

Services to students

The diverse learning needs of students are supported through a coordinated 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

- *Anaphylaxis Guidelines: A Resource for Managing Severe Allergies in Victorian Government Schools*, the Department's anaphylaxis training, education and management strategy, was published in February 2007. The guidelines assist schools to plan for and support students with severe allergies.
- Training in anaphylaxis management for Victorian government schools was delivered to over 5000 teachers in more than 400 government schools.
- The Primary Welfare Officer initiative operated successfully in 450 primary schools with the highest needs.

Drug education

A unified framework has been implemented across all Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools, offering effective, preventative drug education programs and resources. The Department provides support

to schools in the development of individual drug education plans, policies to address drug-related issues, and support materials to facilitate program evaluation and improvement.

Highlights

- The Memorandum of Understanding between the Department, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria was renewed. This ensures young people from all school sectors have equity of access to drug education initiatives, including those that are part of the National School Drug Education Strategy.
- In 2006, 233 schools completed a four-year review and prepared new action plans to enhance drug education delivery. (In 2007, 347 schools are completing new action plans.)
- Forty-nine per cent of government schools reported at least one member of staff participating in drug education professional development.
- Fifty-six per cent of all Victorian schools reported involvement of parents in drug education programs.
- Staff and student surveys developed under the Drug Education Evaluation and Monitoring Project were implemented in a further 400 schools. The surveys assisted these schools to evaluate the effectiveness of drug education programs.
- Service agreements in relation to drug education delivery were implemented with each region at the start of 2007. Funds provided under these agreements come from both State and Commonwealth sources.

- The Indigenous, Rural and Remote Drug Education initiative was completed. Five school communities were funded to develop, implement and document local community initiatives with Indigenous students and families. These activities involved 22 schools from Mildura to Bairnsdale, as well as 435 students, 14 community elders, and parents.
- Twenty-one schools began to implement innovative drug education approaches using media such as drama, arts and information technology under the Year 7 and 8 Drug Education project.

Students with disabilities

The Program for Students with Disabilities provides schools with additional resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities attending 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. Targeted programs strengthen the capacity of schools, families and regions to improve educational outcomes for all students.

A strengthened approach to meeting the needs of students with a language disorder continues to be implemented successfully. This approach acknowledges that all schools have students requiring support. It 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 2007

	FTE students	Per cent
Regular schools	9,640	55.7
Special schools	7,658	44.3
Total	17,298	100.0

Support for families

Education Maintenance Allowance

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 2006–07, the parents and guardians of approximately 213,400 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.

School Start Bonus

The School Start Bonus was introduced by the Victorian Government in 2006 to assist parents and guardians of Prep and Year 7 students in meeting the start-up costs of sending their child to school. The initiative provides financial assistance to families for expenditure on school and sporting uniforms, school bags, books and related expenses. The bonus is \$300 per annum and will be paid at the commencement of the school year.

For the 2006–07 year, the School Start Bonus was paid to over 129,000 students at a total cost of approximately \$38.7 million.

Student transport

The free school bus service, administered by the Department of Infrastructure on behalf of the Department, conveys approximately 72,000 students daily, predominantly throughout rural 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 2006–07, approximately 6400 students were transported by bus and taxi to these schools at a cost of approximately \$36.7 million.