Secretary’s overview

The Department has undertaken significant work to meet the Government’s vision and objectives for education and early childhood development. Our annual plan identified 2009–10 as a year of implementation, with the Department focusing on implementing the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda, the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, the Victorian Schools Plan (VSP) and the Commonwealth Government’s Building the Education Revolution (BER) economic stimulus package.

It is through these reforms that the Department aims to achieve its mission of ensuring a high-quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian. In addition to the policy implementation underway, a range of strategies and initiatives are in place to support this aim. This includes developing the capacity of our workforce, strengthening confidence in education and early childhood services, and developing the next phase of reform.

A selection of our 2009–10 key achievements against our annual plan key initiatives and objectives is provided below.

Implementation

The Department has pursued policy reform and implementation in three high-profile areas – COAG reform agenda, Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development and the VSP and BER.

COAG reform agenda

During 2009–10, the Department has continued to lead and develop national partnership agreements that aim to improve early childhood, schooling and youth transitions outcomes.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships Bilateral Agreement and Implementation Plan will deliver $327.8 million in Commonwealth Government funds over seven years, targeting improved literacy and numeracy outcomes, teacher quality and outcomes in low socioeconomic status school communities. The Victorian Government is making a similar investment over this period through a combination of new funding, reprioritisation of existing funding for schools, and state and system-wide initiatives and support.

The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions Bilateral Agreement and Implementation Plan will see $135.2 million in Commonwealth Government funds delivered to Victoria over four years to increase the participation and attainment of 15–24-year-olds in education, training and employment. Victoria is also eligible for an additional reward payment tied to progress towards achieving the target of 92.6 per cent of young people achieving Year 12 or equivalent by 2015. Victoria is required to achieve an attainment rate of 89.35 per cent by 2012 to receive full payment.
There has also been great movement on national reform in early childhood development. Victoria is pleased to be hosting legislation to implement the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care. Other jurisdictions will refer to this legislation and reform, which will facilitate and introduce a national approvals system and new national quality standards across all services, including preschool (kindergarten), family and long day care, and outside school hours care. Over time, these reforms will introduce improvements in staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratios in education and care services.

Victoria is also committed to working in partnership with the Commonwealth Government, local government, employers and early childhood staff in delivering the Early Childhood Education National Partnership, which recognises the importance to Australia’s future prosperity of investment in early childhood. This partnership will see the implementation of universal access to 15 hours a week of kindergarten, 40 weeks a year, in the year before school. Barriers to kindergarten access for vulnerable children have been identified and strategies will be put in place to support inclusion of vulnerable children in 15-hour kindergarten programs.

The National Partnership for Indigenous Early Childhood Development, a partnership between government and the Indigenous community, aims to improve the outcomes of Indigenous children in their early years and give them the best start in life. Victoria has committed to this partnership and the first stage is focusing on Indigenous children aged 0–3 years. This partnership will see $22 million of Commonwealth Government funds delivered to Victoria between January 2009 and June 2014. Under this partnership, Victoria is implementing three main initiatives:

• integration of early childhood services through Children and Family Centres
• increased access to antenatal care, pre-pregnancy, and teenage sexual and reproductive health services
• increased access to, and use of, maternal and child health services by Indigenous families.

Victoria is pleased to be co-hosting, with Queensland, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Established by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), the Institute will provide national leadership in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. The Institute Board has identified five areas as immediate work program priorities: teacher and school leader standards, teacher certification, pre-service teacher education programs, professional learning, and stakeholder engagement and communications.

Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development

The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, released by the Victorian Government in late 2008 as a five-year reform agenda, continued to drive commitment to the delivery of high-quality education and early childhood services. The Blueprint is structured around three key strategies: system improvement, partnerships with parents and communities, and workforce reform.

In November 2009, the Blueprint: One Year On was released, highlighting the Department’s progress against the delivery of the 42 first-year Blueprint action commitments. I am particularly pleased with progress in several areas – delivering the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, the introduction of Transition Learning and Development Statements, and the implementation of the e5 Instructional Model for teachers and school leaders.
The Blueprint: One Year On details a further 23 new initiatives for 2010, including the following priorities.

- The Health and Wellbeing Service Framework will be released, which will support a coherent and coordinated system of health and wellbeing services for all children and young people aged 0–18 years (see case study on page 19).
- The Ultranet – an electronic learning environment that supports high-quality learning and teaching and facilitates efficient knowledge transfer – will be released. The Ultranet will enable collaboration and communication between teachers and students and assist partnerships with parents. Training for schools began in May 2010, and parents will be invited onto the Ultranet from the end of September 2010 (see key achievements on page 21).
- The Extended School Hub field trials to provide support for students and families in low socio-economic communities will commence (see case study on page 23).

**Growing, Learning and Thriving: Building on Victoria’s Achievements in Early Childhood Development**

On 27 November 2009, the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand MP, released Growing, Learning and Thriving: Building on Victoria’s Achievements in Early Childhood Development.

The Statement builds on the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development and signals the next wave of reform in early childhood development services for children from 0 to 8 years. It outlines the Victorian Government’s vision to achieve increased access to high-quality early childhood health, education and care for all Victorian children, and to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young Victorians.

It also brings coherence to the policy context for early childhood in Victoria, which has seen major developments over the past 12 months.

**Victorian Schools Plan and Building the Education Revolution**

The VSP, when combined with the BER, is an unprecedented opportunity to provide our students, their families and Victorian communities with state-of-the-art facilities. A total of 1581 Victorian government school sites have benefited from the BER National School Pride program, 1253 will benefit from the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program and 70 schools will gain science and language centres. Where possible, the VSP has been strategically combined with the BER to maximise educational outcomes for Victorian students. The Victorian Government is committed to rebuilding, renovating or extending every Victorian government school by 2016–17.

Following the devastation of the 2009 bushfires, the Department has worked closely with bushfire-affected communities to rebuild school and early childhood facilities as quickly as possible. Marysville Primary School opened in April 2010, providing a much-needed integrated facility for the Marysville community. As part of the process of rebuilding the Marysville community, the new school is part of the Marysville Community Learning, Health and Recreation Hub, which houses a kindergarten and children’s centre, and will later become home to a health centre. The hub will provide top-quality education opportunities and health services for Marysville families.

The new schools to be built in Strathewen and Middle Kinglake are progressing well and benefiting from significant community input. Strathewen students are expected to move into their new facilities towards the end of 2010, and Middle Kinglake will be open in Term 1, 2011.
Secretary's overview

Capacity building

A flexible, appropriately qualified, empowered workforce is vital for developing and implementing early childhood and education policies and programs for Victoria's children and young people. Workforce development is therefore a key focus for the Department. In August 2009, the Department's Organisational Development (OD) Framework was released. Implementation of the framework has commenced with the development of the Department's new CORE values. During the year, an all-staff survey and a further management consultation were undertaken to develop an evidence base and inform the identification of achievements and priorities related to organisational capacity.

Capacity building of the early childhood workforce and the teaching and school leadership workforce has been a specific focus. Three initiatives have been pursued over the past year.

- Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce strategy 2009 was released and provides a long-term vision for the early childhood workforce. The strategy includes boosting staff qualifications and providing more support for early childhood teachers to work in rural and regional Victoria. The Victorian Government is promoting early childhood as a career of choice, employing measures to attract high-performing students into the area and supporting early childhood professionals to take on leadership roles.

- Rollout of the e5 Instructional Model for teachers and school leaders was completed. The model focuses on five domains – engage, explore, explain, elaborate and evaluate – and provides school leaders and teachers with a tool to develop a shared understanding of how to improve classroom practice.

- Teacher performance pay models were trialled in 44 schools from May 2010. Thirty-five are trialling the school rewards model and nine the teacher rewards model. All trial schools participated in a two-day forum that focused on the e5 Instructional Model and performance and development processes.

Strengthening confidence

The Department has an ongoing role in strengthening confidence in the education and early childhood sectors. This recognises the vital role that parents and communities play in supporting educational delivery and participating as active partners in children's development and learning.

The transparency agenda has been the key focus during 2009–10. Through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) State Register, School Performance Summaries for Victorian government schools are now available. The summaries provide parents and communities with clear, easy-to-understand information regarding school performance across a range of measures, from academic performance to student satisfaction.

August 2009 saw the statewide introduction of the Transition Learning and Development Statement. These statements provide families with detailed information on their child's learning and social development in early childhood settings as they make their transition to school. The statements also provide primary schools with information on their new cohort of Prep students. In particular, teachers will have an earlier understanding of student abilities, interests, and any learning difficulties or development delays. Transition statements provide an important bridge between early childhood services, schools and families, providing students and families with continuity and information transfer.

The recent launch of the Families as Partners in Learning website will support early childhood services and schools to work together with families to support their child's learning, particularly learning in the home. The website is a central portal of information that provides strategies, case studies, tools and resources to strengthen partnerships among schools, early childhood services and families.
Growing Victoria Together
The Department is tracking well against the Growing Victoria Together goals.

- The kindergarten participation rate remains consistently high with 92.7 per cent of 4-year-olds having attended a funded kindergarten program in 2009.
- The 2009 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results showed that the scores achieved by Victorian students were above the Australian average across Years 3 and 5 in all domains (that is, Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy).
- In 2009, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had completed Year 12 or equivalent was 86.8 per cent, up from 81.8 per cent in 2000.

The year ahead
During 2010–11, the Department will prioritise:

- continued implementation of the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, the COAG reform agenda and the VSP and BER
- building organisation capacity by implementing key elements of the Department's OD Framework, including embedding of CORE values, workforce capability development, improving the effectiveness and alignment of key processes, and strengthening collaboration and partnerships
- working collaboratively with parents and other key stakeholders to improve outcomes for Victoria's children and young people
- focusing on evaluation, including partnering with research bodies and strengthening the evidence base to support the implementation of outcomes for children and young people.

The Department will also explore new opportunities to transform Victoria’s approach to learning and development beyond 2010–11 that focus on integrated childhood and education services with enhanced family and community engagement. This will better position us to meet the broad economic and demographic challenges presented by an increased birth rate, rapid technological change, skills shortages and an ageing workforce. Education and early childhood development will have a critical role in meeting these challenges and shaping Victoria’s future.

I would like to thank the Minister for Education and the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation, the Hon Bronwyn Pike MP, and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, the Hon Maxine Morand MP, for their support during 2009–10. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues and staff in the Department and statutory authorities for their contribution towards achieving the Government’s goals and targets in our portfolio.

Professor Peter Dawkins
Secretary