

# The MEA handbook



Guidelines on the employment and roles of  
multicultural education aides in Victorian  
Government Schools

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multicultural education aides in Victorian government  
schools

ESL Unit, Targeted Programs Branch, Department of Education and  
Early Childhood Development, Victoria, 2008

Published by the ESL Unit  
Targeted Programs Branch  
Student Learning Programs Division  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
33 St Andrews Place  
East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002  
October 2008

Also published at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/>

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Authorised by Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

ISBN 978-0-7594-0444-10-7594-0444-5

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## Foreword

Multicultural education aides (MEAs) provide an invaluable service to schools, ESL students and school communities. This handbook will help school communities ensure that the best use is made of the skills and expertise of MEAs. The language backgrounds of MEAs reflect the diversity of the Victorian government school student population and the commitment of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide funding for MEAs to schools with ESL funding.

School Support Officers including MEAs play an essential role in school improvement, making schools more enriching experiences for students as a result of the support provided to teaching and learning.

This handbook outlines the role of the multicultural education aide and provides guidelines for aides and school administrators.

## Introduction

Each year, funding of approximately \$9 million is provided to around 460 Government schools for the employment of multicultural education aides (MEAs). English as a second language (ESL) index funding is provided for the approximately 7 per cent of all students in schools who meet ESL eligibility criteria. Where a school reaches the ESL funding threshold, this funding is inclusive of MEA and ESL teacher funding.

MEAs constitute an important link between families and the school, by assisting parents and families to communicate through their first languages. MEAs also support ESL learners to reach their potential at school, by assisting them in the classroom.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide schools and their MEAs with information on:

- policy and funding for the employment of MEAs
- advice on implementing effective MEA support for a school's ESL student cohort
- information about effective MEA programs.

In addition it will provide MEAs with:

- information about education in Victorian government schools
- links to information, resources and services.

## Employing MEAs to support ESL students

MEAs are employed by schools to support ESL learners, their families, and the families of students who require language other than English assistance in their communication with the school. The MEA's skills in a language, or languages, other than English enable them to act as a bridge between the school and families. They can also contribute to making the mainstream curriculum more responsive to Victoria's rich cultural heritage and diversity.

MEAs are able to assist with:

- effective communication between students and teachers in the classroom
- integrating ESL learners into school activities by helping them to understand school expectations and goals
- assisting teachers to understand the home cultures and the expectations families have of the school and of education in general
- assisting newly arrived families in their settlement into the new educational community.

## Funding for multicultural education aides

Since 2006, all schools receiving ESL index funding also receive funding for the employment of MEAs as part of this total. Approximately \$9 million is provided for this purpose each year. Allocations are calculated on the same formula as that for ESL funding, that is, based on the ESL student population of the school. All schools that reach the ESL index funding thresholds will also be allocated an MEA funding component expressed as around 25 per cent of the ESL allocation. This does not appear as a separate line in the Student Resource Package (SRP), but is included in the ESL Index Funding budget line. For further information about funding see the Guide to the Student Resource Package at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/financial/srp.htm>

MEA funding is provided to schools to employ MEAs to support ESL students and their families. Schools need to make decisions about the employment level, job roles and responsibilities of their MEAs.

### Program accountability

All schools receiving ESL index funding are required to complete the 'ESL and MEA Survey', which is sent to schools as a paper supplement to the August census. The survey requests a range of information about MEAs, including the tasks and duties assigned to MEAs in schools.

For further information on census procedures and requirements, contact the Census Hotline:

Tel: (03) 9637 3225

Fax: (03) 9637 2830

Email: [census@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:census@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Copies of current census enrolment guidelines and quick guides can be obtained from the DEECD's School Improvement and Accountability web site at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schoolimprovement>

### Regional support

All regional offices have ESL program officers with responsibility for assisting schools in supporting their ESL students. Program officers can assist schools with a range of issues in relation to their MEAs, including:

- assisting with ESL program development and implementation, including the role of the MEA in the ESL program
- assisting with school data analysis related to ESL learners and families who speak another language at home
- assisting with program and ESL learner evaluation, including the effectiveness of the MEA in ESL program support
- providing professional learning information for MEAs.

Contact your regional office for further information (See *Links and resources* p. 31)

## Employment

MEAs are employed under the Victorian Government Schools – School Services Officer 2004 Agreement, at a level commensurate with the roles and responsibilities they are given. Information about the roles and responsibilities can be found at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Human Resources website. See

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/leaders/schooladmin/default.htm> for further information.

The information on this website includes the Dimensions of Work, which are used as a means of determining the classification level of a position. The classification of a position is based on job complexity and levels of responsibility. Work requirements of the position, and position descriptions for MEAs, should be written to reflect the specific Dimensions of Work of the level at which they are employed. All MEAs should have access to human resources information including the Dimensions of Work. It is important to be aware that information on this website is regularly updated. See Dimensions of Work at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/plan/dimensSSO.htm>

Conditions of employment for staff, including MEAs, can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/hr/employment/default.htm>

This website includes information on:

- salaries
- allowances
- leave
- resources.

The school administration should be familiar with the conditions of employment of MEAs as prescribed in the Agreement. Particular conditions may apply when MEAs are:

- employed to work in a cluster of schools
- employed part-time in one or more schools
- employed part time as an MEA and part time as an SSO in another role
- using private vehicles for school purposes.

The Victorian Government Schools – School Services Officers Agreement 2004 is the subject of enterprise bargaining negotiation in 2008. New agreement arrangements, when they become available, may be accessed at:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/hrweb/employcond/res/certagreeSSO.htm>

## Career and professional development for MEAs

As with all staff, schools need to ensure that professional learning and career development opportunities are available to MEAs. These opportunities can be available at various levels:

### At the school level

- ensure that all SSOs have an individual PD plan
- include SSOs in the Performance and Development Culture accreditation process
- ensure MEAs are actively involved in curriculum days, contributing their knowledge while also learning about school programs
- provide opportunities to develop IT skills
- encourage teachers to involve MEAs when planning activities and selecting content to be taught in the classroom, e.g. at short fortnightly meetings.

### At the regional level

- encourage MEAs to take part in professional development provided at the regional level
- encourage MEAs to let regional personnel know the kind of professional development they need.

### At the system level

The DEECD conducts a Statewide professional learning program that has been developed for SSOs. For more information see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/proflearning/sso/>

From time to time other professional development initiatives especially developed for MEAs, such as conferences and specialised training, may become available. These are usually made known to schools through circulars. It is important the information about such initiatives is passed on to MEAs, and that they are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

### Interpreting and translation training

MEAs interested in gaining formal interpreting and translating qualifications should be encouraged to contact the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), the Australian body that sets and monitors standards. Further details of the NAATI accreditation standards are available at: <http://www.naati.com.au/at-accreditation.html>

## Developing position descriptions

Job descriptions for MEAs will vary from school to school and will depend on the roles and responsibilities given. These roles need to be developed by the school administration in response to the needs of teachers of ESL students for in-class support, as well as the needs of students and their families. The inclusion of a parent or community member on the selection panel can help to ensure the applicants' suitability to undertake the required tasks.

## Multicultural education aide job description

The following is an example of a job description written for an MEA working in a secondary school. It shows the range of roles that MEAs are typically called on to perform.

### Key responsibilities

- Communicate directly with families and support teachers and student welfare coordinators to communicate with families, and link the families with services
- Support students in the classroom, explain teacher instructions and work requirements
- Support teachers' general communication with students
- Assist students and their families with transition from one educational setting to another, for example, gather enrolment information
- Translate basic school notices and communications to the local community
- Assist with the preparation of permission forms and applications, for example, for the Educational Maintenance Allowance, Youth Allowance or student travel card
- Act as a resource to develop staff knowledge of the students' backgrounds and the issues they face
- Help to involve parents in school activities and programs.

### Key selection criteria

- Demonstrated ability to communicate in English and the required language/s, including the ability to accurately translate a range of basic school communications in the required language/s
- Demonstrated ability to enhance the school's relationships with the families of the target language group/s, and, with the assistance of school staff, to help them to understand the Victorian education system
- Demonstrated ability to work with students in a classroom setting
- Demonstrated communication and interpersonal skills, including the ability to communicate with a wide range of individuals including staff, parents and the wider community
- Ability to take direction and to work as part of a team.

### Requirements

- No formal qualifications are required
- Applicants will need to demonstrate proficiency in communication in English and the language of the students needing support
- Applicants will work with students, staff, parents and community members
- Applicants will need to have strong interpersonal skills and a preparedness to work with a diverse community in a range of settings.

## Whole school support for the MEA role

### School responsibilities

The management and reporting relationships between schools and their MEAs need to be developed according to the needs of all staff. It is important that MEAs are clear about who manages them and who they report to. They need to know where they have responsibility for making their own decisions about their work and where they need to coordinate their work through their manager.

A performance plan, developed by their manager or coordinator in collaboration with MEAs, will help to make their role clear. Performance plans need to be regularly discussed with MEAs and roles and responsibilities modified as school, student and families' needs change, and as MEAs' skills develop.

Regular meetings between the MEA, their manager or coordinator, and other staff they work with, will help to give MEAs an understanding of their roles and responsibilities and ensure that they are clear about the accountability requirements of their job.

MEAs also need to be made aware of professional learning opportunities that may be available. See p. 9 for further information.

It is important that all staff:

- understand the roles that MEAs can be appropriately asked to perform
- have access to the duties and timetable of the MEA.

All the members of a school community have a role to play to promote the effectiveness of the MEA to support ESL learners and their families. Staff roles in supporting MEAs will vary from school to school, but in general the following responsibilities are likely to be appropriate.

### Responsibilities of the school administration

- Provide an induction course for MEAs new to the school, including information about their employment conditions, the operation of the school, services available, and the school curriculum.
- Appoint an appropriate staff member to manage and supervise the MEA and ensure that regular MEA program support meetings are held.
- Ensure all members of the school community are familiar with the role, duties and timetable of the MEA.
- Ensure that a timetable is established collaboratively for the MEA.
- Ensure that accurate data is collected through enrolment procedures, interviews and meetings with parents, so that statistical information about the school ESL population can be collated, and so that important factors that may influence students' learning are known. This information can be shared with MEAs as appropriate so that they better understand the school community they are working for.

### **Responsibilities of the MEA coordinator/manager**

- Hold regular MEA support meetings.
- Regularly review MEA timetables in relation to the needs of teachers and the school community.
- Assist teachers to plan and implement a program inclusive of ESL needs by providing staff with a collaboratively agreed timetable for the MEA to assist students in their classroom.
- Ensure that the role of the MEA is clear to all members of staff.
- Ensure that planning time is timetabled so that teachers and MEAs can plan together the classroom work of the MEA.
- Hold regular performance management sessions with MEAs.
- Where MEAs work across schools, liaise with MEA coordinators/managers in those schools.

### **Responsibilities of the classroom teacher or ESL teacher**

- Inform the MEA about the organisation of classroom activities, curriculum content and handouts to be used well before the classroom session begins.
- Explain class rules or homework to the MEA so that consistent information about behaviour and expectations is given to students.
- Provide time for independent learning during which the MEA can support the students with their work.
- Provide opportunities for all students to share the diversity of their experiences, supported by the MEA.
- Develop classroom activities that relate to and build upon the experiences that students bring to the learning situation, with the assistance of an MEA.
- Ensure that multicultural perspectives are incorporated in all aspects of the classroom social and learning environments.
- Attend relevant ESL and multicultural or ethno-specific professional learning opportunities.

# The role of the multicultural education aide

This section outlines the kinds of roles MEAs are likely to be asked to perform.

## Support for students and teachers

### Assist ESL students

One of the main roles MEAs are given is to assist ESL students in classroom programs. Under teacher supervision and guidance, MEAs can:

- support ESL students in their learning by explaining concepts or instructions in the learners' first language/s
- assist individual ESL students or groups of students in mainstream or ESL classes
- provide teachers with insights into students' cultural backgrounds and experiences
- assist with activities and excursions
- assist the teacher with the development of materials
- contribute cultural perspectives to curriculum content to make it more relevant to all students
- prepare simple written information for parents, such as notes, notices or basic information about the school. (Professional translators should be used for sensitive information or when difficult or technical information is being communicated – see section on Interpreting and translating, p. 15)
- assist with the enrolment of new ESL students
- assist teachers to communicate with parents and other family members.

### Follow Australian educational principles

When assisting students in the classroom, MEAs may find it useful to follow these principles based on the educational approach, common in Australia, that young people learn best through researching and problem solving. Teachers encourage students to work both independently and as part of teams or groups.

- Encourage students to think independently rather than providing students with the answers; allow students to answer questions before interpreting what is required.
- Encourage students to listen when the teacher and other students are contributing answers or explanations.
- Encourage students to research and complete tasks by themselves.
- Give short explanations in the background language when a topic is being introduced or when students do not understand required reading.

### Aim to be effective

Effective MEAs assist ESL students to learn English, to understand what is expected of them in the classroom, and help them to understand the school work they are doing. Effective MEAs act as a support for teachers as well as students when they:

- follow up observations on lack of student comprehension in the classroom
- encourage positive behaviours in the school ground and in the classroom
- act as a positive role model
- follow up issues between teachers and students
- use the time the teacher has allocated for independent work to assist as many ESL learners from their linguistic background as possible
- work with careers coordinators to help students understand the kinds of educational pathways open to them.

## Support for parents and the community

The MEA is an important link between the school, parents and the local community. MEAs will need guidance on the kind of support it is appropriate to offer families. Within program and school guidelines, and under supervision where appropriate, MEAs are well placed to liaise with family members and members of the ethnic community to foster communication and to encourage parents to participate fully in the life of the school.

They can:

- assist with communication between parents and the school
- foster links between families and the school
- liaise informally with community members
- encourage parents to take part in school events and activities, such as fundraising, school council or parents groups
- explain school policies and activities to students and parents
- make home visits with the Student Welfare Coordinator or the school administration
- provide liaison between parents, community organisations and other school staff
- develop contact with services and resources in the community so that parents can be informed of services available
- inform the school about family circumstances (with family's permission) that may impact on student learning.

NOTE: MEAs will need to be made aware of their responsibilities regarding confidential and sensitive information. They may need to let parents know that any information that is given to them as MEAs may be passed on to the school if it is in the best interests of the student/s involved.

## Supervision of students

Teachers are responsible for supervising students. A teacher must be present at all times when an MEA is assisting students. For example, MEAs should only undertake yard duty if a teacher is present at all times. The teacher is responsible for overall supervision of classes and students.

## Interpreting and translating

MEAs play a valuable role in using their language skills for direct communication with students and parents, but should only be given a very limited responsibility for translating or interpreting. MEAs are not employed as professional translators or interpreters.

Interpreting and translating are very specific skills with training courses at tertiary level and national accreditation procedures. It is not fair or ethical to expect MEAs to perform duties they are not qualified for. While it is appropriate to have MEAs assist in everyday communications with parents and students, it is not appropriate to ask them to interpret or translate in situations where a professional interpreter or translator would usually be employed.

### Use professional translating and interpreting when appropriate

A professional translating and interpreting service, quite separate from MEAs, is provided free to all Victorian government schools.

Parents have the right, under whole of government policy, to access professional interpreting and translating services provided through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:

- when required to make significant decisions concerning their lives; or,
- where essential information needs to be communicated to inform decision making.

For more information on access to interpreting and translating services through the department, see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/accesservy.htm>

Where possible, National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) trained interpreters and translators are used. NAATI interpreters and translators adhere to a code of ethics which includes confidentiality to ensure that they do not disclose information acquired during the course of their assignments. They ensure that messages are conveyed accurately and impartially, and they can reduce the time it takes to work through an issue.

For information about accessing interpreting and translating services in schools, see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/>

### Recognise the limitations of the MEA role

Few MEAs are accredited as interpreters or translators. MEAs are encouraged to recognise their limits and are entitled to decline translating or interpreting work where a professional translator or interpreter should be engaged. For example, the language demands of interpreting between a psychologist and parents, or translating a complex curriculum document would understandably be beyond their linguistic capacity. Specialised knowledge and terminology not possessed by the MEA may be required. It is not appropriate to expect skills from MEAs that only professionally trained interpreters are expected to have.

MEAs are encouraged to make links with their school's parent communities, and may well have family members or friends among the school community. Under

these circumstances it is understandable that often neither the MEA nor the people they may be translating for would feel comfortable when private or sensitive communications need to be made, for example, between parents, teachers and psychologists or welfare workers.

Some MEAs have accreditation to the level required to be a qualified interpreter and translator, and may enjoy doing this type of work. However, it must be remembered they are not being paid the salary of a qualified interpreter or translator, and must not undertake these responsibilities. They may also have conflicting roles within the interpreting situation.

### Understand the differences between MEAs and interpreters

The role of an MEA is quite distinct from – and much broader than – that of an interpreter. An MEA has commitments and responsibilities as a member of a school’s staff, and for a range of support and problem solving activities. The MEA is also a member of an ethnic community and may have conflicting interests between this role and their work role. An interpreter is there for one purpose only – to facilitate direct communication between school personnel and parents or other parties with limited English, or no knowledge of the language other than English.

This difference in roles is highlighted in the table below:

<b>Roles of interpreters and multicultural education aides</b>	
<b>Interpreter</b>	<b>Multicultural education aide</b>
Does not have or must not assume knowledge of student or family	Often has a close relation with family and students
Works only between two other parties	Often has direct and informal contact with student or parent
Responsible for communication	Together with school, responsible for a range of outcomes
Ultimate aim: to facilitate communication between other parties	Ultimate aim: support students and parents, help solve problems and issues
Impartiality	May have an advocacy role
Clear and limited role	Multi-faceted role – often varied expectations

When translating is required, MEAs can assist with the straightforward day-to-day communication needs of the school and its community by preparing short simple letters, notices or sections of newsletters.

### Points to note for MEAs

It is important that MEAs understand their role in relation to assisting with communication. They need to be aware that:

- They cannot play two roles at once – as an MEA and as an interpreter – and that they may need to point this out to teachers or administrators when they are aware of sensitivities that the teacher or administrator is not.

- It is very easy to fall into the trap of becoming an advocate when in an interpreting situation, and this is not appropriate.
- It is appropriate for them to recognise their limits, and that they are entitled to refuse to translate or interpret:
  - when the subject matter of an interview or procedure is likely to be beyond them, e.g. a psychological assessment, sensitive counselling
  - when the relationship they have with a parent or student means it is not appropriate to carry out an interpreting role.

MEAs can become trained interpreters and translators by gaining formal accreditation through accredited training programs, or through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), see <http://www.naati.com.au/> for more information.

### **Accessing professional interpreting and translating services**

Schools with students and families from language backgrounds other than English need to ensure that information relating to school programs and student progress is made available to parents in their first language.

To facilitate this, the DEECD provides schools with access to qualified/accredited interpreters, in line with Victorian government policy to help Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse communities deal with government departments and agencies.

When schools require the services of professional interpreters and translators, they can access them through the free Interpreting and translating services offered to schools. See

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/accessservy.htm> for links to a range of translated resources and materials, including information about Interpreting and Translating services.

### **Booking interpreters and translators**

All bookings for on-site interpreters are made via the online booking facilities on <http://www.allgraduates.com.au> from the *Bookings* menu item. Each school must have a user name and password, which is available from All Graduates on request. All Graduates will provide assistance to schools that have difficulty negotiating the online facility. For enquiries telephone (03) 9416 4911.

### **Emergency bookings**

When an on-site interpreter is required in a case of genuine emergency, contact All Graduates during office hours on 9416 4911.

Schools can view the confirmation of bookings online.

Translated material for parents on a range of topics can be found at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/translated.htm>

This website page provides a directory of print materials translated into the most requested languages. This material provides information about school education in Victoria to parents whose first language is not English.

## Roles of MEAs in schools

### The role of multicultural education aides in primary schools

The roles and responsibilities of MEAs across different primary schools will vary considerably, depending on:

- the numbers of ESL students in classes, how newly arrived they are and how much intensive first language support they may need
- the way in which the ESL program operates to meet the needs of the ESL students
- the needs of the community.

For advice on planning and implementing effective ESL programs for a school's ESL students, see *The ESL Handbook* at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/curricplan.htm>

### Case study

In this primary school with an enrolment of 235 and a Student Family Occupation (SFO) index of 1.4, the percentage of ESL students is high at 56 per cent of the total school population. This school has decided to allocate funds to employ 2 MEAs to share a full-time position to support the three largest language background groups. The school has employed two part-time MEAs to cater for the Sudanese and Vietnamese students.

As well as their weekly program of assisting students in the classroom, the MEAs are involved in the following:

- MEAs meet weekly with teachers and the Assistant Principal (who manages the day to day work of the MEAs) to discuss administrative matters, such as the timetable, to prepare for lessons and to provide professional development for each other.
- MEAs help to source first language material for classroom topics and make classroom resources.
- MEAs assist in planning and running a transition program in Term 4 for next year's Prep intake, that runs for 10 weeks. The MEAs help the students to settle in and help parents to understand the expectations of the school, and the role they can play in their children's education.

### Sample primary MEA time table

The following sample timetable for a primary school indicates the types of tasks and duties allocated to either one full-time or several part-time MEAs, depending on the number of ESL students and their language backgrounds. The timetable was developed in collaboration with MEAs, teachers and the MEAs' manager or coordinator. The timetable is flexible and changes during the year and from term to term, depending on the needs of the school. For example, during parent teacher interview time in June and December, the MEAs spend more time helping parents to arrange interviews. During November they are involved in the Year 7 Transition program, and in December, in the Prep Transition program.

The time allocated for the different aspects of the MEA program for a week looks like this:

Times	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.30 – 9.30	Resource making	Activity preparation	Translation of basic notices for school activities	Preparing parent newsletter item in first language	Student enrolment or parent meeting
9.30 – 11.00	Student support in literary activities Year 1B	Student support in literary activities Prep A	Student support in literary activities Year 3	Student support in literary activities Year 5	Student support in literary activities Year 4
1100 – 11.30	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
11.30 – 1.30	Student support in numeracy activities Prep B	Student support in numeracy activities Year 5D	Student support in numeracy activities Year 2C	Support in ESL class Year 5/6	Support in ESL class Year 3/4
1.30 – 2.30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
2.30 – 3.30	Student support with Integrated unit Year 5C	Student support in science activities Year 6A	Student support in Library session Year 2	Student support in Art class Year 5/6	Student support in Sport activities Year 3/4
3.30 – 4.30	Staff meeting	Planning meeting with ESL coordinator	Community or parent meeting	Planning meeting with classroom teachers	Resource making

**Note:**

- MEAs attend excursions and camps as appropriate, as part of their work allocation.
- When MEAs are required to work outside of their normal hours, they are offered time in lieu or payment for extra hours worked.
- When necessary, MEAs ring parents in the morning, for example they may need to follow up on student absences or on school notices not returned, or to gather additional information about students.

## The role of multicultural education aides in secondary schools

The roles and responsibilities of MEAs across different secondary schools will vary considerably, depending on:

- the numbers of ESL students in classes, how newly arrived they are and how much intensive first language support they may need
- the way in which the ESL program operates to meet the needs of the ESL students
- the needs of the community.

For advice on planning and implementing effective ESL programs for a school's ESL students, see *The ESL Handbook* at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/curricplan.htm>

The following case study shows how one school used its MEA funding.

### Case study

In this secondary school with a total population of 715 students and a Student Family Occupation (SFO) index of 0.6, where the percentage of ESL students is low at 6.4 per cent of the total school population, one MEA is employed with a 0.3 time allocation. This school has recently enrolled a new cohort of students requiring ESL support. The language background of the MEA represents the largest group of ESL students who have the greatest need for literacy support.

In addition to the proportion of ESL funding given to employ MEAs, schools are able to allocate additional funds from other sources to increase the time allocation of MEAs. This school has decided to use other equity funding sources to increase the MEA allocation. The following short case study shows how this school decided to use its MEA funding.

The weekly program of assisting students in classrooms consists of:

- encouraging students and explaining instructions, making sure they understand instructions, activities and assessment procedures
- explaining new or difficult concepts or vocabulary
- encouraging positive behaviour and ensuring students understand class and school rules
- helping to source first language material for classroom topics, and making classroom resources.

The MEAs are also involved in the following activities:

- MEAs meet weekly with teachers and the Assistant Principal (who manages the day to day work of the MEAs) to discuss administrative matters, such as the timetable, to prepare for lessons and to provide professional development for each other.
- MEAs deliver a transition program for students from refugee backgrounds who have little or no prior literacy in their first language – the first language assistance that the MEA gives students in this program is vital to its success.
- MEAs support VCAL literacy and numeracy classes for students from a refugee or low literacy background.

- MEAs offer a career guidance program for students in conjunction with the careers coordinator.
- MEAs assist the Student Welfare Coordinator with the drug and alcohol education program.

### Sample secondary MEA time table

The timetable below shows the range of roles of one full time MEA in one particular secondary school. The timetable was developed in collaboration with MEAs, teachers and the MEAs' manager. The timetable is flexible and changes during the year and from term to term, depending on the needs of the school. For example, during parent teacher interview time in June and December, the MEAs spend more time helping parents to arrange interviews, and at the end of each year MEAs are involved in parent information sessions about subject selections and careers pathway planning.

The time allocated for the different aspects of the MEA program for a week looks like this:

Times	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.15 – 8.45	Newsletter translation Parent meetings	Materials preparation	Finding class resources	Parent phone calls	Student enrolment
8.45 – 9.35	Maths Year 9A	Health Year 8C	Transition Program	Transition program: Pathway planning with careers coordinator	VCAL literacy class
9.35 – 10.30	History Year 8A	Science Year 9 B	Transition Program	History Year 8A	VCAL literacy class
10.30 – 10.50	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10.50 – 11.40	Transition Program	Science Year 7A	Planning meeting with ESL	Science Year 10B	VCAL numeracy class
11.40 – 12.30	Transition Program	Welfare coordinator meeting	Transition Program	Science Year 10B	VCAL numeracy class
12.30 – 1.15	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.15 – 3.10	Transition Program	Maths Year 10A	Transition Program	English Year 7A	ICT – Year 10 elective
2.10 – 3.05	Transition Program	Maths Year 10B	Transition program	Science Year 7A	ICT – Year 10 elective
3.05 – 4.15	Staff meeting	Year level meeting	Maths/science meeting	Literacy team meeting	Materials preparation

**Note:**

- MEAs attend excursions and camps as appropriate, as part of their work allocation.
- When MEAs are required to work outside of their normal hours, they are offered time in lieu or payment for extra hours worked.
- When necessary, MEAs ring parents in the morning, for example they may need to:
  - follow up on student absences
  - follow up on school notices not returned
  - gather additional information about students.
- At the weekly meeting, MEAs and teachers prepare for lesson organisation, content and handouts.

# Education in Victoria – Context for multicultural education aides

This section is designed to provide information for MEAs about the Victorian government education system.

## Curriculum – Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Victorian schools work to a set of curriculum guidelines, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), which outline what is crucial for all students to learn from Prep to Year 10. Schools use the Standards to plan their teaching and learning programs, including assessment and reporting of student progress.

For more information about VELS (some information is available in languages other than English for parents) and to access the VELS, see

<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

### Five educational principles

The Standards are based on five educational principles that underpin schooling for all students. They are:

- Learning for all – proceeding on the basis that all students can learn given sufficient time and support, and that good schools and good teaching make a positive difference to student outcomes
- Pursuit of excellence – seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one's best
- Engagement and effort – acknowledging that student ability is only one factor in achievement and that if students work hard and make an effort, they improve
- Respect for evidence – seeking understanding and truth through structured inquiry and the application of evidence to test and question beliefs
- Openness of mind – being willing to consider a range of different views and consider different ways in which evidence is perceived and solutions can be reached.

### Three strands of learning

There are three strands in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards that define what students should know and be able to do at different stages of learning. They are:

- Physical, Personal and Social Learning:
  - Health and Physical Education
  - Interpersonal Development
  - Personal Learning
  - Civics and Citizenship

- Discipline-based Learning:
  - The Arts
  - English
  - the Humanities (Economics, History, Geography)
  - Mathematics
  - Languages other than English
- Interdisciplinary Learning:
  - Communication
  - Design, Creativity and Technology
  - Information and Communication Technology
  - Thinking Processes.

## English as a second language

In addition, the VELS provides *The English as a Second Language Companion to VELS*, a framework for assessing ESL student achievement, and developing effective learning programs for the many students in Victorian schools who are learning English as a second language.

## More information on VELS

For the VELS Parent Introduction website, see <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/parent/>

For the ESL Companion to VELS, see <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/esl/esl.html>

For translated information about VELS for parents see <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/links/general.html#parentbooktrans>.

For translated information for parents about VELS and ESL students, see the pamphlet, *English as a second language (ESL) students and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards* at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/translated.htm#H2N10102>

This pamphlet outlines how the VELS is structured and how the standards are used for reporting the learning progress of ESL students.

## Curriculum development – how do schools choose what to teach?

VELS describes broad areas of learning for students which do not necessarily equate to ‘subjects’, and teachers may teach a range of ‘subjects’ through the same set of activities. For example, a teacher may teach a unit of work which incorporates mathematics, science and English. Such a unit may also make use of communication technologies such as using the internet for research, or presenting work using PowerPoint software. Students may also be using interpersonal skills in such a unit as they work in groups or pairs to research or present their findings to other students.

By choosing units of work that cover a range of learning areas, teachers are able to cover the full range of essential learnings described in the VELS without teaching these areas in isolation. They may also plan and teach with other teachers to ensure that students cover what is essential at each year level. They

may also collaborate with other teachers when assessing student achievement against the VELs.

## Teaching approaches

The VELs also gives teachers guidance on the teaching approach (pedagogy) which is most appropriate for the learning area and the students' stage of development. When teaching, teachers encourage independent thinking, the sharing of opinions and open discussion. Students work in a team to complete projects. This helps them to recognise the strengths of different people, and to learn the skills of working in a team, sharing their ideas, and producing shared projects.

For more information about the teaching approaches common in Victorian schools, see the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingprinciples/>

## Reporting student progress to parents

The VELs is the basis for reporting student achievement to parents. The school report card, given to parents twice each year, shows how far students have progressed during the year, and compares their performance with the standards expected for students of their age in a range of VELs learning areas. It also shows how far students have progressed in the previous year. The report card allows teachers to report to parents the progress their children are making in learning English as a second language, through the Stages of the ESL Companion to VELs.

For information about how the reporting system operates, see *Student Reports* at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/studentreports/>

For information for parents about student reports and some translated information for parents, see: *Student Reports - Information for Parents* at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/studentreports/>

For information about reporting ESL students' progress to parents, see <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/studentreports/samples/>

## School values and inclusion

Underpinning the curriculum in Victorian government schools are shared values and beliefs about education that are believed to be crucial to the success of all students.

These values underpin the curriculum, the teaching methods used and the way in which teachers and students are expected to interact. They also underpin the kinds of behaviour which is acceptable in schools. Parents are also expected to respect the values of the school and the education system, and to assist the school by helping their children to understand why schools operate in this way.

Some of these ideas about education can be new for families from overseas, and MEAs play an important role in helping families to understand the rights, roles and responsibilities they have in the education of their children.

Some of the core values and principles that underlie the way in which schools operate are described at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/valuesed/>

## Multiculturalism

In a society like Australia's, with so many cultures, nationalities, languages and experiences represented, it is important for all to respect those who differ from their group. The education system encourages respect and understanding for all, through initiatives such as the following:

### **Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools**

The document *Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools* provides schools with an overview of government policies and DEECD initiatives that affirm cultural and linguistic diversity and uphold the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups in our society. They provide practical information and advice about the roles and responsibilities of various elements of school communities and relevant sections of the DEECD, within this broad legislative and policy context.

*Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools* includes an extensive bibliography containing Human Resources publications, as well as lists of relevant teacher reference and classroom teaching materials.

See a copy of the guidelines at

[http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schpoli\\_cygd.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schpoli_cygd.htm)

### **Multicultural Victoria Act 2004 – Implications for Schools**

The Multicultural Victoria Act 2004 aims to establish principles of multiculturalism and foster a common understanding of the importance of cultural diversity and how it enriches Victoria. See:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schviclegal.htm>

### **Racism, No Way!**

The *Racism, No Way! Anti-racism education for Australian schools* website at <http://racismnoway.com.au> provides a tool to help schools assess how they are working towards achieving a culturally inclusive environment. It also identifies areas where strategies may need to be developed to increase inclusivity. The site also has lessons plans, units of work, games and resources to promote inclusive practices in schools.

## **Safe Schools are Effective Schools**

The DEECD is committed to providing safe, secure and stimulating environments for all students, and provides a range of anti-bullying policies and strategies for schools to deliver on this commitment.

In 2006, the DEECD introduced new anti-bullying guidelines and policies for all Victorian government schools. The document *Safe Schools are Effective Schools* includes:

- a definition of bullying
- an anti-bullying policy
- the key characteristics of safe and effective schools

- strategies for schools, including summaries and case studies of good practice schools, and strategies on the prevention, intervention and management of bullying incidents
- strategies for parents, such as the best way to manage bullying incidents when their child is being bullied, bullying others or observing bullying behaviour.

For more information see:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/safety/bullying/>

Translated posters about bullying for students are available at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/safety/bullying/resources.htm>

## Student health and well-being

Students are better prepared for learning when they are healthy, safe and happy; therefore, student welfare is the responsibility of all staff working in a whole-school context. Student learning cannot be separated from welfare.

Helping students to learn effectively and to develop positive attitudes and behaviours are goals that have long been shared by teachers, student support services staff and parents. It requires that each young person is educated in an environment which provides for their individual development.

For more information about student health and welfare services, see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/>

## Programs for students with disabilities

The DEECD provides a range of resources to schools to enable the delivery of a high quality program for all students, including students who are having difficulty learning. These resources include psychologists, social workers, youth workers, speech pathologists, visiting teachers and curriculum consultants, as well as specific early identification and intervention programs. Resources can be in the form of personnel employed by the DEECD or as programmes delivered by community agencies or other government departments. Student Wellbeing staff employed in regional offices are also available to support schools in the implementation and delivery of student welfare initiatives.

Victorian government school students with a disability and additional learning needs are eligible for the Program for Students with Disabilities, provided they meet the eligibility criteria for one of seven categories:

- physical disability
- visual impairment
- severe behavioural disorder
- hearing impairment
- intellectual disability
- autism spectrum disorder
- severe language disorder with critical education needs.

The role of the MEA in such programs is chiefly around assisting parents and families to understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to their child's educational needs.

For more information see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/>

## **Sexual health education**

Sexuality education in Victorian secondary schools is a part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Comprehensive, whole-school sexuality education provides consistent and accurate information to all young Victorians from an early age and is respectful of diversity.

It is important that schools have an open dialogue with parents in regard to sexuality education. This can be achieved through parent teacher interviews, school newsletters and through the school council. MEAs also have a role in helping parents make their views about sexuality education known to the school, and in ensuring that parents understand the place of sexuality education in their children's education as a whole.

Parents do have the right to withdraw their child's participation from sexuality education, although research shows that programs are more effective when they are developed together with parents and the local community.

Sexuality education classes can be delivered in single sex or mixed classes and this decision is usually at the discretion of the school.

For more information see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality>

## **Drug education in schools**

Victorian Schools are required to develop a drug education plan to ensure that all students have access to drug education curriculum, programs and support and that their school has a policy to respond to drug-related incidents. The plan is reviewed every four years.

The involvement of parents in drug education programs is seen as an important part of a successful program.

For further details and information for parents in a range of languages, see:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/drugeducation>

The role of MEA's in drug education is to help ensure that parents and students understand the school's drug education policy and programs.

## The senior secondary years – educational and career pathways

### Options

It is important for MEAs to understand that the pathways students have for completing their secondary education are many and varied. MEAs should work with careers advisors or coordinators in their schools when assisting parents or students in making choices about their future education. A key role for MEAs in secondary schools is likely to be helping parents and teachers during information sessions.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) website at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/> provides information about options for senior students:

- the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Vocational Education and Training programs (VET)
- the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)
- Some translated information for parents about the VCAL can be found at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcal/students/>

Many education and training options are available to students during their senior secondary years. There are a range of programs and tools available to schools to assist students and their parents to navigate through these options and to support students in their transitions. For more information, see information at the Youth Transitions website at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/>

### Parent involvement

Students at school do not learn in isolation; their families play a significant role in their success at school.

This can be a new idea for some recently arrived families. Many communities come with an understanding that home and community life are quite separate from what occurs at school. It is common to expect that a student's learning is entirely the responsibility of the school.

Because parents may not be accustomed to seeing themselves as partners with schools in their child's education, many feel that schools can be intimidating places to go to, particularly when they are still settling into a new cultural environment and do not speak English. It is a key role of the MEA to help parents to understand that schools welcome parent involvement.

Schools would like parents to be engaged as much as possible in the life of the school. In particular schools would like parents to be involved in the following ways.

### Parent-teacher interviews

Parents or carers normally have at least one formal interview with their child's teacher/s each year. Parents with concerns about their child's progress can contact the school for an appointment and make a mutually convenient time to meet with the classroom teacher or year-level coordinator at any other time. An interpreter can be engaged to ensure communication is clear.

A parent-teacher interview enables parents to:

- discuss school reports and discuss how their child is progressing, both academically and socially
- see examples of their child's work
- get to know their child's teacher/s
- be informed about plans for their child's future learning.

### **School newsletters**

Reading school newsletters is a good way for parents to learn about what is happening at school and an activity which parents and children can both be involved in.

The DEECD also produces a newsletter for parents. Parents can subscribe online to *Parent Update*, a free email newsletter that will keep them up to date with the latest information and changes to education in Victoria. MEAs may have a role in helping parents to understand information in the newsletter. *Parent Update* can be found at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/participation/parentupdate.htm>

### **Volunteers in school**

Victorian government schools have volunteer programs where parents can directly participate in school activities. Opportunities are available for parents who wish to volunteer, helping in school activities like:

- assisting in the canteen
- helping teachers on excursions and other school events
- assisting with reading and mathematics programs
- participation in environment committees and cultural groups.

MEAs can play an important role in explaining how these volunteer programs work, and in encouraging parents to become involved.

### **School councils**

Each school has a school council made up of parents, the principal, staff and sometimes community members. The school council governs the school. It is given the power to set the key directions for the school, and is a legal entity in its own right. A school council directly influences the quality of education that a school provides to its students. Council members don't need any particular qualifications or experience – schools look for enthusiastic parents who want to help improve the learning outcomes for all students. Elections are held for school council members. All parents or guardians of students enrolled at the school are eligible to vote.

For more information, contact your school, or see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/schoolcouncils/>

## Links and resources

### ESL program website

The ESL program website provides information about the range of services and resources available to the teachers and parents of ESL students in Victorian Government schools.

See <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/> for further information about:

- **ESL in Schools** -- information about the range of services provided to mainstream schools to support students learning English as a second language, including information about funding for ESL programs.
- **Newly Arrived Students** – the New Arrivals Program provides intensive English as a second language (ESL) tuition for newly ESL arrived students. The New Arrivals Program is delivered to students principally through English language schools and centres.
- **Support for Refugees** – information and resources to help support students from refugee backgrounds in schools, especially those with disrupted or no previous schooling
- **Curriculum Planning** – information about planning learning programs for ESL students – includes the link to *The ESL handbook*
- **ESL Assessment and Reporting** – information about assessing the English language development of ESL students, and reporting their learning progress to parents
- **Professional Learning** – information about professional learning programs and resources for teachers
- **Resources** – details a range of print and multi-media materials for teachers of ESL students -- provides information about where they can be purchased.

### Regional offices

For contacts at the nine Regional Offices, see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/structure/regions.htm>

For information about contacting the ESL Program Officer in each region, see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/proflearn/otherproviders.htm>

### Interpreting and translating services

For links to information about Interpreting and Translating services, including translated material for parents, see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/>

## Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC)

LMERC is a specialist resource centre for Victorian schools in the areas of languages other than English, ESL and multicultural education. Victorian teachers and MEAs may borrow a wide range of resources from LMERC. The LMERC catalogue is available on-line at the LMERC website. For more information see

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/lmerc/>