
Secretary's report

In August 2007, the Premier, John Brumby, announced the establishment of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to be created by the merger of the Department of Education and part of the Office for Children, in the Department of Human Services (DHS).

The new Department was given the task of supporting two ministers, the Minister for Education, Bronwyn Pike, and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand. In supporting these two Ministers, the new Department is responsible for developing and implementing a new birth-to-adulthood learning and development agenda.

The creation of the new Department signals greater opportunities to improve the learning, development, health and wellbeing of Victorian children. It also recognises the importance of early childhood development as a foundation for optimal life outcomes.

Throughout 2007–08, the Department has successfully pursued a range of programs, strategies and initiatives designed to fulfil the Government's vision and meet the objectives outlined by the Government. A key focus has been maintaining and, where possible, accelerating the rate of progress of Victoria's human capital reform agenda. An overview of key achievements for 2007–08 is provided below.

Creation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

As indicated above, integrating the designated part of the Office for Children and the Department of Education into the

new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has been a key priority throughout 2007–08. To date, work on integration has included:

- a realignment of Department structures:
 - a new head office structure took effect in December 2007 that included an Office for Children and Early Childhood Development (with an interim regional operations division and a new policy division), for which a Deputy Secretary has been recruited
 - an Establishment Board chaired by the Deputy Secretary for Planning, Strategy and Coordination was created to progressively oversee the merger process and associated change management plan
 - agreement was reached, following a review in May 2008, on the approach to merging two sets of regional offices and an associated accountability framework (to commence in January 2009)
- the development of a new Corporate Plan for 2008–09 to 2010–11 which embraces the new opportunities and challenges that accompany the Department's broadened responsibilities
- the development, on behalf of our two Ministers, of a new Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (see page 6).

Growing Victoria Together – goals and measures

The Department has continued to make progress towards the achievement of the Government's goals and targets for education and early childhood development.

Year 12 (or equivalent) completions

A noteworthy achievement in 2007 was the significant increase in the proportion of 20–24-year-olds achieving Year 12 or equivalent for the second year in a row. The proportion increased from 85.5 per cent in 2006 to 86.1 per cent in 2007 – a significant move towards the 2010 target of 90 per cent.

Literacy and numeracy

The percentage of Victorian Year 3 and Year 5 students achieving the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks has been at or above the national average since 2001. Effective implementation of literacy improvement teams was also an important policy development in this area.

Early childhood development

The rate of four-year-old participation in kindergarten also increased, from 93 per cent in 2006 to 94 per cent in 2007.

A new Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development

Discussion papers proposing a new Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development were released by the Ministers in April 2008. The release of the discussion papers was followed by an extensive consultation process that included a summit, regional forums and various roundtables. In keeping with the Government's integrated birth-to-adulthood learning and development agenda, the final Blueprint was released as a single volume and incorporates a strong reform agenda built around:

- system improvement
- workforce reform
- partnerships with parents and communities.

The 2007–08 Victorian State Budget provided funding to support this reform agenda.

Implementation of the Victorian Schools Plan for school infrastructure

The Department is on track with the delivery of the Victorian Schools Plan, which has a target of 500 schools to be built, rebuilt or modernised by 2011. The 2007–08 State Budget funded the first stage of the plan, which involved 131 schools receiving funding. Planning and construction is underway for the majority of these projects.

Governance and reporting against the plan has been significantly strengthened with the introduction of a dedicated Program Management Office (PMO) within the Resources and Infrastructure Strategy Division. The PMO will monitor progress against the plan's targets and also provide the Minister and the Departmental Leadership Team with program scenarios for completing the 500-school target. During 2007–08, the Government also announced and commenced planning for two new selective entry schools.

Partnerships Victoria in Schools project

In September 2007, Premier Brumby requested a report investigating the use of public–private partnerships to deliver school infrastructure. A report was prepared for the Premier in November 2007 and a business case provided to the Government in December. On 6 December 2007, a project was announced to deliver 11 new schools in the growth areas of Melbourne as part of the Victorian Schools Plan. Expressions of interest from the private sector were called for in February 2008 and, in May 2008, a shortlist of three consortia was invited to proceed with the next stage of the tender. The successful private partner will be appointed by the end of 2008 to enable the first five schools to open for the 2010 school year. The remaining six schools will open for the 2011 school year.

Commonwealth–State Relations – promoting collaborative federalism

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Productivity Agenda Working Group, the Department has been working closely with the Premier, Ministers, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance to develop a strong Commonwealth–State reform agenda in schools and early childhood development. In particular, the Department has been promoting Victoria’s best interests in this new COAG agenda and, through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), promoting a strategic approach to:

- the digital education revolution
- integration of early childhood education and care
- the Commonwealth Government’s Trades Training Centres initiative
- new Commonwealth–State funding arrangements.

Other important Commonwealth–State relations initiatives to which the Department has made a significant contribution include the development of the National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (discussed further on page 8) and a new Commonwealth funding partnership that will focus on school communities within low socioeconomic status areas and teacher quality.

Implementation of major policy commitments and projects

Blueprint for Government Schools

The Department continued to implement the reform strategies outlined in the 2003 Blueprint for Government Schools.

The Blueprint provides a framework for a highly effective government school system and focuses on:

- recognising and responding to the diverse needs of students
- building the skills of the education workforce to enhance the teaching and learning relationship and the capacity of school leaders
- continuously improving our schools by enhancing school accountability.

Significant progress was made in the implementation of 2003 Blueprint initiatives in 2007–08, including:

- implementation of a suite of 19 leadership professional learning programs provided for government schools to meet the development needs of principals and teachers at different career stages and in different contexts
- accreditation of a total of 948 schools as schools with a Performance and Development Culture at the end of May 2008 and registration of all remaining schools to complete accreditation in 2008
- updating and distribution of the 2008 *Guidelines for Principal Class Performance and Development* in February
- a year of self-evaluation, review and planning undertaken by over 400 primary and secondary schools to support the development of their school strategic plan during 2007
- consolidation of the statewide implementation of the School Compliance Checklist
- additional regional support for approximately 160 schools through Targeted School Improvement funding.

Victoria’s plan to improve outcomes for children

The Department achieved progress on the implementation of initiatives and reforms outlined in the 2006 Victorian Government

Statement, Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood, including:

- improving the quality of early childhood services, including kindergartens and maternal and child health services
- enhancing early intervention services
- improving staff qualifications in early years services.

Future of Schooling in Australia report

In September 2007, the *Future of Schooling in Australia* report was launched by the Victorian Premier on behalf of the Council for the Australian Federation. The report was subsequently presented to MCEETYA by the Ministers for Education. Agreement has been achieved, through the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) and MCEETYA, for the development of the new National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, building on the *Future of Schooling in Australia* report, to be released in Melbourne in December 2008.

Legislation reform

Review of *Children's Services Act 1996* and Regulations

The *Children's Services Act 1996* (the Act) provides for the regulation of children's services in Victoria. In 2005, the Government committed to regulating family day-care and outside school hours care as part of a wider review of the Children's Services Regulations. The Children's Services Legislative Amendment Bill was passed by Parliament on 27 May 2008 and was given royal assent on 3 June 2008. The new regulations will ensure a stronger regulatory framework for children's services in Victoria to complement the Commonwealth Government's reform agenda for the improvement of services for children in

their early years. Work on the new regulations will continue in 2008–09 with:

- release of the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) and draft regulations
- public consultation on the RIS and assessment of feedback
- development of resources to assist sector compliance with the new regulations
- training of Departmental staff responsible for regulation and staff employed in services, starting in March 2009
- new regulations commencing 25 May 2009.

Statutory authorities

The contributions of the Department's statutory authorities to the achievement of the Government's goals and targets for education and early childhood development have been significant.

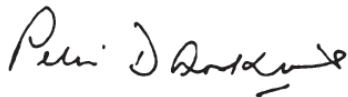
In 2007–08, a new statutory authority, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), was created. The VRQA was created under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and is responsible for the regulation of education and training providers and qualifications in Victoria – from home schooling to higher education.

Priorities 2008–09

The past year has been an exciting and challenging one. We have worked to establish the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and simultaneously progress, with our two Ministers, Victoria's human capital reform agenda in relation to the learning and development of all Victoria's young people. I am pleased with the achievements we have made in this regard and wish to thank my colleagues and staff for their hard work and dedication in 2007–08.

Looking forward to 2008–09, I anticipate that key priorities will include:

- implementation of the new Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development
- continued implementation of the Victorian Schools Plan
- pursuit of collaborative federalism through COAG and MCEETYA, with a particular focus on ensuring that young Victorians benefit
- further integration of education and early childhood development
- establishment of an organisational development strategy for the Department in tandem with the ongoing integration agenda.



Peter Dawkins
SECRETARY