

# Chapter 9

## VICTORIA

### Government sector

At the end of a recent visit to Victorian schools and institutes an overseas guest observed that across the State education system, at all levels, action was consistently assessed against whether it would improve student learning. This is powerful evidence that Victorian government schools are on track to deliver against community expectations of world-class education and training.

### The structure and context of schooling

Education became compulsory for all Victorian children aged six to fifteen when the *Education Act 1897* was passed. The Act set out a course of free, compulsory and secular instruction, covering subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, drill and needlework. The Education Department was established on 1 January 1873.

In 1910, a further education act authorised the establishment of higher elementary schools and district high schools, continuation classes, preparatory trade classes, trade schools and technical schools. The secondary system was founded.

The Department of Education, in its current form, was established in October 1992.

In terms of school education, the Department's core business is to provide high-quality education and training to students in the compulsory years of schools (P-10) and participating in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) (Years 11 and 12).

Victorian government schools provided quality education for around two thirds of all school students in Victoria at 1,635 locations throughout the state. In February 1999 a total of 529,072 full time equivalent students were enrolled in government schools, an increase of 3,074 students on 1998.

**Table 9.1 Number of government schools and students, February**

	1998		1999	
	<i>students</i>	<i>schools</i>	<i>students</i>	<i>schools</i>
Primary	303,752	1,253	306,215	1,243
Secondary	216,355	309	216,369	309
Special	5,145	81	5,413	80
Language	745	3	1,073	3
Total	525,998	1,646	529,072	1,635

Source: DEET February school census

In 1998-99 the Department of Education budget for its three key service delivery areas (school education, tertiary education and training, and strategic policy advice, portfolio-wide and Ministerial services) was \$4,991 million.

### Priority objectives

Victoria's focus on improved student learning linked a wide range of activity across the Department during the year.

Targets were set to deliver:

- high standards of literacy and numeracy
- a skilled workforce able to meet the emerging needs of the economy
- socially and culturally aware citizens
- innovative information technology and multimedia
- improved participation and performance in science and technology education
- continuous improvement in service quality.

### Significant developments

#### High standards of literacy and numeracy

Research in 29 Victorian primary schools over three years identified the characteristics of the multi-faceted

intervention required to deliver universal student success against literacy standards in the first three years of school. In response, an additional \$50 million was provided to all primary schools from the beginning of the 1999 school year to enable them to deliver a specifically developed classroom program and additional assistance to students who need it. Funds also supported increased parent participation in children's learning and training for teachers delivering the *Early Years* literacy program.

The major elements of the Early Years Literacy program are:

- the structured classroom program
- provision of additional assistance for students who require it
- parent participation
- professional development for teachers.

By the end of 1999, all but one of the 1,243 primary schools and 81 per cent of specialist schools in Victoria had made a commitment to implement the Early Years Literacy program in their Years P-2 classes.

At the school level this commitment was given practical effect through developments that included implementation of state-wide standards, accreditation of Early Years trainers, expansion of the Reading Recovery program, introduction of the Prep entry assessment procedure and strengthening of parent participation.

Schools undertook to meet state-wide minimum standards for reading in Years P-2. Baseline data, in the form of reading accuracy of reading recovery text levels, was collected from approximately half of all primary schools at the end of 1998. The data collection was repeated at the end of 1999. The result was that the reading ability of students was better in 1999 than in 1998 for all three year levels (Prep, Year 1 and 2).

Around 1,000 additional teachers were employed by the beginning of the 1999 school year. The recruitment process targeted new graduates, with the result that nearly 500 primary schools began the year with recently graduated staff. These new recruits injected energy and enthusiasm into schools, and their numbers contributed to improved teacher-student ratios.

During the year action-research began in 28 government schools to develop programs that will lift numeracy learning to the same high standards as literacy.

Higher literacy and numeracy standards were also key targets of the Middle Years Research and Development project.

## **A skilled workforce**

In 1999, long-term investment in workforce skills and structured workplace learning increased with further substantial growth in VET (vocational education and training) in Schools enrolments and the number of part-time apprenticeships and traineeships for school students. The latter increased substantially to 596 by June 1999, while VET in Schools enrolments increased from 8,813 in 1998 to just under 10,390 in 1999. The number of accredited VET programs expanded from 23 in 1998 to 25, with vocational education playing an increasingly important role in the revised Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

## **Socially and culturally aware citizens**

Schools maintained a strong commitment to programs and activities that prepare students for future roles as active citizens and community leaders. More than 3,500 teachers participated, for example, in local and regional professional development activities to support the civics and citizenship program launched in 1998.

A Student Leadership project was also established, aiming to promote community service and youth leadership. Regional student leadership committees were established and new Student Leadership Excellence awards were launched with the support of the Education Trust Victoria.

The practical and popular Victorian Youth Development Program, which enables schools to establish partnerships with one of 15 major community organisations, continued its steady expansion during the year. Introduced initially in 28 secondary schools in 1997, in 1999, more than 3,000 students had the chance to participate in a variety of community service activities while undergoing personal development in areas such as leadership, self-discipline, teamwork and responsibility.

## **Information technology and multimedia**

Victoria continued to show leadership in ensuring education tapped the best available technology, training and expertise to support improved teaching and learning. Victorian government school education is now the largest information technology user in Australia. School computer-student ratios are on track to reach the June 2000 target of 1:5. Approximately 40,000 emails a day are delivered across the department's system, and around seven million hits were recorded on the Internet by school users

every day. From May 1999, each student could be provided with an individual Internet account, email account and personal homepage.

For teachers, delivery of the first 12,150 notebook computers provided a major impetus to professional development, and the capacity to maximise information and communications technology potential in classroom teaching. The five-year program to provide all teachers and principals with a notebook computer involves the second largest contract of its type in the world. Linked professional development programs enabled nearly 12,000 teachers and school leaders to enhance their learning technologies skills.

## Science and technology education

The department, through its science, engineering and technology strategy, SET for Success, recognises that performance in these domains will be a key factor in determining our community's future prosperity and quality of life. SET for Success extends across all education sectors from primary to tertiary education. Initiatives have been developed to increase student interest, equip teachers with the required level of knowledge and expertise and deliver the highest possible standards of learning.

Eleven new science projects were established in schools during the year and significant partnerships were established with tertiary institutions, business and industry to raise the profile of science and to encourage young people to pursue science as a career.

## Service quality

Rising demand for education and training, community expectations about high-level performance and continuing pressure on public sector resources mean that education systems worldwide are striving to improve service quality within limited resources.

Clear standards for learning, benchmarked against the best education and training systems in the world, and against which student progress can be assessed, are central to long-term efforts to improve systemwide performance.

In schools, 24 VCE study designs were revised for implementation in 2000 and graded assessment of selected VET units was trialled to further enhance the status of VET in the VCE. The revision of the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) for years Prep–10 was completed and the document was disseminated for widespread consultation. The revised framework takes account of the renewed interest

in mathematics and science, a greater interest in literacy and numeracy, and civics and new learning technologies. It is scheduled for release to schools in February 2000.

While primary responsibility for assessing and reporting student progress and performance rests with teachers, statewide testing for years 3 and 5 students provides important additional information about how students are performing against the CSF. The 1999 Learning Assessment Project test results will be compared with the results of similar tests in other States and Territories against the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Student progress continued to be reported twice yearly to parents, and schools reported their performance on a range of measures as part of the department's school accountability requirements.

Across the department and in a significant number of schools, service improvement was addressed through a wide range of projects using the Australian Quality Council's Business Excellence framework.

## Commonwealth-funded capital projects

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$51.126 million towards capital projects to the Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria.

Of the 151 capital projects funded by the Commonwealth, 55 projects were completed both physically and financially during 1999. The most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided in both primary and secondary schools were the upgrading and/or provision of general purpose classrooms, library facilities, technology facilities, staff administration facilities and the refurbishment or upgrading of capital infrastructure.

## Catholic sector

### Overview

Catholic education is based on Christian principles and practices, is holistic in nature and seeks to:

- focus on the development of the whole person – spiritual, moral, intellectual and social
- pursue uncompromising respect for the dignity and rights of the individual
- promote the Catholic community of Faith

- ensure a just environment in which every student has access to the best quality learning
- foster cooperation, engagement and participation in the wider community.

## Structure

Enrolments in Catholic schools represent approximately 23 per cent of the total student population in Victoria.

These students receive their education through the 383 primary, 91 secondary, 11 combined primary–secondary and six special schools. In 1999, these 491 schools provided, in aggregate, places for 178,751 students.

Catholic primary schools are established and operated by parishes. Secondary schools operate under the governance of a particular religious order, or of a parish or group of parishes or a diocese. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) is the overarching body that provides the channel for rationalisation and coordination of educational resources, policies and strategies throughout the State. It is a forum for decision-making by consensus that is sensitive to the rights and needs of each diocese, the religious orders and individual school communities. The State is divided into four dioceses and the Bishop in each diocese assists the good running of schools through his Catholic Education Office (CEO). Schools have a high degree of autonomy, and principals and staff are appointed locally in accordance with guidelines produced by the CECV and diocesan CEOs.

Funds for recurrent and everyday expenses of schools are derived from three sources: Commonwealth government, State government and private fees and charges. The CECV received Commonwealth and State grants and distributed these funds according to the level of need in each school. This level of need is determined through the application of a socioeconomic index that takes into account each school's expected amount of locally raised income.

## Priority objectives

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria has the following objectives for schooling:

- to provide an education that is consistent with the beliefs and values of the Catholic Church
- to provide a comprehensive curriculum which will enable each student to achieve his or her full academic potential in the eight key learning areas

- to develop in each student social, moral and ethical skills and attitudes that will enable them to be exemplary members of the community and workforce
- to ensure that pastoral care policies and practices respond to the social and cultural diversity of its members, recognise fundamental freedom and rights and foster self-discipline and the values of mutual respect, responsibility and service within the community
- to recognise the positive and invaluable contribution made by teachers and to maximise their competence, efficiency, confidence and morale through a broad range of professional development opportunities and network support structures
- to fully participate in achieving government priorities and objectives for schooling, including the basic objectives for schooling enunciated by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in the Hobart Declaration of 1989
- to improve the participation and achievement of students at an educational disadvantage through socioeconomic circumstances, disability, Aboriginality, ethnicity or geographical isolation
- to develop further equal opportunity and affirmative action strategies
- to be proactive in keeping abreast of new and emerging educational practices and technical advances.

## Specific objectives

Specific objectives for the Catholic sector in 1999 were to:

- provide ongoing provision of a broad range of professional development opportunities to assist teachers in their classroom, organisational and leadership roles. Priority was given to religious education and faith development, Catholic leadership, curriculum and teaching (including literacy and numeracy), learning technologies in the classroom, special education, pastoral care, Indigenous perspectives, civic and citizenship and languages other than English
- utilise curriculum and key learning area network structures for effective delivery of professional development programs and for the dissemination of materials and resources
- further develop the secondary schools professional development coordinator's network as a means of

improving the quality of professional development opportunities available to teachers

- utilise the Framework for Accredited Teacher Professional Development as a means of supporting teachers' career development by providing programs that assist teachers to plan their professional and career goals
- continue the implementation of the Literacy Advance Strategy through the Children's Literacy Success Strategy, the Literacy Advance Research Project, and the refinement of the Literacy Advance Secondary Strategy
- plan and assist in the delivery of Commonwealth specific-purpose programs such as literacy, languages, school to work and civics and citizenship
- develop a coordinated response for the effective utilisation of funds provided for prevention and intervention programs related to youth suicide
- support the effective use of learning technologies in schools and classrooms through the provision of infrastructure and resources
- participate in the trialling of the Victorian Student Achievement Monitor
- assist each school to develop programs and structures which cater for the needs of all students
- improve data collections to facilitate the provision of outcomes information in respect of accountability requirements
- ensure that funds received from governments are distributed on a needs basis.

## Significant developments

### Vocational education and training in schools

With the assistance of Commonwealth programs, Catholic schools have responded to changing economic and social demands and embraced a new agenda for post-compulsory schooling. Working in partnership with training providers, industry groups and regional planning groups, Catholic schools have been able to provide a range of alternative pathways for the large number of students who proceed directly to further training and/or to the labour market. These pathways have been instrumental in reducing the

number of students that were at risk of not completing their secondary education.

In 1999, the CECV sponsored, either solely or in conjunction with the Department of Education, several projects to stimulate interest in particular industries providing potential employment and training opportunities. The projects involved awareness-raising and promotion for parents, students and employers; work placement and site visits. They included:

- Engineering in the north-west of Melbourne
- Engineering in the eastern area of Melbourne
- Furnishing in outer eastern Melbourne
- Viticulture in the Mornington Peninsula
- Aquaculture in Gippsland
- Horticulture (flower growing) in the Kyneton area
- VET in Schools Retail Project, run by the Australian Retailers Association.

The CECV also entered into a joint venture with the Australian Enterprise Education Centre and initiated a pilot Industry Participation for Teachers program to foster tangible involvement of specific industry groups in the development of VET programs in schools. This program involved teams of teachers working on relevant projects in participating industry settings over a ten-week period. The major objectives for the program were:

- to enable teachers to gain relevant and current industry experience
- for industry personnel to spend periods of time in a school setting to assist in VET in Schools program delivery strategic planning, project management and school-industry partnerships.

Participating schools and industries in the 1999 pilot model are spread throughout the State in areas of Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Echuca and Mildura.

Outcomes are encouraging and it is expected that the model, with some enhancements, will be continued in 2000.

### Technology for Catholic Schools

The Technology for Catholic Schools project, designed to provide greater access to digital resources for teachers and students, was implemented in 1999. All 491 Catholic primary and secondary schools in Victoria participated in the project, which:

- established a Virtual Private Network (VPN)

- provided a hardware pack for primary school administration
- provided professional development for each principal and a key teacher to assist them in the development of a Learning Technology Plan for their school
- arranged for a technical audit of current infrastructure as part of the Learning Technology Plan and to detail the specifications for an extended school network
- provided access to bulk purchase arrangements for hardware and network wiring installation and connection.

Considerable benefits will accrue to schools and students through access to a cheaper, faster, safer dedicated connection to the Internet and expanded access to digital resources. The VPN now provides an enhanced communication channel for specific interest groups such as principals, curriculum coordinators, subject coordinators and subject teachers. It has also enabled students to communicate electronically across the world. The project consolidates the identification and construction of a wide range of professional development activities to ensure ongoing support is provided to teachers.

## Commonwealth-funded capital projects

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$18.252 million towards capital projects in Victoria for Catholic primary and secondary schools.

Of the 29 capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction and refurbishment of general purpose learning areas and the refurbishment of libraries in primary schools, the construction of general purpose learning areas and refurbishment of science facilities in secondary schools, and the upgrading of administration and staff areas in both primary and secondary schools.

## Independent sector

There was a wide range of objectives stated by independent schools in Victoria. The main themes were:

- the continuing and future development of policies, plans and actions involving literacy and numeracy
- the continuing professional development of all staff members
- an emphasis on the implementation of effective information technology procedures
- the improvement of the quality and quantity of programs to those students with special needs
- the broadening and improvement of the level of pastoral care.

Other objectives included the construction of new buildings, increases in enrolments, reviews of assessment procedures, development of cultural programs, and improvement in communication. Christian schools were concerned with the development of Christian ethics and morals, while others sought closer community relationships.

## Commonwealth-funded capital projects

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$6 million towards capital projects in independent schools in Victoria.

Of the 27 capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the most common type of work undertaken and facilities provided were general learning areas for both primary and secondary, construction and upgrading of library/resource centres for secondary students and establishment and refurbishment of science facilities in new and expanding secondary schools.