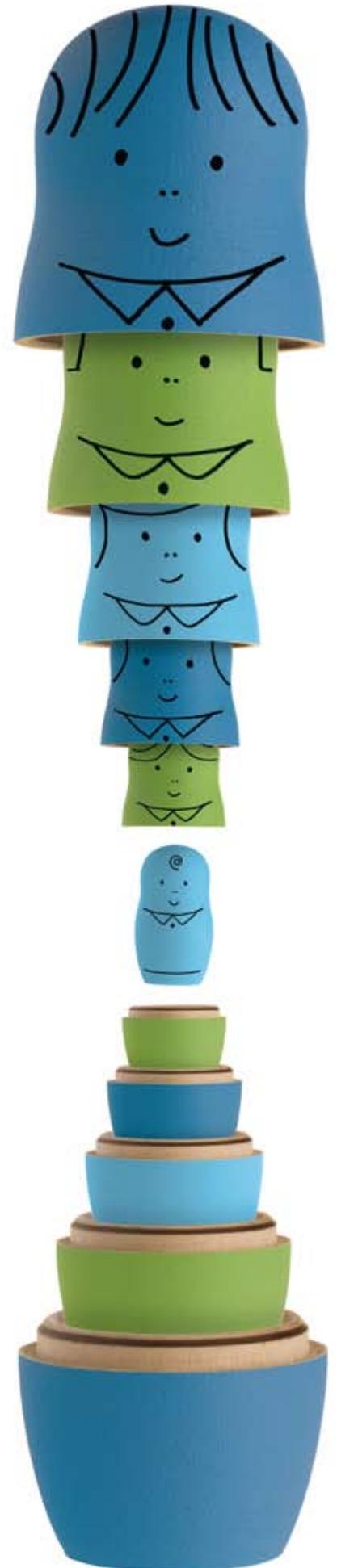


# Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform:

School Reform  
Discussion Paper



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## **Ministerial foreword**

Since 1999 the Victorian Government has consistently identified education as its number one priority. This has been backed up by a record investment in our school system – including the employment of over 8,000 additional teachers and other staff in schools, and the largest ever investment in improving school buildings through the *Victorian Schools Plan*.

Our school system in Victoria is something of which we can all be proud. By international standards our children and young people achieve well above average, and our education system is viewed as highly performing.

But we can and must do more if we are to successfully prepare our children and young people for life in the 21st century.

The Victorian Government is embarking on an ambitious five year plan for school reform. This discussion paper outlines our proposed approach to reform and suggests a range of actions which could be considered for the future.

We are seeking feedback from families, practitioners, education stakeholders and the wider Victorian community to guide our reform direction and to provide views on whether the suggested actions will best meet the needs of our children and young people.

I encourage you to let us know your views and help support our children and young people to be the best they can.

I look forward to your contribution.



**Bronwyn Pike MP**  
Minister for Education



## **Executive summary**

The Victorian Government has made education its number one priority since coming to office in 1999. The November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* signified the Government's long-term commitment to reform in school education, articulating a clear policy direction with specific goals and targets against which progress could be measured.

The creation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recognises the need for an integrated approach to the learning and development of our children and young people, from birth right through to adulthood. Along with the opportunities presented by the creation of this department, the new Commonwealth-State context provides unprecedented opportunities to align policy and funding and to establish workable partnerships to drive reform.

This discussion paper examines the achievements since the release of the November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* and our ongoing challenges, and presents proposed actions for further improving student outcomes over the next five years.

Building on the reforms of the November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools*, our objectives for this next phase of reform are to

- Equip all young people with the skills and capabilities they will need for economic, social and cultural success in the 21st century
- Provide all young people with productive post-school pathways and the capabilities they need to become lifelong learners
- Enhance public confidence in a world class school education system for all young Victorians that has a strong and vibrant government school system at its core
- Reduce the effects of disadvantage on early childhood and education outcomes.

To achieve these objectives the next phase of reform will concentrate on three areas: system development and reform, workforce reform, and parent and community partnerships. Proposed actions in each of these key areas are described in the following sections.

### **1. System development and reform – creating a culture of excellence that delivers results in all schools for all students**

To ensure each individual student achieves good progress, we propose to focus on developing a high quality national curriculum; implementing detailed strategies in the priority areas of maths, science and languages; and strengthening the capacity to measure, report and improve progress of individuals and cohorts of students, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

To improve transitions to and from school we propose to focus on taking a consistent approach to learning and development for 0-8 year olds; developing integrated support services for children 0-18 and their families; and improving pathways and transitions from school.

To support government schools to improve we propose to focus on developing a differential approach to accountability; supporting regional school networks to drive school improvement; articulating clear standards for what students and parents can expect from all government schools; and providing information for parents to assess school performance against these standards.

To support non-government schools to improve, we propose to collaborate with the non-government schools sector and the Commonwealth Government to provide more support, through better access to government resources, clearer expectations and standards for improvement in student outcomes and better information for students and parents about student progress and outcomes.

**2. Workforce reform – focusing on developing teachers and school leaders and attracting and rewarding the best people so we have the best people doing the right things**

To extend Victoria’s successful, flexible approach for teacher professional learning we propose to focus on leadership; consistently high quality teaching; skilling teachers and supporting schools to use technology effectively; and joint professional learning between primary schools and children’s services.

To attract the best people to teaching, and to encourage them to improve once they are teaching, we propose to focus on improving teacher training programs. These programs will encourage high performing graduates to enter teaching; find ways to motivate and reward high performing teachers and school leaders; provide incentives for the best people to work in the schools where they are needed most; and support teachers who have become disengaged to leave the profession.

**3. Strengthening parent and community partnerships so we all maximise our contribution and opportunities to improve education outcomes**

To assist schools to engage with parents and communities in ways that suit their particular circumstances, we propose to focus on ensuring that schools are welcoming and encourage active parental involvement. We also propose to support schools and teachers to use the Ultranet effectively and provide specific, practical guidance to families on supporting their child’s learning and development at all ages.

To help schools benefit – and to provide a wider community benefit – from partnerships with other groups in the community, we propose to focus on developing wider networks to offer post-compulsory education, training and employment options; developing schools as children’s and community hubs; and encouraging stronger links between schools and early childhood services.

A robust education system that offers real choice to Victorian parents is fundamental to a strong civic culture and economy. There is much to be proud of in our school system and we must continue to celebrate our achievements. We must also keep striving to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all young Victorians and develop an education system that is second to none.



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## Introduction

Each school day, over 800,000 students attend Victoria's schools. We know that the parents of these students hope that our schools will bring out the very best in their children, encouraging them to thrive and grow, and helping them acquire skills to succeed in school and in life.

All of us working in education and government share that same hope, and are committed to delivering the best possible education outcomes for Victorian children.

The Victorian Government has made education its number one priority since coming to office in 1999. The November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* signified the Government's long-term commitment to reform in school education, articulating a clear policy direction with specific goals and targets against which progress could be measured.

The creation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has been an important step. DEECD recognises that learning doesn't just start at school – rather, well-rounded individuals enjoy a continuum of learning from birth right through to adulthood. It is vital that our system underpins the entire learning journey and this new Department will provide unique opportunities for school partnerships and stronger relationships between parents and communities.

The discussion paper on the *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development*, also currently released for comment, provides more detail on the goals and objectives of our early childhood development focus.

The role of schools in the learning continuum remains of critical importance. The last four years have seen an enormous commitment by government schools to implementing the reform agenda and indicators show that this reform is having an impact. By international standards Victoria's school system is well above average, and within reach of being the best.

It is now time to review our progress and to renew our commitment to improving school education in Victoria.

The opportunity for reform and evolution has never been better. The new Commonwealth-State context provides the Department with unprecedented opportunities to align policy and funding and to establish workable partnerships to drive reform. We have ambitious goals and targets, and expectations of ourselves and our partners are high. We measure ourselves not by Victorian standards, or even Australian standards, but by world standards.

This discussion paper examines the progress made since the release of the November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* and our ongoing challenges. It presents the Government's plan as we seek, together with our partners, to advance our facilities, our curriculum, our workforce and our thinking. It presents proposed actions and heightens our expectations and responsibilities for further improving student outcomes over the next five years.

We know the best results occur when schools partner with parents to help individual students become the best they can be. Together, we can create an education system that helps students develop into resilient, knowledgeable, highly skilled members of the Victorian community.

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 for Victoria's school system.

## Key achievements in school education

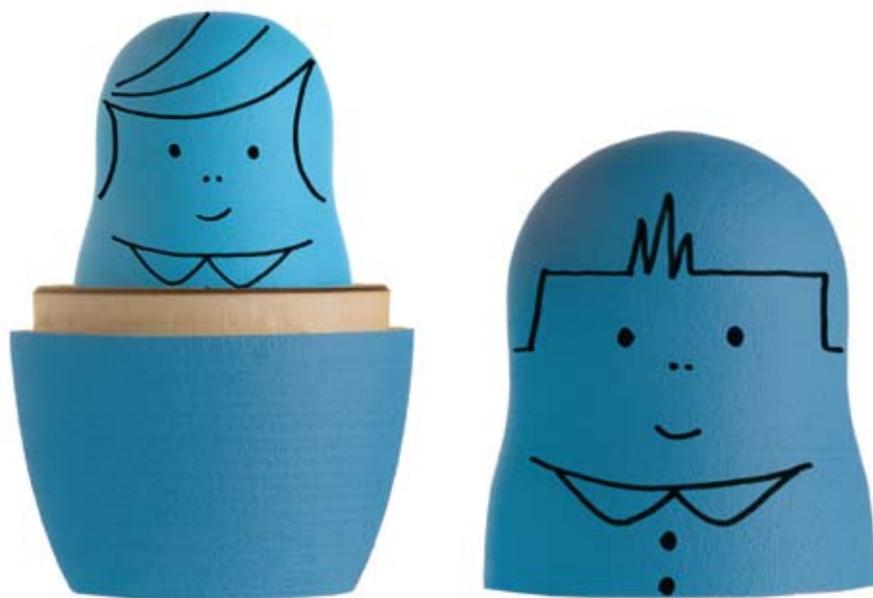
The November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* started from the premise that every school could and should improve performance over time. At its core was an explicit intention to build the capacity of teachers, school leaders and regional staff and to focus on those actions that had the greatest potential to improve student learning outcomes.

Victoria's approach to school improvement has been recognised internationally. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

*The quality of the systemic approach to school improvement in Victoria has been excellent since the Blueprint was published by the Government in 2003. The creation of a clear and persuasive, research-based school improvement, professional learning and leadership development culture, articulated through a common language, reflects clarity of focus.<sup>1</sup>*

Much has been achieved since the introduction of the November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools*

- At a national level, the performance of Victorian students is strong and we lead in critical national reform areas
  - our primary students perform well against national benchmarks
  - early years reading is now at very high levels
  - more students are completing Year 12 or its equivalent
  - by international standards, Victorian students are highly connected to their school
- School programs and practices better reflect contemporary knowledge about effective teaching and learning. A new world class curriculum framework, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), has been introduced into every school. Together with new assessment guidelines and principles for quality teaching practice, the VELS assists schools to focus on what is important to learn and how learning should occur, as well as how it should be assessed and reported
- There has been a \$1.9 billion commitment to the *Victorian Schools Plan*, under which every Victorian government school will be rebuilt or modernised over a ten year period. The *Building Futures* policy directly links this record investment in educational facilities with improved educational provision, and will create the physical spaces where 21st century learning can occur



<sup>1</sup> Matthews, P., Moorman, H. & Nusche, D. (2007). *School leadership development strategies: Building leadership capacity in Victoria, Australia*. OECD, Paris, p. 28.

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## **Key achievements in school education**

- Regeneration projects are transforming education in many areas of Victoria already. These projects present an opportunity to reform educational provision in a locality, with state-of-the-art facilities and innovative, high quality educational programs, optimal use of ICT for teaching and the latest, proven approaches to teaching and learning. These projects will be expanded over the next five years to enable communities across Victoria to share in the benefits
- A new student report card gives parents clearer information about their child's progress. It includes simple, easy-to-understand explanations of progress, what the school will do to help each child's development, and advice on what parents can do to assist
- A new School Accountability and Improvement Framework supports and streamlines school improvement activity, with clearer reporting to the community on student outcomes. Greater use of their performance data has also improved schools' capacity to decide where to focus their improvement effort. This has been strongly supported by the Effective Schools Model, which provides a common language and an evidence-based framework to drive improvement in every school
- A new parent opinion survey collects and analyses feedback from over 55,000 parents every year
- All government schools are working towards a performance and development culture, with 656 schools already accredited. These schools have improvement rates up 10 per cent on 2002 in key areas such as professional growth and supportive leadership
- Over 3,000 principals, assistant principals, aspirant leaders and school leadership teams have undertaken professional development to increase their leadership capability. More than 2,400 teachers have undertaken professional learning leave that has improved classroom practice
- A new resourcing model, the Student Resource Package, allocates funds to schools in a way that more closely reflects costs and student needs
- There has been a significant expansion of program options for young people in the post-compulsory years, within and in addition to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), to ensure our diverse range of students can access programs relevant to their learning needs. This includes the introduction of the vocationally oriented Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which had over 12,000 enrolments in 2006
- We are introducing into every government school the Ultranet, an intuitive, student-centred electronic learning environment that connects students, teachers and parents within the one platform. The Ultranet will, among other things, enable parents to view their child's school records, teachers to plan curriculum, and students to collaborate with their teachers and other students, online. It will bring together the key processes involved in the day-to-day running of a school and a classroom, and become an indispensable part of school practice and culture.

## Objectives: what we aspire to achieve

International experts consider Victoria's education system to be high performing. However, to be among the world's best, we need to do more, based on a clear view of where improvement is needed. We will not rest until every Victorian child in every Victorian school has access to the best possible learning and education opportunities and outcomes. And we are not there yet.

In fact, this next stage of reform is guided by a very real understanding that we still have significant gaps in performance in some regions, in some areas, and within some schools. We know that some groups of students do not find clear pathways to further education, training and employment. We must improve performance for all students, while addressing the gaps between groups of students.

Our objectives apply to all Victorian students, in government and non-government schools alike. We recognise, however, that with two-thirds of students in government schools, major improvements will not be possible without a strong, high performing government school system.

### **Building on the November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* reforms, our objectives for this next phase of reform are to**

- Equip all young people with the skills and capabilities they will need for economic, social and cultural success in the 21st century
- Provide all young people with productive post-school pathways and the capabilities they need to become lifelong learners
- Enhance public confidence in a world class school education system for all young Victorians that has a strong and vibrant government school system at its core
- Reduce the effects of disadvantage on early childhood and education outcomes.

### **The next phase of reform will focus on three key areas**

Figure 1 below provides the framework for the next phase of reform, which focuses on three key areas.

1. System development and reform – creating a culture of excellence that delivers results in all schools for all students
2. Workforce reforms – focusing on developing teachers and school leaders and attracting and rewarding the best people so we have the best people doing the right things
3. Strengthening parent and community partnerships so we all maximise our contribution and opportunities to improve education outcomes.

**Figure 1.**  
**Conceptual framework for early childhood and school education reform**



We will build on the achievements of the last four years to accelerate reform in all classrooms, in all schools and across the whole system to lift student performance. Our commitment to parents, students and the community is that the vision of excellence in education will be vigorously pursued.

# 1. System development and reform – creating a culture of excellence

The November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* established a vision for an excellent government school system that does not settle 'for a school system with some excellent schools in it'. Our intent now is a statewide system in both government and non-government schools that reflects a culture of excellence for every student and every teacher in every learning situation. Twenty-first century learning demands excellence at all levels of the system and every school must be challenged and supported to achieve it.

This goal is inextricably linked with a performance culture; one that is measurable, based on clear standards, strong accountabilities and a collective commitment to action. As Richard Elmore observed about the Victorian approach since 2003

*It is not about making schools more accountable for its own sake. It is about using accountability as a mechanism to support and improve practice. It is not about telling people in the field what to do. It is about setting overall expectations for performance and quality and putting the resources and supports behind those expectations.<sup>2</sup>*

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework has provided a simplified approach to school planning, with a greater focus on student outcomes and clearer accountability. This has been confirmed by the Victorian Auditor-General as well as the OECD and international experts

*The good news is that Victoria, because of the thoughtful design of its improvement strategy, is on the leading edge of policy and practice in the world. There are few improvement strategies close to or as well developed, and probably none that are focused with such depth and complexity on the basic human capital problems associated with school improvement at scale.<sup>3</sup>*

Building on achievements to date, the next stage of reform is clear. While many schools are high performing, there are many that could do better. In 2007 the Victorian Auditor-General concluded that

*Although a large proportion of schools provide high standards of education, there is a high concentration of poor outcomes in some schools and some regions.<sup>4</sup>*

Research tells us that improving student learning outcomes and embedding accountability structures takes time. Cultures and behaviours take many years of support before work practices graduate from 'premeditated and designed' to 'spontaneous

and natural' ways of working. It is with this long-term journey in mind that the next stage of reform focuses on sustainable improvement in the system.

A key asset of the government school system is the system itself. With its mass of people, physical infrastructure and relationships, we can achieve extraordinary results. A strong performance culture implies a coherent set of values across the system, supported by robust structures, resources and interventions to enable the system to recognise and capitalise on excellence. The next phase of reform reflects this philosophy and focuses on three key areas

1. Ensuring every child makes good progress
2. Improving transitions to and from school
3. Establishing clear expectations and providing greater support for all schools.

Every student is unique. We must strengthen our focus on the needs and progress of each individual and provide the teaching and learning experiences that will allow each student to reach their potential. This will require better data and understanding of the needs of the diverse range of students that are found in Victorian classrooms.

Parents rightfully have high expectations that the schools they choose for their children will ensure all students are supported to achieve their best, irrespective of cultural background, location or school sector.

Government, in turn, has a responsibility to assure the quality of education delivered in Victorian schools. In Victoria, the non-government school sector educates some 35 per cent of all students. Many non-government schools are rightfully proud of their success; however, as in the government school system, some could be better supported to improve student outcomes.

We must collaborate with the non-government sector and the Commonwealth Government, particularly in areas of high need and low performance, to ensure a clear focus on improving student outcomes. This collaboration will extend both opportunity and responsibility, at a system and local level, and may include more support through greater access to government resources, better information to parents on student progress and outcomes, and stronger accountability for outcomes.

2 Elmore, R.F. (2007) *Educational Improvement in Victoria*, published in *From the Deputy Secretary OGSSE*, No. 1, 5 February 2008, DEECD.

3 Matthews, P., Moorman, H. & Nusche, D., *ibid.*, p. 31.

4 Victorian Auditor-General (2007), *Improving Our Schools: Monitoring and Support*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Melbourne, p. 9.

Transitions to and from school are increasingly complex. Improvements in early childhood services will improve transitions to school, as children will be better prepared to learn, and schools will have better information on the development of individual children. Schools face a major challenge in ensuring all their students have productive post-school pathways, and will require strong partnerships with other education and training providers, employers and communities to make this a reality.

Finally, the next phase of reform will focus on establishing a performance culture for all schools, through clear standards, strong accountabilities and a collective commitment to take action where it is needed. For the vast majority of schools that are performing well, this means access to expert advice and resources to support continuous improvement. At a system level, high performing schools will continue to share their knowledge and expertise. Underperformance in schools must be addressed.

Consistently underperforming schools require stronger interventions, which could include mentoring from high performing schools or additional professional development. Resources and incentives will be targeted to the areas where they are needed most and regional offices will continue their key role in school improvement. Where necessary, they will be supported to intervene urgently to ensure that all schools can improve and all students receive a high quality education and a genuine opportunity to succeed.

School networks and high performing schools will also play a greater role supporting underperforming schools by sharing resources and expertise and fostering innovation.

These arrangements must be transparent so that all schools understand them and parents and communities know what they can expect from government schools and how they will produce the best possible outcomes for their children.

## What are we proposing to do?

### **1. Ensure every child makes good progress**

The expectation that all students can meet high standards must drive teaching and learning. The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), combined with the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) in the senior secondary years, represent a world class modern curriculum that can prepare our young people for work and life in the 21st century. The challenge is to support schools and teachers to provide each individual student with the benefits of this curriculum. To strengthen implementation of the VELs and to improve teaching and learning overall, we propose to

- Work with other jurisdictions to ensure any national curriculum reflects the best aspects of Victoria's existing approach and benefits from the best all jurisdictions have to offer
- Develop detailed strategies in the priority areas of maths, science and languages
- Strengthen the capacity of schools to measure and improve progress of individuals and cohorts of students, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- Develop better data to allow the progress of individual students to be measured and reported, and form the basis of accountability throughout the system.

### **2. Improve transitions to and from school**

The creation of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development creates a major opportunity to improve transitions to school. At the same time, work must continue to improve transitions from school for all young Victorians.

To improve these transitions we propose to do the following

- Take a more consistent approach to learning and development for 0–8 year olds through
  - a new learning and development framework for children aged 0–8 and linked to existing frameworks
  - consistent approaches to assessment on school entry and in the early years of school, to provide the most useful picture of children's progress

## **System development and reform – creating a culture of excellence**

- developing transition plans for all children starting school
- maintaining and sharing information, beginning at a child's entry into early childhood services, by developing consistent data systems across early childhood services and schools
- Develop a seamless system of support services for children aged 0-18 and their families through improved coordination and use of early childhood support staff and the non-teaching/allied health school workforce, including
  - coordinated Koorie supports, including a consistent approach to services and family assistance from birth to adulthood
  - a consistent approach to support for children with a disability
- Improve pathways and transitions from school including
  - develop and promote packages of VCE and/or VCAL subjects that provide clear pathways into specific industries and the vocational education and training (VET) sector
  - expand school responsibility for young people's pathways until they complete Year 12 or equivalent or turn 19.

### **3. Increase expectations and provide greater support for government schools**

Effective accountability involves a tailored approach to intervention that provides support where needed, and intervenes more heavily as a school's performance and capacity to improve declines. To support government schools to improve, we propose to

- Refine the accountability system to provide
  - stronger interventions and more intensive monitoring in underperforming schools
  - greater incentives and responsibilities for high performing schools
  - monitoring and incentives to ensure that adequately performing schools are encouraged to improve
- Ensure that school networks focus on school improvement, and that regional offices support them to carry out this task
- Articulate clear standards for what students and parents can expect from all government schools, including access in their school, or in partnership with other schools or providers, to the full range of offerings that comprise a contemporary curriculum

- Provide information that allows parents to assess school performance against these standards.

### **4. Establish clearer expectations and provide greater support for non-government schools**

There is a clear opportunity for collaboration between the government and non-government school sectors to improve student outcomes, particularly in areas of high need and low performance. This can encompass invitations to take advantage of opportunities available within the government school sector, as well as more transparent accountability requirements and information. To support this collaboration, we propose to work with the non-government school sector and the Commonwealth Government to

- Provide more support, through better access to government resources, which may include curriculum materials, professional learning opportunities, facilities and additional funding
- Refine the accountability system for non-government schools to provide clearer expectations and standards for improvement in student outcomes at a system level
- Work with non-government schools to provide parents and students with better information about student progress and outcomes at a local level.

## Focus questions:

- 1. Is the focus of the reform proposals to ensure every child makes good progress right? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**
- 2. Is the focus of the reform proposals to improve transition to and from schools right? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**
- 3. Do you agree with our reform proposals to increase expectations and provide greater support for government schools? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**
- 4. Do you agree with our reform proposals to establish clearer expectations and provide greater support for non-government schools? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**

## **2. Workforce reform – the best people doing the right things**

Good teaching is critical to improving student outcomes. Research indicates that, after student-related factors such as socioeconomic and cultural background, teaching quality has the greatest impact on how much students learn, accounting for 20 to 30 per cent of the variation in student scores. Research also confirms the critical role of school leaders in fostering quality teaching. An effective principal will foster a culture of high expectations, and strive for continuous improvement.

The recent McKinsey investigation into the characteristics of the top performing education systems put workforce quality at the core of their success and noted that

*school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence in learning.*<sup>5</sup>

The best systems

- Get the right people to become teachers
- Develop these people into effective instructors
- Put in place systems to ensure every child succeeds.

The November 2003 *Blueprint for Government Schools* included three flagship strategies designed to improve the quality of the workforce to enhance the teaching and learning relationship.

Much has been achieved through these strategies including a shift from a compliance approach to a focus on learning and continuous improvement; a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between organisational health and improved school performance; and positive feedback from participants in leadership development and teacher professional leave initiatives.

To ensure a highly capable education workforce in the future, we must attract and retain the best people. They must be strongly accountable for their professional practice and their students' progress and have clear actions to support performance improvement.

Workforce reforms need to be pursued

- In the classroom, through clear expectations of teachers, models and tools to improve student outcomes
- In schools, through clear performance standards, including interventions where appropriate
- Across the system, through strategies to attract, recruit and retain quality teachers and leaders.

The next phase of reform must build on past achievements and further improve the knowledge, skills and practice of the workforce. To an extent, the issues facing us in workforce development face every State in Australia and indeed, many countries around the world. A global skills shortage together with the lowest unemployment rate in Australia for over three decades means many careers and professions are facing critical shortages, and education is no different.

Nearly 40 per cent of the Victorian teaching workforce is aged 50 years and over and there are shortages of secondary teachers in key subject areas including maths, science and technology and languages other than English. Location is also an issue, with some rural areas having difficulty attracting casual relief teachers.

The focus of our reform is on two key areas

1. Further developing teachers and school leaders
2. Attracting and rewarding the best people.

Teachers deserve a clearly articulated career path, including an instructional model that outlines developmental levels, creates a common language and shared practice, and supports teachers in ongoing professional learning to move from novice to expert practitioners. They should be able to focus on teaching. It is critical to reward high performing teachers, both in recognition and performance-based reward.

We need to improve our succession planning so teachers know where they are headed and we can identify and prepare the next generation of school principals and leaders. And by making teachers more accountable for their students' outcomes, we can more easily encourage good teachers to remain in the profession and assist disengaged teachers to leave.

Improving our workforce will directly improve the learning outcomes for Victorian children, and we are committed to supporting every teacher in their quest to develop resilient, knowledgeable and articulate individuals of the future.

5. Barber, M. & Mourshed, M. (2007). *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*. McKinsey & Company, London.

## Workforce reform – the best people doing the right things

What are we  
proposing to do?

### 5. Further develop teachers and school leaders

Victoria has a successful and flexible system for teacher professional learning. This approach will continue. Emerging areas we propose to focus on are

- Leadership, through the development and accreditation of principals and school leaders
- Consistently high quality teaching, by developing an instructional model to ensure excellence in teaching and learning, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy, where teachers will work in teams to improve outcomes in these critical foundational skills
- Skilling teachers and supporting schools to use technology such as the Ultranet effectively and realise its potential to improve and share teaching practice across the system
- Creating opportunities for joint professional learning between primary schools and children's services.

### 6. Attract and reward the best people

To consistently improve student outcomes, the best people must be attracted to teaching, and encouraged to improve once they are teaching. To achieve this, we propose to

- Work with universities to ensure teacher training programs provide a solid foundation for their graduates to succeed and grow as teachers
- Develop a scheme to encourage high performing graduates from other fields to enter teaching, modelled on the UK's *Teach First* and the USA's *Teach for America* programs
- Find the best ways to motivate and reward high performing teachers and school leaders
- Provide incentives, including higher salaries, for the best teachers and school leaders to work in those schools where they are needed most
- Support teachers who have become disengaged to leave the profession, after appropriate opportunities and support have been provided to lift teaching practice
- Develop models that make best use of the skills teachers bring to their work, including through better use of non-teaching staff.

Focus questions:

5. **Is the focus of the reform proposals to further develop teachers and school leaders right? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**
6. **Do you agree with our reform proposals to attract and reward the best people? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**



### **3. Partnerships with parents and communities – partnerships for learning**

Across the world, there is increasing recognition of the importance of building partnerships between schools, families and communities to enhance student learning, values and aspirations.

*When schools, family and community work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more.<sup>6</sup>*

Effective partnerships between schools, families and local communities can help smooth transition points and improve student outcomes. This is particularly so for schools where low socioeconomic background and other forms of disadvantage continue to have a negative impact on student outcomes and perpetuate gaps in attainment.

In Australia, in 2007, the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments recognised that all schools can benefit from two-way partnerships. They outlined a commitment to

- Engage parents in planning their child's progress through school, provide them with the necessary information to understand and contribute to their child's achievement and to make informed decisions about future learning and employment
- Engage with a wide range of community, business and industry partners to help schools support students in achieving successful pathways for prosperous and fulfilling lives.

For the Victorian school system, this means

- At the classroom level, engaging parents in their child's learning
- At the school level, building the capacity of school leaders to establish strong relationships with families and communities
- At the system level, developing the partnership frameworks and infrastructure to enable schools to form productive, sustainable partnerships with their communities
- At the community level, working out ways communities and schools can best form meaningful, sustainable partnerships.

Providing teachers, principals and regional offices with the tools, resources and infrastructure to enable them to build successful, sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships with parents, families and local communities will require action in two key areas

1. Partnerships with parents and families
2. Making the best use of school and community resources.

Parents and other family members have a major influence on their child's education and should be actively involved. Their influence is also crucial in building social skills and capabilities at all stages of a child's development.

There has traditionally been a strong focus on supporting and valuing the role of families in early childhood and the early years of school. To optimise outcomes for children and young people, parents and families must remain engaged throughout a child's schooling and into further education, training and employment; and must recognise that the type of involvement will change as the child develops.

Effective partnerships between schools and community resources, such as early childhood services, local government, health and community services, social networks, businesses and industry, enhance the quality of student support, benefit schools, students and the community. These partnerships can have a significant impact on reducing the effects of disadvantage and improving educational attainment.

Furthermore, business and community organisations such as local government services, social and sporting clubs can provide schools with access to a wealth of resources and opportunities to broaden students' educational experiences. These organisations can give learning real context and relevance. Local businesses, industry and vocational education centres can provide apprenticeships, referral pathways and strategies to engage young people leaving school.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, A. & Goodall, J. (2007). *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement: Do parents know they matter?* University of Warwick, UK.

# **Partnerships with parents and communities – partnerships for learning**

Schools are also a major community asset. Sharing facilities between schools and community partners maximises the use of infrastructure; makes services more accessible to parents, families and community members; and enables schools to offer richer learning opportunities. Examples include the joint use of school and community facilities, co-locating services like kindergartens and schools and extending school opening hours so the community can use resources like performing arts centres and sporting fields.

With the right partnership frameworks in place, primary schools can become children's hubs and secondary schools can act as community hubs. These partnerships can enable schools, local services, parents, families and other members of the community to benefit mutually from each other's resources, skills and expertise.

Strong partnerships already exist. Examples include *ChildFIRST*, *Best Start*, Local Learning and Employment Networks and a range of other important and effective locally developed partnerships. The challenge is to make the good practice that exists the standard statewide.

## What are we proposing to do?

### **7. Partner with parents and families**

All schools engage with parents, and each school will need to adapt its work in this area to suit its own school community. To assist schools in this, we propose to

- Ensure schools are welcoming and encourage active parental involvement
- Use the immense potential of the Ultranet to provide parents with detailed, up-to-date information on their children's learning, and support schools to implement it effectively
- Provide specific guidance to families on how they can support their child's learning and development at all ages, in formats that are most useful to families.

### **8. Mobilise community resources**

Schools have the potential to benefit greatly from partnerships with other groups in the community, and to provide a wider community benefit. To further improve the way this is done, we propose to

- Develop wider networks to offer post-compulsory education, training and employment options through
  - closer links between Local Learning and Employment Networks and DEECD regional offices, to ensure all parties are working together in agreed ways
  - brokering relationships between schools and the large number of businesses seeking partnerships with them
- Develop schools as children's and community hubs, through co-location of services and increased community use of school facilities. Regeneration projects provide particular opportunities to put this into practice
- Encourage stronger links between schools and early childhood services, to make the links developed through programs such as *Best Start* consistently strong across the State.

## Focus questions:

- 7. Is the focus of the reform proposals to better partner with parents and families right? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**
- 8. Do you agree with our reform proposals to utilise and mobilise community resources? Are there other reform proposals we should consider?**

## **The future**

A robust education system that offers real choice to Victorian parents is critical. Improving the education outcomes for Victorian children is a challenge we embrace and are motivated by because we know how important it is to our future as a productive and enriched community.

Much has already been achieved on the journey of improvement – but there has never been a better time to increase our efforts, place high expectations on ourselves and specifically reject the status quo.

This Government has committed record levels of funding and established an aggressive school improvement program because it knows the importance of getting the foundations right. But we don't just want to lead the way in Victoria – we want to continue to be recognised by our international peers for our reform agenda and the specific outcomes it generates for our students.

We will continue to deliver funding and resources so we can develop the world class system to which we all aspire. We will work together with you, our partners, teachers and parents, to establish the best outcomes for our children. And we will continue to be rigorous in our approach to assess the data, monitor our progress and deliver the culture of excellence our children and workforce deserve.

There is a lot to be proud of in the Victorian school system. We must continue to celebrate our achievements, and to celebrate the wonderful well-rounded individuals our system develops every day. But we must also continue to set our sights high.

Our collective promise should be to do all we can to ensure every Victorian child has the opportunity to be the best they can be. We are all participants in the journey to improve our school education system, and your comments are a valuable part of this process.

## **How to contribute your views**

### 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 comments 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.



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