FROM THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Tuesday, 4 May, 2010

GIVING CHILDREN THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN LIFE

Young children and school students with disabilities across the State will get the best possible start in life thanks to a $108.6 million boost to disability support and services in early childhood and at school.

The 2010 State Budget will provide a significant funding boost for early childhood intervention services and a brand new Victorian Deaf Education Institute to train and support teachers.

The Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand, and Minister for Education, Bronwyn Pike, said the funding would provide children and young Victorians with a disability every opportunity to maximise their development to succeed at school and later in life.

“Parents of children with disabilities told us they wanted improved support and access to early intervention services and the Brumby Labor Government has listened and taken action,” Ms Morand said.

The Brumby Labor Government’s 2010 State Budget includes:

- **$38.4 million** over four years for Early Childhood Intervention Services, which provides support to families of children with a disability or a developmental delay before they reach school age, such as speech therapy, physiotherapists and special education;
- **$38.1 million** over two years to meet increasing demand for the Program for Students with Disabilities - particularly in the areas of autism and intellectual disability. This program provides funding for schools to meet students’ individual learning needs which can include teacher support and allied health support such as physiotherapy and speech therapy;
- **$18.5 million** in additional funding over three years to provide transport for more than 1700 students attending special schools;
- **$9.2 million** over four years to establish a new Victorian Deaf Education Institute in Melbourne to support and train teachers working with deaf students in schools across the State;
- **$4.4 million** to establish in partnership with specialist schools 'satellite’ classrooms at local primary and secondary schools. These purpose-built on-site facilities will have specialist staff to meet students’ additional needs but will mean students can be part of the mainstream school community. The funding will also provide additional inclusion support programs for students with autism; and
- **$2.5 million** over four years to provide teachers and early childhood professionals with specialist mental health training including funding 70 Mental Health Graduate Diplomas for Teaching Professions at Monash University.

“The increase in funding for Early Childhood Intervention Services represents the single biggest increase in investment in these services since 2003. These services include physiotherapy, speech therapy and special education,” Ms Morand said.

She said the ‘satellite’ classrooms would provide learning spaces within mainstream schools for children with intellectual disabilities. These learning spaces would be set up in partnership with existing specialist schools.
“Having students with disabilities attending mainstream schools will be beneficial to those students and to the broader school community,” Ms Morand said.

“This ‘satellite’ approach means children with an intellectual disability can participate in mainstream subjects, but there are also separate facilities and staff on site to cater to their special needs.”

The 2010 State Budget also provides funding to ensure Victoria has a highly skilled workforce for children with special needs in Victoria.

“The Victorian Deaf Education Institute will play a leading role in deaf education in Australia and will significantly increase the teaching expertise available in Victoria for students with a hearing impairment,” Ms Morand said.

“Children and young Victorians with a disability or developmental delay can achieve outstanding success at school with the help of support and specialist teachers, resources and facilities.

“This significant package of increased funding will help to ensure families with children with special needs can access the extra support they need, close to home.”