

Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform:

An Overview



Published by the
Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development
Melbourne
April 2008

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and Early Childhood Development) 2008

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Authorised by the
Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development,

2 Treasury Place,
East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002.

ISBN 978-0-7594-0501-1

Designed by Design by Pidgeon

Printed on 100% recycled,
environmentally responsible paper

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in an accessible format, such as large print
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Ministerial foreword

The establishment of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provides an unprecedented opportunity to integrate early childhood services and schools across Victoria.

The linking of early childhood services and schools marks the beginning of a new era in the health, wellbeing, learning and development of all Victorian children and young people from birth through to adulthood.

We are excited to present a proposed five year reform agenda for early childhood services and schools that will drive improvement and integration and help us to deliver the best possible outcomes for all our children and young people.

Our proposed reform agenda is outlined in the accompanying discussion papers and we seek feedback from families, practitioners, education and early childhood stakeholders and the wider Victorian community to assist us in the development of a *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform*.

We encourage you to have your say in shaping Victoria's future directions and supporting our children and young people to be the best they can.

We look forward to receiving your feedback, and working together to develop and deliver our reform agenda.

Yours sincerely



Bronwyn Pike MP

Minister for Education



Maxine Morand MP

Minister for Children and Early
Childhood Development



Opportunity for reform

The Victorian Government's decision to bring together early childhood services and school education in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development signals a new opportunity to improve the health, wellbeing, learning and development of all Victorian children.

Linking early childhood services and school education recognises that children's development is a continuous process from birth to adulthood, and government services must reflect this to provide each child with the best opportunity. This initiative marks the beginning of a new era in the education and development of our children. We know that a child's learning starts from day one, and that a child's early experiences have a direct impact on their future prospects.

**The Honourable John Brumby,
Premier of Victoria**

2 August 2007

We are capitalising on this opportunity by setting a challenging reform agenda to guide integration and improvements in early childhood services and the school system over the next five years.

We recognise that the success of the reform agenda will be dependent on the degree to which families and communities, early childhood and school practitioners, and our other partners, help shape and inform the future directions.

We have developed two discussion papers to assist us to gather your input. These discussion papers outline the Government's proposed strategic directions and possible actions to ensure our education and early childhood service systems are best placed to meet the needs of children and their families into the future.

Public comment will inform the development of the *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform* to be released later this year. The Blueprint will be a formal document which sets out the Government's strategic directions, actions and targets for education into the future.

We encourage you to share the journey, to reflect on the goals we have set ourselves, and to let us know your thoughts and aspirations. Together, we are committed to creating the best possible outcomes for Victorian children as they grow, develop and thrive from birth through to adulthood.



Our vision for all Victorian children and young people

Children deserve the best possible start in life. We know that giving children the best possible health, development and learning foundations will benefit individuals and families as well our community and economy.

Regardless of their background or circumstances, every Victorian child and young person should have the opportunity to engage in creative and intellectual pursuits and be the best they can in all aspects of learning and development.

The Government has a responsibility to put in place the structures and standards that support families and the community to help and encourage children and young people to thrive, learn, grow and develop. This includes providing additional support for children and families who need it most.

We are clear on what outcomes we want from the Government's actions in early childhood and school education. We want

- Improved educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for all young Victorians
- An accessible, high quality and coherent universal service system for early childhood and education, with targeted support for those who need it
- Enhanced public confidence in a world class school education system and high quality early childhood services and programs for all
- Reduced effects of disadvantage on children and young people's learning and development.

We propose to pursue these outcomes through a lifecycle approach to seamless learning and development which recognises

- The early childhood years (0-8) are the foundation stage for learning and development
- The middle years of development (8-16 years) are a critical educational and developmental period, playing a major role in determining whether children will achieve their full potential
- The youth transitions stage (16+ years) provides the bridge to adulthood.

The education and early childhood reforms are being developed with this lifecycle approach in mind. They capitalise on shared opportunities as well as recognising the need for actions specific to early childhood or school education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Lifecycle approach: from birth to adulthood



Driving reform: a new approach to learning, wellbeing, health and development

The Government's reform efforts to date have provided a strong foundation for healthy and happy children and young people. The appendix to this paper carries full details of the major policy initiatives undertaken since 2003.

There is a lot to be proud of in the Victorian early childhood service system and in our schools. We must continue to recognise and celebrate our achievements.

But we must continue to set our sights ever higher.

There is increasing evidence of the need for a stronger and more consistent focus on wellbeing, learning, health and development across all of the places that children and young people spend their time. Safety, health and wellbeing are preconditions for effective learning and development and schools and children's services are key platforms for promoting health and wellbeing.

Research increasingly highlights the impact that early childhood experiences have on development in later life. For example, we now know that

- Quality relationships with adults in the early years significantly impact on a child's development
- Successful transitions throughout early childhood and school have a significant impact on success - for example quality early childhood programs can promote wellbeing and 'school readiness' for children - and that their impact can extend into and beyond the formal school years
- Early interventions are more effective and less costly than waiting until later in a child's development - gaps in school performance stay generally constant or increase after 8 years of age.

Research also shows that providing a range of study options and pathways for young people is crucial to their successful transition from school to further education and employment.

There is also clear evidence demonstrating the positive impact of close links between schools and their local communities on both educational outcomes and community strength.

This evidence underpinned the Government's decision to create an integrated Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

To achieve the reform we need over the next five years, we will concentrate on three areas: partnerships with parents and communities, system development and reform, and workforce reform (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Conceptual framework for early childhood and school reform



We have identified a series of proposed actions within each reform theme. Many of these will apply to both early childhood and school education. Through the following cross-sectoral actions, we will draw on existing linkages and foster new linkages between early childhood services and schools.

1. Partnerships with parents and communities

- Engage families of children of all ages, providing guidance on supporting learning and development
- Develop schools as children's and community hubs through better cross-sectoral planning, co-location of services and more community use of school facilities
- Develop local networks of early childhood services, schools and other service providers including local governments and the Department of Human Services.

2. System development and reform

- Build greater continuity in the approach to the learning and development of 0-8 year olds and improve transitions to school
- Improve coordination and consistency of approaches to supporting children and young people aged 0-18 with a disability
- Publish information on provider performance and broaden parental choice
- Collect, maintain and share information as young people move through the system, by extending information technology platforms and supports.

3. Workforce reform

- Improve coordination, professional development and use of non-teaching workforce/allied health workforces
- Develop forums and invest in joint professional learning between primary schools and early childhood services.

The two accompanying discussion papers outline the proposed actions specific to either early childhood development or school education.

Focus question

1. **What other opportunities might exist as a result of the creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development?**



Improvement targets and progress measures

We want to make sure the Blueprint reforms make a real difference in outcomes for Victorian children and young people.

We will set ambitious and challenging targets in order to monitor progress and evaluate the success of the actions outlined in the Blueprint.

For the purpose of discussion, we have developed a list of possible indicators to measure our progress over the next five years and help focus our efforts. These indicators, which span from birth to adulthood, are

- Increase the proportion of infants fully breastfed in the first six months of life
- Increase the proportion of children attending Maternal and Child Health Service developmental checks, particularly at three and a half years
- Increase to at least 95 per cent in all local government areas, the proportion of children participating in four year old kindergarten
- Increase the proportion of children entering school with basic skills for life and learning*
- Reduce the proportion of children entering school with emotional and behavioural problems*
- Reduce by 10 per cent the number of children who have not met expected learning standards at Year 3
- Increase the availability of children's services that offer integrated education and care programs*

- Increase by 5 per cent the number of students performing well above expected levels in literacy and numeracy
- Reduce by 15 per cent the gap for Koorie students in reading, writing and numeracy
- Increase community confidence in public schooling*
- Increase the proportion of government schools that meet standards of curriculum provision*
- Increase the proportion of government school principals accredited as high performing*
- Increase the proportion of the early childhood education and care workforce with a recognised qualification*
- Further lift the Year 12 or equivalent completion rate.

* These are important measures and require new ways of collecting information. Numerical targets will be set for these measures as baseline data becomes available.

Focus questions

2. **Are the individual improvement targets realistic and sufficiently challenging?**
3. **As a set, are the improvement targets comprehensive and do they address the right outcomes?**
4. **Are there other improvement targets we should consider?**

Commonwealth–State partnership

Our reform agenda for early childhood development and school education is being developed and supported within the context of a new national agenda for children and young people.

Governments at every level believe there is no challenge more important than the future development of young Australians.

We are working closely with the Commonwealth Government to shape the new national directions, and this collaboration will help drive the success and momentum of the reform agenda in Victoria.

The national outcomes and targets signed off by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 26 March 2008 provide an unprecedented opportunity to create a shared national vision and a collaborative national approach to improving outcomes for Australia's children (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Council of Australian Governments’
Participation and Productivity Agenda –
early childhood development and schooling

Early Childhood Development

Outcomes

- Children are born healthy¹
- Children acquire the basic skills for life and learning
- Children will benefit from better social inclusion and reduced disadvantage, especially Indigenous children
- All children have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling¹
- Quality early childhood education and care supports the workforce participation choices of parents with children in the years before formal schooling

COAG Targets

- Universal access to early learning for all four year olds by 2013
- Halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years old within a decade¹
- In five years all Indigenous four year olds in remote Indigenous communities will have access to a quality early childhood education program¹

Schooling

- All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling
- Young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving
- Schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children
- Australian students excel by international standards
- Young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study

- Lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade

¹ The Productivity Agenda Working Group will work in partnership with Indigenous and Health COAG Working Groups.

How to contribute to the Blueprint

Public consultation process

We have raised a number of focus questions through this discussion paper, and would encourage you to respond with your thoughts.

Your ideas are a valuable part of the future development of our early childhood and school education services and systems.

Electronic versions of the discussion papers can be downloaded from the Blueprint website at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/blueprint>

Additional information on the consultation process, including information on how to make a submission, can also be accessed from this site.

Written submissions close Friday 16 May 2008. All submissions will be treated as public documents.



Appendix

Major Victorian policy initiatives since 2003

Blueprint for Government Schools (November 2003)

A comprehensive reform package designed to address the concentration of poor outcomes in some schools and regions, high variations of student outcomes between classes within schools, and variations in student outcomes between schools with similar student populations.

Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework (October 2006)

Covering the whole of childhood from birth through to adulthood (0-18 years), the framework described 35 key outcomes that matter for Victoria's children and young people – their safety, health, development, learning and wellbeing – and the characteristics of their families, communities and the wider service system and society that make a difference to children and young people. The framework underpins outcomes reporting and monitoring across government of how children are faring.

Victoria's plan to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes (National Reform Agenda, April 2007)

Outlined the actions required over the next ten years to improve literacy and numeracy, focusing on quality teaching and quality teachers, building a culture of improvement in schools and directing resources to where they can most make a difference.

Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood (National Reform Agenda, April 2007)

Set out a ten year vision to improve the supports available to families with young children with a focus on better antenatal services; strengthening the health, development and learning of all children; enhancing the provision of early childhood education and care services; and improving the early years workforce.

Future of Schooling in Australia (September 2007)

Produced through the Council for the Australian Federation, this reform package critically assessed Australia's performance relative to international competitors, proposed a national framework for schooling and recognised the importance of early intervention and a rigorous curriculum.

Council of Australian Governments' Productivity Agenda Outcomes Framework (February 2008)

Produced through the Council of Australian Governments' Productivity Agenda Working Group, the proposed Outcomes Framework will provide an agreed set of outcomes, indicative progress measures, targets and policy directions framed around early childhood, schooling, and skills and workforce development.

