1. What is the current status of the enhancements to the student support services program?

Feedback from the consultation process has now been integrated into the final model which is described in the newly released Strengthening student support services directions paper: The way forward (the Directions paper), found at www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/support/ssso.htm

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conducted an extensive consultation process during August and September 2008 to seek the views of stakeholders about the development of an enhanced student support services program. Regional forums were attended by 680 people and a total of 88 written submissions were received.

The consultation process provided DEECD with strong support for implementing the five key elements of a strengthened student support services program as proposed in Strengthening student support services: A discussion paper for consultation and provided valuable arrangements, detailed feedback and information on how each of the five key elements could be implemented:

- Overarching statewide student support services policy
- Targeted service delivery model in all regions
- Improved management structures
- Workforce support and supervision
- Better accountability and performance reporting.

2. When will the changes occur?

Implementation of the components of the strengthened program will begin in Term 1, 2009 and continue throughout the year. Enhancements to student support services will be tailored to the requirements of each region. As there are a variety of service delivery and management models in place at the current time, changes will need to occur at different stages and rates according to local needs, structures and arrangements.

Regions will communicate and consult with student support services staff about the implementation process throughout 2009.

3. Will there be more or less resources in my network?

The additional $33.2m provided by the Victorian government in the 2008–2009 State Budget will enable the employment of an additional 70 student support services staff statewide from Term 1, 2009. Resources in all regions will be either increased or maintained at current levels.

Student support services resources will be allocated on the basis of the numbers of students at government schools in each region and take into account important factors including areas of disadvantage, rurality and the number of small schools, to ensure the total program resources are distributed in a consistent and targeted manner.

4. Will schools and students receive the same level of support?

The new arrangements will support a move to more strategic prevention and intervention measures at the school level so that better outcomes can be achieved for a broader range of students with needs.

As a result, time and resources will be more equitably distributed across schools, networks and regions. There will be no impact on support to students through the Program for Students with a Disability. The appointment of additional staff in areas of greatest need will extend the capacity of the program to meet unmet demand and respond to the changing context and needs of students and their families. In addition, targeted service delivery through multi-disciplinary teams will result in a greater capacity to respond appropriately to differing and complex needs of students.
5. What does targeted service delivery mean?

Delivery of student support services will be determined according to need across a network or sub-region depending upon local arrangements, particularly geographic issues. This will replace the current model of operation in many areas, where individual staff are allocated to schools to deliver services, as this model does not make the best use of the range of staff expertise and knowledge.

Targeted service delivery will ensure that students and schools with the greatest need receive support while also maximising the number of students benefiting from additional assistance.

In addition to usual service requirements, networks and regions may identify and target a range of issues affecting their area such as student attendance, behaviour, mental health, homelessness, Indigenous education and parenting support.

Prevention and early intervention activities will be a key focus of the service delivery model. The strengthening of partnerships with other services and organisations which provide support to schools, children, young people and their families will be essential to improve the overall range and quality of support services and programs.

6. How will the work of student support services staff link with school improvement?

Student support services will be more closely aligned with the enhanced network model for Victorian government schools. This alignment will strengthen support for vulnerable children and young people through more effective coordination and targeting.

Improved program coordination and leadership within regions and networks will also ensure that student support services work closely with Regional Network Leaders and are included in strategic planning processes and can contribute to the implementation of school, network and regional improvement goals and targets related to student learning, engagement and wellbeing.

7. How will student support services be accessed?

Schools will refer students to network and sub-regional student support services teams. Clear documentation of the referral and intake process will be available within the network or sub-region to ensure all schools and staff are aware of the process.

Each network or sub-region will establish a liaison process to ensure each school has access to student support services staff to consult regarding potential referrals or student wellbeing issues. This process can assist in directing schools to the most appropriate support service for the student and their family.

8. Where will student support services staff be located?

Student support services staff will work in multi-disciplinary teams that will be co-located within network or sub-regional settings. Visiting teachers will work in teams supporting students with additional learning needs across the region. Working collaboratively in teams will broaden the scope and capacity of the service and enable better response to complex and emerging issues. Regions will determine location options.

9. How will student support services staff be better supported?

The improved management structure will include regional program coordination and the implementation of network or sub-regional Student Support Services Coordinators to manage and support staff.

The enhanced program model will include a stronger focus on workforce support, professional learning and supervision for student support services staff. Professional stream leaders will also be appointed to support profession specific learning and support.

10. Where can I find further information?