
Services to students

The diverse learning needs of students are supported through a coordinated approach to student wellbeing that encompasses policy, guidelines, resources, school and classroom-based approaches, and links to community agencies.

Student wellbeing

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

Highlights

- Ministerial Order 90 builds on and is consistent with best-practice guidelines on anaphylaxis management policy released by the Department in February 2007. All Victorian government schools received information packs in June 2008, developed in consultation with all key stakeholders, to ensure compliance with Ministerial Order 90. Training in anaphylaxis management for Victorian government schools is a key component of the Ministerial Order and was delivered to over 7900 teachers in more than 450 government schools during 2007–08.
- \$80 million over four years was allocated to extend the Primary Welfare Officer initiative in schools with the highest needs. In 2008, the number of schools receiving Primary Welfare Officer funding increased from 450 to 573.
- The update to Student Health in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide* was completed. This revised section provides step-by-step advice on matters such as roles and responsibilities, routine supervision to ensure safety with medication

and first aid provision, personal medical support, support for specific medical conditions and guidance on planning and supporting student health.

- In August 2007, the Minister for Education and the Chief Commissioner of Police launched the manual entitled *Responding to Allegations of Student Sexual Assault: Procedures for Victorian Government Schools*. This manual gives schools comprehensive information about what to do if a student discloses an alleged sexual assault, how to address the needs of all involved in the allegation, and what support is available for the school in relation to those who assist with management of an alleged student sexual assault. The Department has the safety and wellbeing of all students as its number one priority. The manual reflects this philosophy.

Drug education

A unified framework was implemented in 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 continued. This gives young people from all school sectors equity of access to drug education initiatives, including those

that are part of the National School Drug Education strategy.

- In 2007, 347 schools prepared new action plans to enhance drug education delivery. In 2008, 402 schools are completing new action plans.
- Approximately 50 per cent of government schools reported at least one member of staff participating in drug education professional development.
- Sixty-two per cent of all government 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 244 schools during 2007. In 2008, 212 schools are participating in the project. The surveys assist these schools to evaluate the effectiveness of drug education programs.
- The Indigenous, Rural and Remote Drug Education initiative, involving 12 Victorian school communities, was extended into 2008. This project will develop, implement and document local community activities with Indigenous students and families across schools in Mildura and Swan Hill.
- In 2008, a two-year drug education research initiative commenced in partnership with the University of Melbourne to improve drug education in Victorian secondary schools. This research will document how an evidence-based drug education program leads students to make safer, healthier choices.
- Interactive drama, arts and information technology curriculum materials related to drug education for Years 7 and 8 students were produced for schools.
- Eight evidence-based alcohol fact sheets, targeting parents and teenage students, were prepared for all Victorian schools and distributed online.

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 or regular school. A systematic approach is used to design and develop programs and strategies to support students with special needs. Targeted programs strengthen the capacity of schools, families and school 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 2008

	FTE students	Per cent
Regular schools	9,901	55.4
Special schools	7,970	44.6
Total	17,871	100

Support for families

Education Maintenance Allowance

Low-income families continue 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 2004*, or be a Veterans' Affairs pensioner or a foster parent on the first day of Term 1 and Term 3 respectively.

In 2008, eligible parents of primary students receive \$215 per year. Eligible parents of secondary students receive \$430 per year. During 2007–08, the parents and guardians of approximately 208,700 students received the allowance. The Education Maintenance Allowance is 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 a one-off payment of \$300 that is not means tested. The bonus is paid to families using a payment voucher which the parent or guardian presents at an Australia Post office for a cash redemption.

In 2007–08, vouchers were issued for over 129,000 students at a cost of approximately \$38.9 million.

Student transport

The free school bus service administered by the Department of Transport on behalf of the Department conveys approximately 70,000 students daily, predominantly throughout rural and regional Victoria.

Conveyance allowances may be provided to eligible students to assist with travel costs where access to a transport service is not available.

The Department also provides transport assistance for students attending specialist schools. In 2007–08, approximately 6400 students were transported by bus and taxi to these schools at a cost of approximately \$38 million.