
Policy and regulation

The Department supports and advises the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, and helps with the management and administration of their portfolios. In particular, the Department provides support to the Ministers in the areas of international education, information and promotions, external and intergovernmental relations, and the implementation of legislation.

International education

The Department manages a number of specific, high-quality international education programs and services. It promotes and administers the overseas fee-paying student program in Victorian government schools and conducts and facilitates student and staff exchanges, study tours and official delegations.

Increasingly, the Department is engaging in offshore capacity-building initiatives that highlight the strength of Victoria's curriculum and innovative approaches to school education.

Highlights

- The Overseas Study program was launched 18 March 2008 by the Minister for Education. This new initiative will promote global awareness and global literacy among a cohort of secondary students from government schools who have not previously had the opportunity to study overseas. The program is at the field trial stage with more than 80 Year 9 and 10 students selected from four Victorian regions undertaking study offshore.
- The Victoria International School of Sharjah was built to a design by a Victorian architect.

It is owned by the Government of Sharjah and provides curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and reporting based on Victoria's model of school education. The school commenced operations on 2 September 2007 and the Premier of Victoria officially opened the junior school on 10 February 2008. At full capacity, the school will cater for 2800 students from kindergarten to Year 12.

- A Department-led consortium successfully delivered a suite of professional development programs in Qatar between February and April 2008. These included e-learning, classroom management, school self-review, subject coordination and student welfare.
- The Department continued to support the Australian East Timor Friendship Schools project. Seventy-three Victorian primary and secondary schools have established links with schools in Timor-Leste as part of their project.
- The Department hosted 42 delegations comprising 597 participants. Delegations came from Bahrain, the People's Republic of China, Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Qatar, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

International students

International students make a significant educational, cultural, social and economic contribution to Victoria.

Highlights

- During 2007, there were more than 2900 international students from more than 53 countries enrolled in government schools. This represents a 9.8 per cent increase

over the previous year and demonstrates international recognition of the Victorian government school system.

- An independent audit of school compliance against Departmental quality standards was carried out in 2007 in 22 government schools. A high level of compliance was identified.

Cross-government activity

The Department continues to strengthen linkages with other Government agencies and to develop whole-of-government strategies that effectively utilise government infrastructure overseas.

Highlights

- In cooperation with the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD), the Department continued to support the Education Service Managers in the Bangalore, Dubai, Shanghai and Tokyo Victorian Government Business Offices. These offices promote:
 - Victoria's capacity to deliver quality education services offshore
 - Victoria as a preferred study destination.
- Education Service Managers continued to support Victorian education institutions offshore and provide market intelligence to both Departments.

Programs

The Department implemented a number of programs to support international education in Victoria, including student, teacher and professional exchange programs.

Highlights

- The fifth International Education Week was held in March 2008 to celebrate the contribution that international education makes to Victoria's cultural diversity, and social and economic development. The Governor welcomed over 700 international

students, teachers and stakeholders to a function at Government House that was attended and addressed by the Minister for Education. Regional functions were held in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Gippsland and Warrnambool. These occasions were facilitated by the Department and DIIRD.

- Approximately 270 government schools continued to undertake activities under formal and informal sister-school arrangements with schools in overseas countries.
- The Department conducted student study tours for 1535 overseas students on a fee-for-service basis, placing them in government schools for periods of up to ten weeks.
- The Division hosted 40 participants from South Korea and Japan in three professional development programs to improve the teaching and learning of English for secondary and elementary teachers of English from overseas.
- Twenty-eight Victorian teachers exchanged schools and homes for the school year with teachers from Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United States of America and the United Kingdom.
- Eighty teacher assistants participated in programs that bring native speakers of Chinese, French, German, Italian and Japanese to assist with the teaching and learning of language and culture in government schools. Negotiations with Indonesian universities are proceeding to develop similar support for the teaching and learning of the Indonesian language.
- The Visiting Journalist program continued, with journalists from India and Thailand visiting Victoria in 2007–08 to witness how the international student program works and what Victorian education has to offer.

Marketing and communications

A new suite of marketing material was developed during the year.

Highlights

- A 'Friends of Victoria' function was held in Berlin as part of a communication strategy to leverage off the networks of Victorian alumni.
- The <study.vic.gov.au> website was re-launched in July 2007.
- New DVDs were developed and translated into six languages to promote studying in government schools. DVDs were also created to market school education in the four regional areas of Geelong, Warrnambool, Ballarat and Bendigo.

Information and promotion

During 2007–08, the Department promoted early childhood development and school education throughout Victoria in a variety of ways.

The Department produced a number of publications for external audiences during the reporting period.

Significant work continued to align all Departmental online communications into a single-entry public website <www.education.vic.gov.au>. This resulted in improved access to information for the Victorian public, early childhood communities and school communities. The migration of the former DHS Office for Children website to the <www.education.vic.gov.au> site also progressed. The Department's website averaged over a million visits every month.

Education Times continued to be a major communication link with government schools and editorial content has now been expanded to cater for early childhood service providers as well. The newspaper is published fortnightly during each school term and distributed to local councils, all early childhood providers and government schools.

DEECD Mail Bulletin to Schools continued to be a key communication tool between schools and the Department. Distributed weekly via email, the bulletin provides Departmental information on policy and staff issues, school management, professional learning, events and school activities.

The *Welcome to School* handbook was distributed to all parents of Prep students in government schools at the beginning of the school year. It was also distributed to the broader community through child-care centres, public libraries and Information Victoria, and made available online in English, Chinese, Vietnamese and Arabic at <www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/welcomeschool.htm>. The English version is also in audio format.

The Department's electronic newsletter for parents, *Parent Update*, provided information to parents and the broader early childhood development and education community about initiatives in Victorian government early childhood services and school education. In June 2008, the newsletter had 6160 subscribers.

A comprehensive events and promotions program in 2007–08 included Back to School week, the Victorian School Sports Awards, the Premier's VCE Awards, Education Week, Victorian Education Excellence Awards, Victorian School Design Awards, the Premier's Reading Challenge, Rubbish Free Lunch Challenge and Literacy and Numeracy Week.

The Department's Information and Referral Service answered approximately 60,000 queries from parents, students, school staff and other community members during 2007–08. The service responds to queries about a broad range of education and early childhood development matters, as well as providing recorded information about school term dates for Victoria and other states, contact details for the Department's regional offices, and special dates and events.

Services to Ministers and policy

External relations and strategic coordination

The Department supports the Ministers and the Departmental Leadership Team in fulfilling their responsibilities across the portfolio through Ministerial and executive support functions, external relations, legal services and privacy administration.

Services provided include the coordination of briefings, correspondence, Community Cabinet, Parliamentary services (including Parliamentary inquiries), Cabinet and legislation, archives and records management and Freedom of Information. These areas provide the interface between the Department and the Ministers on day-to-day matters and ensure that the Department's administrative support functions operate effectively.

Commonwealth–State relations

The Department also supports the Ministers and the Departmental Leadership Team in contributing to the Victorian Government's agenda in Commonwealth–State relations.

Services provided relate to Commonwealth–State negotiations and inter-government relations. This requires developing the Department's long-term strategic policy and new policy as required by the Departmental Leadership Team in relation to Commonwealth–State relations.

The Department supports the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development as members of MCEETYA and the Secretary as a member of AESOC and the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group.

The Department also supports the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development as a member of the Community and Disability

Services Ministers Conference, and the Deputy Secretary, Office for Children and Early Childhood Development, as a member of the Community and Disability Services Ministers Advisory Council.

Statewide outcomes for children

The Department's Statewide Outcomes for Children Division focuses government and the community on improving the safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing of children aged from birth to 18 years in Victoria. This involves monitoring and reporting on outcomes, research, data collection and analysis, evidence-based policy and cross-government planning and partnerships. Activities during 2007–08 included:

- preparing the 2007 annual report: *The State of Victoria's Young People*
- publishing early childhood community profiles for all 79 local government areas
- publishing Indigenous early childhood community profiles for 25 local government areas with a large Indigenous population
- conducting major surveys including the Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing Survey
- supporting the Victorian Children's Council to provide timely, independent and expert advice to the Premier and Ministers on policies to enhance outcomes for children.

Registration of government schools

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* provides for the VRQA to register and review schools, having regard to the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007.

The Office for Government School Education is responsible for managing registration and reporting requirements for government schools.

Highlights

- All government schools that were operating at 30 June 2007 were registered with the VRQA.
- Ten additional government schools were registered with the VRQA and were able to open for the 2008 school year. These included three new schools, six merged schools and the opening of one additional campus for an existing school.
- An additional campus for an existing school was registered with the VRQA, enabling the campus to open during Term 2, 2008.

Legislation implementation

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the Act) and associated Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) came into effect on 1 July 2007.

The Act, which replaced 12 separate pieces of education and training legislation, established the VRQA, which has responsibility for ensuring that all schools, training providers and higher education providers (except established universities) meet minimum standards. It is also responsible for registering students being home schooled.

The VRQA's role and functions incorporate the previous responsibilities of the Victorian Qualifications Authority and the Registered Schools Board, which were abolished when the Act came into effect.

The Regulations relate to:

- teaching service appeals
- the Victorian Institute of Teaching elections
- the responsibilities of the VRQA in relation to the registration of schools, home schooling and education and training organisations
- admission of students, times of school operation, discipline, school councils, parent clubs and fundraising for government schools
- the Education Maintenance Allowance, the transport of students and travelling allowances for all schools.

In order to ensure that education legislation remains robust and contemporary, two Acts were developed in 2007–08, to amend the 2006 legislation.

The *Education and Training Reform Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2007* provides for:

- a range of measures to assist in the administration of the Act and implement machinery-of-government changes
- matters arising since the passing of the Act relating to the functions of the Victorian Institute of Teaching and the VRQA.

The *Education and Training Reform Amendment Act 2008* includes provisions for the:

- VCAA to support the integration of education and early childhood services, administer national testing and improve examination processes
- introduction of the Victorian Student Number, a unique student identifier to ensure that student information travels with the student throughout their education.

The Department's legislative program for 2008–09 includes the development of the Education and Training Reform Further Amendment Bill 2008, which will provide for:

- legislative change required to implement initiatives stemming from the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development
- creation of new streamlined processes in respect of performance in the Victorian Government Teaching Service
- clarification of the functions and delegation powers of the VRQA.

The Department is also remaking the Education (Prescribed Age) Regulations 1999, which establishes the age limits for enrolment at government schools.

Yearly planning cycle

The Department also provides corporate and business planning services. In 2007–08, major activities in the coordination of the Department's yearly planning cycle included:

- development of a three-year corporate plan for the Department
- development of a three-year Departmental planning framework
- implementing a strategic framework to improve business planning across the Department following a review of the 2006–07 process
- developing divisional and regional business plans
- better supporting divisions and regions to plan and assess risk through capacity-building professional development activities
- developing the Department's budget submissions, culminating in the 2008–09 State Budget
- evaluating major activities and programs within the Department
- preparing presentations and briefings to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee of the Victorian Parliament
- managing the preparation of half-yearly performance reports for the purpose of revenue certification
- managing the preparation of the portfolio annual reports for 2006–07
- supporting the operation of the portfolio statutory authorities.