing the capacity of leaders to plan strategically for school improvement
- developing the capacity of regional and school-based staff as facilitators of continuous learning communities and creating strategies that sustain them
- monitoring the achievement of clearly articulated high-quality outcomes and using data to inform and refine improvement strategies
- providing finance, facilities, personnel and workforce planning support services to facilitate the achievement of effective learning environments
- supporting schools to implement innovative approaches to increase levels of student achievement, retention, engagement and wellbeing
- promoting learning communities and collaboration, and fostering supportive networks within and across local government areas to improve education and employment outcomes
- engaging with the wider community to develop strategic relationships and partnerships to build capacity and bring the resources of the community to the work of schools.

Metropolitan regions

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Non-government schools

The Minister for Education and Training has legislative responsibility for the education of all primary and secondary school students in Victoria.

The Department contributes to the achievement of the Government's goals and targets for education by providing funding and other support to non-government schools in Victoria.

As of February 2006, non-government schools educated over 294,331 students statewide or 35.3 per cent of all Victorian school students. Of these students, 62.1 per cent attended Catholic schools and 37.9 per cent attended Independent schools. There were 482 registered Catholic schools and 218 registered Independent schools.

The Department provided over \$330 million in financial assistance to non-government schools in 2005–06, through untied recurrent funding and specific purpose grants.

The Department has changed its internal organisational arrangements as part of reinvigorating its relationship with non-government schools. Continued improvement in learning and teaching practice will be the central tenet in pursuing mutually beneficial interactions between the Department and non-government schools to improve learning outcomes across all sectors.

The Targeted Initiatives Unit of the Learning Programs Branch is funded to provide drug education support to the non-government schools sector. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed between the sectors to ensure all students have equity of access to available resources.

Highlights

- Twelve schools from the Catholic education sector are working towards external verification of their Performance and Development Culture. The Catholic Education Office is represented on both the steering group and regional team which provide governance for the initiative.
- Non-government schools worked with the VCAA and the Department in the development and sharing of resources to support schools in implementing the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
- Consultation with the non-government sector continued in the area of student reporting, as well as strong joint partnerships in cross-sectoral projects in drug education and values education.
- The Department completed work on implementation of a new funding model for non-government schools. The new model, developed in conjunction with representatives from the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, changes the way the State Grant is calculated for Victoria's non-government schools. The model was implemented on 1 January 2006 and comprises a mix of 50 per cent core per capita funding, weighted according to stages of schooling, and 50 per cent needs-based funding. Needs are determined through a school's student characteristics profile.
- The government and non-government schools sectors entered into a quadrennial agreement for the purposes of state funding from 2006–09.
- In 2005–06, \$315 million incorporating funding assistance for needy non-government schools was allocated to Victorian non-government schools through the State Grant to assist schools in meeting recurrent operating costs.

- Funding to non-government schools in 2005–06 also included:
 - \$7 million as part of the 2003–04 State Budget initiative to provide \$62 million over four years to assist needy schools in meeting their operational costs
 - \$5.3 million in support services to assist students with special learning needs, including students with a disability
 - \$1.2 million for suicide prevention initiatives
 - \$0.9 million in interest subsidies
 - \$2 million for Internet access
 - \$18.9 million for student transport mainly from outlying areas
 - \$4.6 million in rail ticket subsidies through the Department of Infrastructure.

Registration of non-government schools

During 2005–06, the Registered Schools Board approved the registration, or revision of registration, of schools in the following categories.

New primary schools	1
New secondary schools	1
New primary and secondary schools	3
Additional secondary year levels	16
Additional campuses	2
School amalgamations (two schools to form one school)	4
Relocations	Schools – 1 Campuses – 11
School closures	4
Campus closures	2

Full fee-paying overseas students

In 2005–06, in accordance with section 65 of the *Education Act 1958*, the Departmental officer holding the position of Chair, Registered Schools Board, under delegation from the Minister for Education and Training, endorsed three non-government schools and re-endorsed 37 non-government schools to accept full fee-paying overseas students.

As of June 2006, there were 128 registered schools accepting full fee-paying overseas students. In February 2006, there were 3010 full fee-paying overseas students in non-government schools.

Registered Schools Board

The Registered Schools Board is the statutory authority responsible for the registration of Victorian non-government schools. The *Education Act 1958* requires the Registered Schools Board to:

- register and, where appropriate, revise the registration of schools
- monitor a school's compliance with the requirements for registration.

Non-government schools are reviewed at least every six years.

All schools complete an 'approval to open' application at least six months prior to opening. Before being granted approval to open, schools must be able to demonstrate that the curriculum, policies, facilities and organisation are of a satisfactory standard and that teachers are registered. New schools must also meet probity requirements and demonstrate that they are financially viable. A school must apply to the Registered Schools Board for registration within 14 days of opening.

Monitoring of schools

Annual returns

As a requirement of the Act, the Registered Schools Board maintains a database of school details that are collected on census day in February each year. Schools submit their returns electronically.

Registration reviews

In order for non-government schools to maintain registration under the Act, the Registered Schools Board must be satisfied that the school continues to meet the requirements for registration. Registration review material is updated annually in accordance with changes in legislation and regulations relevant to non-government schools. During 2005–06, 96 schools undertook registration reviews.

Membership

The Board, which meets monthly, consists of eight members: four from the public sector, including the nominee of the Secretary of the Department as Chair, and four from the non-government sector, appointed by the Governor-in-Council.

Membership of the Registered Schools Board as at 30 June 2006 was as follows:

Department of Education & Training

Mr John McCarthy (Chair)

Ms Maria Kelly

Mr Don King

Vacancy

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

Mr Tony O'Meara

Mr Christopher Lennon

Association of Independent Schools of Victoria

Ms Michelle Green

Mr Neville Lyngcoln