Victorian Department of Education Submission

Parliamentary inquiry into the state education system in Victoria

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Education

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1. The Victorian education system

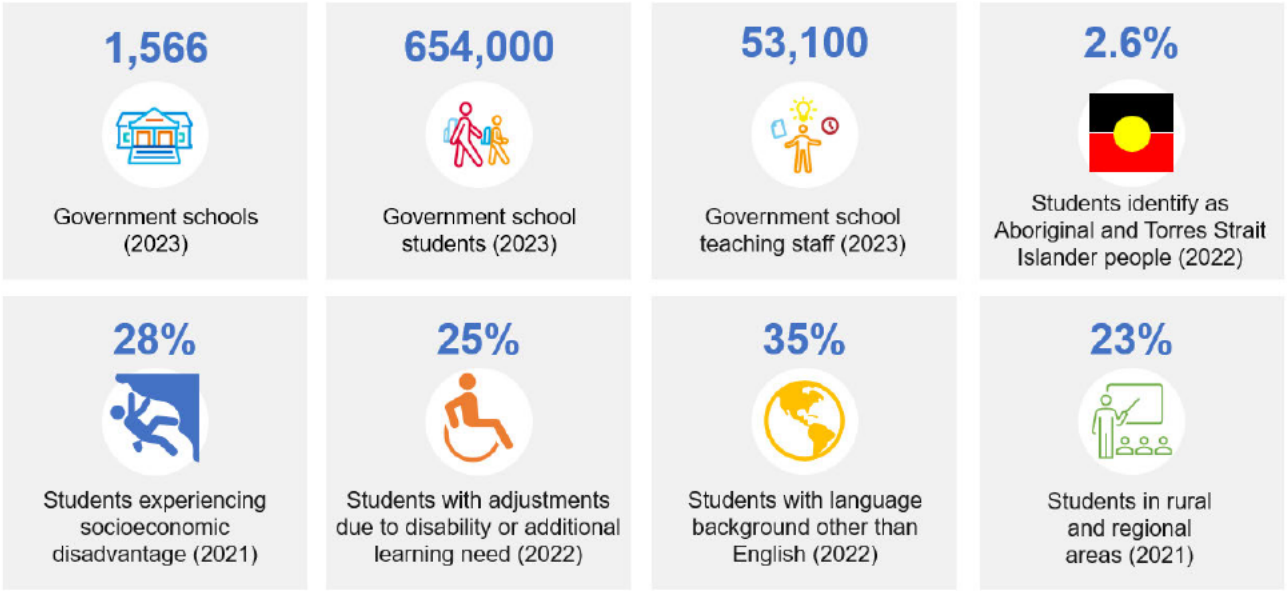
1.1 Overview of the Victorian education system

The Victorian government school system was established 151 years ago. In 1872, Victoria became the first Australian colony, and one of the first places in the world, to provide free, secular and compulsory education for its children.

The statutory obligations concerning the provision of education for school-aged children are set out in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

Victorian government schools and student population

Key figures in government schools



Number of students (FTE) and teachers (headcount) rounded.

The Department of Education (the department) is responsible for 1,566 government schools, including primary, primary-secondary, secondary, special and language schools.[1] Government schools represent 68% of all Victorian schools (Appendix 1, Figure A1.1).

Of Victoria's total student population of 1,033,000 across all sectors, more than 654,000 attend government schools, representing 68% of primary students and 57% of secondary students (Appendix 1, Figure A1.2).[2] The number of students attending government schools has grown 20% since 2012, reflecting Victorian population growth.[3]

Approximately 28%, or 180,000 students, attending government schools experience socioeconomic disadvantage[4]. This is more than double the proportion in non-government schools, a challenge shared by all state and territory education systems. Appendix 1, Figure A1.3 provides a more detailed illustration of the different profile of relative disadvantage and non-disadvantage of students in Victorian government, Catholic and independent schools.

Approximately 2.6% (or 16,500) of full-time students in government schools identify as Koorie students – almost 3 times the proportion in non-government schools.[5]

Other characteristics of students attending government schools include:

- 77% attend school in a major city and 23% attend school in regional and rural Victoria[6]
- 25% (approximately 162,000 students) receive adjustments to their schooling, to support a disability or additional learning need[7]
- 35% (approximately 230,000 students) have a language background other than English, of whom about 156,000 students mainly spoke another language at home. The most common home non-English languages spoken include Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese and Punjabi[8]
- 1% (approximately 4,060 students) are international full fee-paying students, with most students from China, Vietnam, India, Cambodia and Hong Kong.[9]

As of June 2023, the Victorian government teaching service consisted of approximately 85,250 staff (72,750 Full Time Equivalent). This included approximately 53,100 teaching staff, with the remainder comprising of principals and school support staff. Approximately 530 allied health staff were also working in government schools (Appendix 1, Figure A1.4). Chapter 6 provides further information about education and teaching workforces in Victorian government schools.

School registration and minimum standards

Government and non-government Victorian schools must be registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and comply with the Minimum Standards, including Child Safe Standards and other requirements for school registration to obtain and maintain their registration. The VRQA renews government school registration through the school review process.

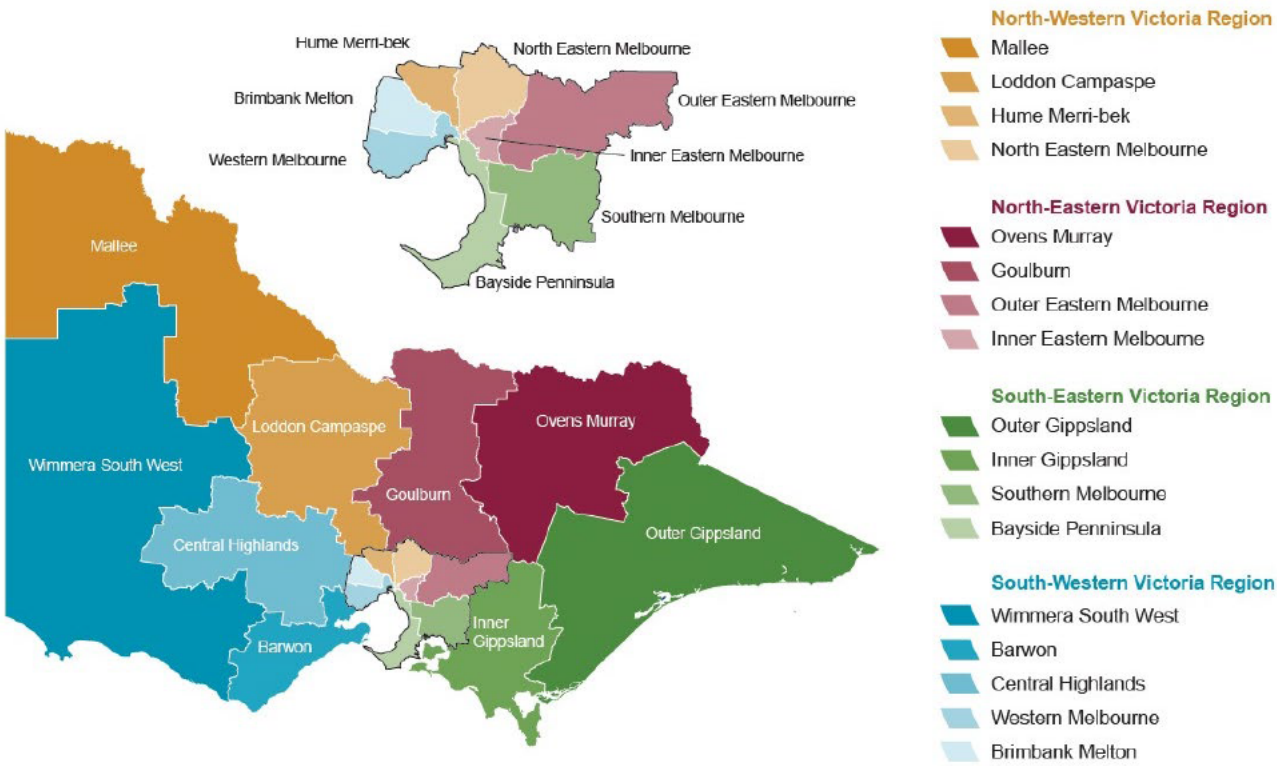
1.2 Administration of government schools

The department has responsibility for government schools under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017.*

Staff in regional and area offices support local schools to deliver education and services to students. Principals ensure that schools operate according to legislative frameworks. Principals lead and administer government schools and are responsible for the delivery of their school's education program, leading staff, managing finances, and providing a child-safe environment.[10]

The department employs a regional model to support education services across Victoria. Under the regional structure, the department manages 4 regions and 17 areas (Figure 1.1),

Figure *1.1 Department of Education's regions and areas*



School councils are established and operate under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* and a constituting Ministerial Order.[11] The principal of the school is the executive officer of their school's school council.[12]

School councils assist the principal to provide efficient governance of the school, make decisions in students' best interests, enhance educational opportunities, and ensure the school complies with its legislative obligations.

1.3 School operations

The department's policy framework for school operations is the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO 2.0).

FISO 2.0 was released in 2021 and builds on the original FISO, which has been the improvement framework for government schools since 2015. FISO 2.0 places both learning and wellbeing at the centre of the school improvement model (Box 1.1). This responds to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and advice from the teaching profession about the important role of schools in supporting student wellbeing.

Box 1.1 Framework for Improving Student Outcomes 2.0

FISO 2.0 defines 2 student outcomes that all schools work towards:

- **Learning**: the ongoing acquisition by students of knowledge, skills and capabilities, including those defined by the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and senior secondary pathways.
- **Wellbeing**: the development of the capabilities necessary to thrive, contribute and respond positively to the challenges and opportunities of life.

The framework identifies the 5 core elements that have the greatest impact on these student outcomes: leadership, assessment, support and resources, engagement and teaching and learning.

As part of the FISO 2.0 cycle, every government school undertakes the following mandated planning and accountability processes:

- **School Review** – every 4 years, panels led by a trained, independent school reviewer examine school performance data and support schools to plan their improvement priorities for the coming 4 years
- **School Strategic Plan (SSP)** – is based on the key directions recommended by the School Review panel. The SSP outlines schools' goals for improving student learning and wellbeing outcomes, targets that measure the student outcomes articulated in these goals and the Key Improvement Strategies (KIS) they will use to achieve them over the coming 4 years
- **Annual Implementation Plan** – operationalises the goals, targets and KIS for implementation in the coming school year
- **Annual Report to the School Community** – each year schools report to their community on a range of key data sets, and these are published annually on the VRQA State Register.

1.4 Statutory authorities

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* establishes 4 statutory bodies to support the development of curriculum, regulation of schools and teachers and professional development for teachers.

The **Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority** (VCAA) the Victorian Curriculum F-10, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) curriculum, including the VCE Vocational Major, and the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC). The VCAA is responsible for the delivery of the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy in Victoria and the administration of the VCE examinations. The VCAA has prepared a submission to the Inquiry.

The **VRQA**, among other functions, regulates school education by registering schools to provide quality schooling (see Section 1.1), accrediting courses and qualifications (including the VCE and VPC) and investigating complaints from the public against schools and other education providers.

The **Victorian Institute of Teaching** regulates the teaching profession to ensure quality teaching and safety for children.[13] This includes legally registering teachers and school leaders to practise, accrediting Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs that prepare early-career teachers for working in Victorian schools, and investigating instances of misconduct, incompetence or lack of fitness to teach, including compliance with Codes of Conduct and Ethics.

The **Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership** (the Academy) was established in 2022 to offers evidence-informed, inspiring professional learning to Victorian school teachers and leaders. The Academy has facilities in Melbourne and 7 regional locations.

1.5 Key organisations

The department works with a range of organisations, including:

- the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, which has a formal partnership with the department, and works to ensure that Victorian schools have high expectations of Koorie students, deliver high-quality education programs and respect Koorie culture
- the Victorian Principals Association, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, and the Principals Association of Specialists Schools as professional associations representing school leaders
- the Australian Principal Federation and the Australian Education Union as industrial organisations
- Parents Victoria, which represents parents of students in Victorian government schools
- the Victorian Student Representative Council, which represents students in Victorian government and non-government schools
- the Country Education Partnership, which advocates for rural and remote education communities.

2. School funding

2.1 Overview of school funding

Funding for Victorian government schools comprises recurrent funding, which provides for the day-to-day operations of schools and the delivery of education, and investment in school infrastructure, including the delivery of new schools and school upgrades (see Chapter 3).

Since 2019, recurrent funding for school education has been guided by the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA). The NSRA sets out 8 national policy initiatives against 3 strategic reform directions that all governments agree to work together on over the course of the agreement.[14]

In December 2022, education ministers agreed in principle to extend the current NSRA for 12 months until 31 December 2024, allowing for the Australian Government Minister for Education's NSRA Expert Panel to conduct the *Review to inform a better and fairer education system*.[15] The NSRA Expert Panel will recommend targets and reforms to be included in the next NSRA to drive improvement in student outcomes.[16] The NSRA Expert Panel's final report is expected to be provided to education ministers by 31 October 2023.

Schooling Resource Standard

The NSRA and associated bilateral funding agreement sets out the contribution of the Victorian and Australian governments to fund Victorian government schools. Calculation of these contributions is made using the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), an estimate of the public funding required to meet the educational needs of students, based on formulas in the *Australian Education Act 2013*.[17]

The SRS formula comprises a different base amount for primary and secondary students, and an additional 6 loadings to provide extra support for student priority cohorts and small and regional schools (Box 2.1). In 2023, the base funding amount is $13,048 for every student in primary school, and $16,397 for every student in secondary school.[18]

Under the NSRA, the Victorian Government contributes more than 70% of SRS funding for government schools and 20% of SRS funding for non-government schools. The Australian Government contributes 20% of SRS funding for Victorian government schools.

Victoria has increased its SRS contribution from 68.02% in 2019 to 70.43% in 2023 (Figure 2.1). The Victorian Government has committed to increase its funding share for government schools to 75% of the SRS by 2028.

Figure 2.1: Victoria's Schooling Resource Standard contribution targets under the current National School Reform Agreement

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Government schools	68.02%	68.42%	68.99%	69.68%	70.43%
Non-government schools	19.76%	19.08%	19.17%	19.94%	20.00%

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Victoria Bilateral Agreement, 10 August 2023.

Box 2.1 – Schooling Resource Standard: needs-based loadings

The SRS comprises a base amount and 6 needs-based loadings. The 6 needs-based loadings in the SRS comprise 4 student-based loadings and 2 school-based loadings.

Student-based loadings:

- *Students with disability loading*: additional funding for students with a disability. This is calculated based on information reported in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on School Students with Disability. The NCCD is an annual collection of information about Australian school students with disability.
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student loading*: additional funding for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student. The loading amount increases as the proportion of Aboriginal students in each school increases.
- *Socio-educational disadvantage loading*: additional funding for each student from a socio-educationally disadvantaged background. This is calculated based on the percentage of students in the lowest 2 quartiles of socio-educational advantage based on the occupational and educational status of parents, as calculated by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).
- *Low English language proficiency loading*: additional funding for students from a language background other than English where at least one parent has completed school education only to Year 9 (or equivalent) or below.

School-based loadings:

- *School size loading*: additional funding for medium, small and very small schools in recognition that they cannot achieve the same efficiencies of scale as a large school.
- *School location loading*: additional funding for schools in regional and remote locations in recognition that it generally costs more to educate students in regional and remote schools than it does for students in city-based schools.[19]

2.2 Recurrent funding for government schools

In 2020–21, $12.9 billion was invested in Victorian government schools for educational services, excluding capital grants.[20] This included $10.81 billion provided by the Victorian Government and $2.1 billion provided by the Australian Government.

Victorian government schools receive most of their allocated funding through the Student Resource Package (SRP) for staffing and locally incurred expenses, such as class materials, cleaning and utilities.[21] Additional Victorian Government funding is provided to Victorian students and schools through state-wide programs, and schools also raise funds through voluntary parent contributions and other local activities.[22]

Funding is grouped into 3 broad categories: student-based funding, school-based funding and targeted initiatives.

1. **Student-based funding** – is the main funding source for all schools and is designed to fund core teaching and learning, leadership, teaching support, professional development,

relief teaching, payroll tax and superannuation costs for schools. Student-based funding comprises 2 components:

   a. *Core student learning allocation* – which accounts for the differing costs associated with levels of learning, types and sizes of schools, rurality and isolation.

   b. *Equity* – which reflects the differing costs associated with additional learning needs including social disadvantage, disability inclusion and English as an Additional Language.

2. **School-based funding** provides funding for school facilities and programs specific to individual schools. School-based funding comprises 2 components:

   a. *School infrastructure* – provides a funding amount based on school facility characteristics and covers items such as cleaning. Capital works are funded separately (see Chapter 3).

   b. *School-specific programs* – provides funding to schools for specific programs which are based on school and student needs. Funding from this category varies across schools.

3. **Funding for targeted Initiatives** funds programs with specific targeted criteria and/or defined lifespans.[23]

Since 2014, funding has increased across the following key areas:

- *Equity*: additional investment in social disadvantage reform starting in 2015, which has reached $374 million in 2022.
- *Inclusion*: additional investment of almost $1.6 billion over 4 years with staged implementation starting in 2021 as part of the transition to new Disability Inclusion funding and support model (see Chapter 5.3).[24]
- *Wellbeing*: additional investment in mental health reforms starting 2022, including $200 million over 4 years for the School Mental Health Fund and Menu and $200 million over 4 years to expand the Mental Health in Primary Schools program (see Chapter 4).[25]

Equity funding

Victorian government schools are funded to provide additional support to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.[26] Both the 2011 *Review of Funding for Schooling* (Gonski Review) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2012 Equity and Quality in Education report recommend that school funding be needs-based.[27] In particular, the Gonski Review recommended that supporting disadvantaged students requires a targeted needs-based funding component that includes loadings paid to schools for socioeconomic background, disability, English language proficiency, the particular needs of Indigenous students, school size, and school location.[28] Each of these elements are present in Victoria's school resourcing and funding model.

- **Equity (Social Disadvantage) funding** was introduced in 2015, providing needs-based loadings to every government school for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools can use equity (social disadvantage) funding to deliver tailored educational programs that meet the needs of this cohort of students. This can include additional staffing, programs to improve learning and achievement, or professional development.

  Equity (Social Disadvantage) funding is allocated based on parental occupation, level of parental education and the level of concentration of disadvantage in a school. This allocative model ensures that schools with students with the highest level of need are provided with the most funding, thereby providing schools with the resources that is

required to support them. Further information is available in the 2023 Revised Student Resource Package Guide.[29]

In 2022, $374 million was distributed to schools through Equity (Social Disadvantage) funding. The majority (66%) of this funding was provided to schools with a high proportion of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **Equity (Catch Up) funding** was also introduced in 2015 and is provided to schools based on the number of secondary school students who are achieving below expected levels of learning in Year 5 NAPLAN (Reading). This loading is based only on the academic achievement of a student and does not consider the level of disadvantage of a school or student. A school's Catch-up funding allocation is calculated by adding the number of secondary students that scored below Year 5 National Minimum Standards and multiplying this by the Level 1 rate ($2,399 per student) or Level 2 rate ($1,200). The Level 2 rate applies to those students who also receive disability funding. The funding allows secondary schools to invest in proven interventions and tailored educational programs to meet the learning needs of their students.[30]

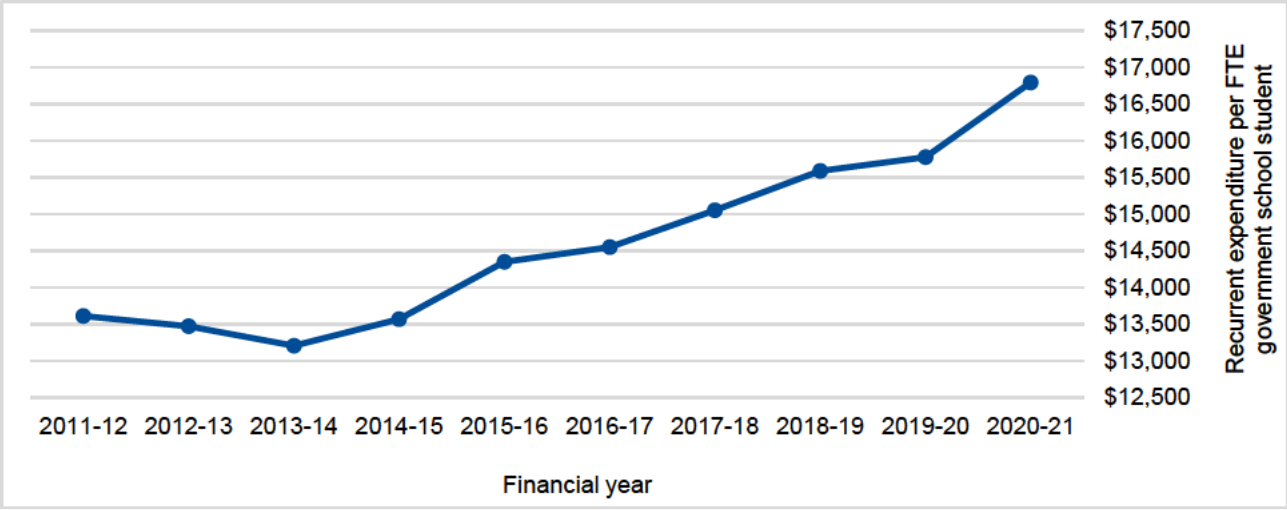
  In 2022, more than $19 million was distributed to schools through Equity (Catch-up) funding. 48% of this funding was provided to schools with a high proportion of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition to the SRP, the department provides funding for programs for students from low-income families to access the essentials for learning and support students' wellbeing and engagement. These are described in section 4.5.

Growth in recurrent funding

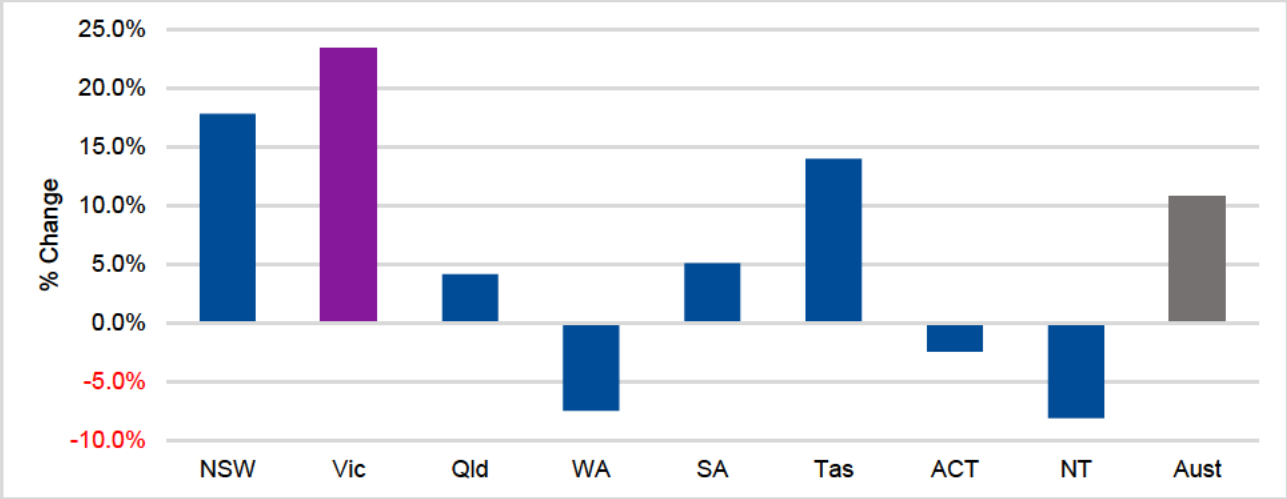
Between 2011–12 and 2020–21, recurrent expenditure for Victorian government schools grew by $3,180 per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) student as shown in Figure 2.2. This represents a per-FTE student increase of 23.4% on 2011–12 funding levels, above the Australian average of 10.8% (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.2: Victorian Government recurrent expenditure per FTE government school student, 2020–21 dollars



Source: Report on Government Services, 2023, School Education data tables, Table 4A.14, data adjusted to 2020–21 dollars.

Figure 2.3:
Change in state and territory government school recurrent expenditure per FTE student, 2011–12 to 2020–21



Source: Report on Government Services 2023, School Education data tables, Table 4A.14, data adjusted to 2020–21 dollars.

3. School infrastructure

3.1 Investing in school infrastructure

With a combined asset and land value estimated to be $36.5 billion as at June 2023, Victoria's government schools are one of the largest asset bases in Victoria.

Since 2012, more than $16 billion has been invested to build new schools and deliver school upgrade projects. Victoria's new school building program is the largest of any state.[31] Over 2,050 school upgrade projects have been delivered since 2012. Since 2015, all specialist schools have been funded for upgrade projects, with 2 new specialist schools constructed.

The department requires that infrastructure design supports contemporary teaching practices, is adaptable to changing pedagogies, and provides for health and wellbeing services. New school buildings and school upgrades promote effective educational delivery by meeting standards that are safe and inclusive, empower students and build school pride and encourage intellectual engagement and self-awareness. In addition, new school buildings and school upgrades provide value to the broader community through access to high-quality facilities, such as competition-grade sports venues.

Increasing co-location of early childhood services and government schools has supported improved service delivery and more connected communities. 31 kindergartens have been built on government school sites since 2019, including 5 with co-located Maternal and Child Health centres. Early childhood grant programs have supported establishing 17 kindergartens adjacent to new government schools since 2021.

3.2 Investment to address enrolment growth

Investment in government school infrastructure has been responsive to growth in Victoria's population and school enrolments.

Each year, the department reviews forecast demographic data (including Victoria in Future[32]) and actual school enrolments to identify expected government school enrolment and areas of growing demand. The department uses this information to advise the Victorian Government when and where new schools should be delivered.

New government schools are built each year to meet demand:[33]

- 9 new schools opened in 2019 (5 primary, 2 secondary, 2 primary-secondary)
- 11 new schools opened in 2020 (9 primary, 2 secondary)
- 14 new schools opened in 2021 (10 primary, 4 secondary)
- 14 new schools opened in 2022 (6 primary, 7 secondary, 1 specialist)
- 13 new schools opened in 2023 (10 primary, 2 secondary, 1 specialist)
- 14 new schools will open in 2024 (8 primary, 4 secondary, 2 specialist).

3.3 Upgrading existing government schools

Over the past 9 years, over 1,100 government schools have been funded for school upgrade projects. This includes more than 700 schools that have received upgrades through the **Capital Works Program,** which provides upgrades to address school condition or capacity requirements.

School upgrades are also delivered through the following specialised programs:

- More than 385 schools have received infrastructure grants through the **Inclusive Schools Fund** to promote inclusion and meet the educational and social needs of all students, through projects such as outdoor sensory gardens and learning areas, or specialist play and recreation equipment
- More than 800 schools have been supported through the **Accessible Buildings Program** to make reasonable adjustments for students and staff with disability, promoting equitable access for people of all abilities to Victoria's government schools
- More than 480 schools have received grants from the **Minor Capital Works Fund** to support small-scale priority building upgrades such as toilet replacements and fixing roofs.

3.4 School maintenance

The Victorian School Building Authority, which is part of the department, plans school maintenance based on an onsite condition assessment that is conducted for every school every 5 years.

Since 2018, funding provided to schools through the SRP for maintenance and minor works has increased by more than 170%, from just under $60 million to over $163 million in 2024.

In addition, the Small Schools Program provides support to small rural and regional schools to manage routine maintenance, essential safety measures, occupational health and safety obligations and return to work obligations. The program will be rolled out to 319 small rural and regional schools in 16 clusters over 3 years. The first tranche of the program was rolled out in 2022–23, providing dedicated facilities and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) coordinators to 83 schools in 4 clusters.

From 2024, the department will use a new centralised model to complete the audit, inspection and testing of essential safety measures, including exit lights, fire extinguishers, fire doors and safe means of escape to reduce the administrative burden on school staff.

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4. Student wellbeing and engagement

4.1 Student wellbeing

Improved student wellbeing is both a desired outcome of schooling and a means of improving learning outcomes.[34] Students with high levels of wellbeing, including good physical and mental health and a sense of school connectedness, are more likely to attend school, engage in learning and thrive.[35]

The determinants of wellbeing start to be established pre-birth. Factors such as parents' physical health, social wellbeing and behaviour influence health and wellbeing outcomes for infants. As children and young people grow and develop, their wellbeing is influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including their activities and behaviours, their family and home environments, their relationships with peers, their school environment, and their broader physical and community environment.[36]

While wellbeing is influenced by factors beyond the school gate, schools play an essential role in developing students' social and emotional and wellbeing capabilities, and identifying students who may need more support and meet these needs through school supports or referring students on to other services.

Children and young people across Victoria experienced significant wellbeing challenges during COVID-19 restrictions. Victorian students experienced periods of remote and flexible learning over 2020 and 2021, and schools continued to be impacted in 2022 by higher levels of student and staff absences. The 2019–20 bushfires and 2022 floods also disrupted schooling for many Victorian students and impacted on the mental health and wellbeing of some affected students and staff.

The Productivity Commission has recommended that student wellbeing should be elevated as a national priority in the next NSRA.[37] The department has been an early mover in this space, enabling schools to support student wellbeing and engagement through:

- **a system-wide focus on wellbeing** – including FISO 2.0, High-Impact Wellbeing Strategies and the Safe Schools and Respectful Relationships programs (Section 4.2)
- **mental health supports** – including the Mental Health Fund and Menu, Mental Health Practitioners in Secondary and Specialist Schools, and the Mental Health in Primary Schools program (Section 4.3)
- **a health and wellbeing workforce in schools** – including the Student Support Service, Koorie workforces, Primary and Secondary School Nursing Programs and Doctors in Secondary Schools (Section 4.4)
- **enabling full school participation** – including the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, Affordable School Uniforms program, Free Period Products, Glasses for Kids, School Breakfast Clubs and Smile Squad (Section 4.5)
- **student attendance and engagement** – including Flexible Learning Options, the Navigator program, LOOKOUT Education Support Centres and the Education Justice Initiative (Section 4.6).

Appendix 2 provides a summary of key mental health and wellbeing supports available to students in Victorian government schools.

4.2 A system-wide focus on wellbeing

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (Royal Commission), established in February 2019, noted the critical role schools can play in supporting students' mental health.

The Royal Commission found the education system is a 'strategic platform' for promoting mental health, preventing ill health and providing early intervention.[38] Schools are particularly important in this regard for students in rural and regional areas who may face additional barriers to accessing mental health services.[39]

As a direct response to the findings of the Royal Commission and advice from the teaching profession, the department revised the **Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO 2.0)** to place wellbeing at the centre of school improvement for Victorian government schools, alongside learning (see Section 1.3).

Every government school must now have a wellbeing goal in their Annual Implementation Plan to mobilise available resources to support students' wellbeing and mental health.

The department has developed **High-Impact Wellbeing Strategies** to support classroom teachers to promote student wellbeing.

Every government school is also required to have a local **student wellbeing and engagement policy** tailored to the needs of the student population with targeted strategies to address student behaviour, and health and wellbeing issues. This policy outlines how schools will maintain a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment, and address bullying and school attendance.

The **Respectful Relationships** program supports schools to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviours and to teach students how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence. Respectful Relationships is being delivered in every Victorian government school.

School-wide positive behaviour support is the department-endorsed framework used by schools to develop positive, safe, supportive learning cultures.

The **Safe Schools program** develops safe environments in schools that are supportive and inclusive of LGBTIQ+ students.

4.3 Mental health supports

There is a long-term national trend of increasing rates of mental health issues being identified in children and young people. While this trend preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on self-reported youth mental health has been observed Australia-wide and globally.[40]

The **Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu** enables government schools to select from an evidence-based menu of programs, staff and resources to meet their students' needs. Over 1,100 schools are currently using the Mental Health Fund and Menu, and about 1,500 schools will have access to the Fund by 2024. Rural and regional schools receive an additional Schools Mental Health Fund loading.

The **Mental Health in Primary Schools** program, developed in partnership with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education, funds a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader (MHWL) in primary schools to help identify and manage emerging mental health issues in students and provide connections between education, social and health services. To date MHWLs have been funded in 498 schools, and by 2026, every

government and low-fee non-government primary school will be funded to employ a MHWL to implement a whole-school approach to student wellbeing.

The **Mental Health Practitioners in Secondary and Specialist Schools** initiative enables every government secondary school campus to employ a suitably qualified, school-based mental health practitioner (psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist or mental health nurse). The initiative has funded Mental Health Practitioners for 440 schools to deliver 93,000 one-to-one counselling sessions with students and 42,000 training sessions for school staff. The initiative also provides other early intervention services for students, coordination of supports for students with critical and complex needs, and professional support for mental health practitioners.

4.4 Health and wellbeing workforce in schools

The expansion of student health and wellbeing services has involved changes to the workforces operating in schools. The department employs more than 500 **Student Support Service** staff, which includes teams of psychologists, occupational therapists, social workers, youth workers, mental health practitioners and speech pathologists, as well as primary and secondary school nurses, to support students in government schools. These workforces provide government schools with a range of prevention, early intervention, response and critical incident support.

Student Support Services staff work in area-based teams and build the capability of school staff, provide group-based and individual support and specialised services directly to students, who are referred by their school.

The department employs approximately 150 **Koorie Engagement Support Officers** and **Koorie Engagement Coordinators** to assist early years services and schools to support the engagement, attendance, wellbeing and achievement of Koorie learners.

The **Primary School Nursing Program** enables the early identification of health, wellbeing and development issues of students in their Foundation year (also known as Prep) to enable timely referral and intervention. In 2022, more than 62,000 health assessments were completed by primary school nurses in government, Catholic and independent schools.[41]

The **Secondary School Nursing Program** is targeted to schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged students. Secondary school nurses provide assessment, care, health advice referral and support to students, and they support school communities in addressing contemporary health and social issues facing young people and their families.

The **Doctors in Secondary Schools** program funds General Practitioners (GPs) to attend up to 100 government secondary schools, giving students access to adolescent-friendly models of care, addressing health problems early and reducing the pressure on working parents. Participating schools are selected based on concentration of disadvantage. All secondary school GPs are trained in adolescent health. The Doctors in Secondary School program has delivered more than 71,000 consultations and made over 24,000 referrals to secondary services.

4.5 Enabling full school participation

The department many programs to ensure that students from lower-income families are provided with the essentials for learning and can fully participate in school activities:

- The **Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund** (CSEF) provides payments for students from lower-income families to attend school camps, excursions and sports and outdoor education programs. In 2022, the CSEF supported over 112,000 primary students and almost 90,000 secondary students from lower income families to fully participate in school activities.
- The **Affordable School Uniforms program** provides school uniforms and other essential items to government school students experiencing financial disadvantage. In 2022, 71,500 students from government schools received more than 290,600 items through the program.[42]
- **Free period products** have been made available in every government school since 2020.
- The **Glasses for Kids program** is focused on Foundation to Year 3 students at selected government schools. In 2022, the program delivered vision screening to 6,690 students and provided free glasses to more than 1,300 students.[43]
- The **School Breakfast Clubs program** offers free and healthy food for students in 1,000 Victorian government schools. As of September 2023, the program has delivered more than 33 million meals to government school students.
- **Smile Squad** is a free dental program for government school students. It delivers free oral health promotion, dental check-ups and treatment to Victorian government school students at school.

4.6 Student attendance and engagement

Victoria has the strongest student attendance rates in Australia. On average, Victorian government school students attended 87.7% of all school days in 2022, compared with the national average of 86.5%.[44] Like all states and territories, Victoria has experienced a decline in attendance rates in recent years, in part driven by students and staff experiencing high levels of illness related to influenza and COVID-19 in 2021–22. School refusal rates remain low, despite increasing from 1.2% in 2018 to 1.8% in 2021.

The department sets strong expectations that all schools monitor and follow up on student absences, working with parents and carers to support students to attend and engage in school. In 2022, the department developed the **Schools Guide to Attendance**, which outlines practical strategies that school staff can take to engage with students and families, monitor and follow up on attendance, and provide additional support for students who require it. The department's area teams support school leaders to identify and strengthen attendance improvement strategies and provide specialised support for at-risk students and priority cohorts (such as Koorie students, students in out-of-home care, and students with disability).

Targeted supports

Flexible learning options provide an alternative school provision model for students who are disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from mainstream school.

Navigator program also support disengaged 12- to 17-year-olds to re-engage with education. This includes connecting students to supports to address underlying barriers to learning, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, insecure home environment or contact with youth justice. In 2022, 76% of Navigator participants re-engaged in schooling, with a total so far of 3,700 students re-engaging with education through the program.[45]

LOOKOUT Education Support Centres support schools working with students in out-of-home care. LOOKOUT centres provide professional development for staff, advice to schools to support individual students and facilitate opportunities for students to participate fully in school life (including camps, excursions and extracurricular activities). In 2022, 85% of students in out-of-home care received targeted support in school through LOOKOUT.[46]

The department supports children and young people in contact with the youth justice system to engage with education through the **Education Justice Initiative**. Coordinators ensure young people are connected to their school or education setting, that a learning mentor is identified, and that they have priority access to the department's allied health and mental health services. After 3 months of involvement in the initiative, 63% of participating young people and 70% of Koorie young people were engaged in education.[47] In addition, comprehensive and individually planned school education is provided to students in youth justice and secure welfare settings, supported by partnerships with the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

Hospital schools provide educational services to cohorts of students with serious medical and mental health conditions likely to result in significant periods of absence from formal school education. Hospital schools support student engagement or re-engagement with education and work closely with a student's base school to support continuity of learning and transition back into the regular school setting.

5. Student learning outcomes

5.1 Overview

Victoria is the highest performing jurisdiction in Australia in terms of academic outcomes as measured by the NAPLAN assessments. In 2023, Victoria ranked first or second nationally in 16 out of the 20 NAPLAN areas (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy, for Year 3, Year 5, Year 7 and Year 9) (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Number of top 2 rankings in 2023 and 2022, by jurisdiction

	Vic	NSW	ACT	WA	Qld	SA	Tas	NT
2023 (new scale)	16	15	7	2	0	0	0	0
2022 (old scale)	12	14	11	3	0	0	0	0

Out of a possible 20 rankings (Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, for reading, numeracy, spelling, writing, and grammar and punctuation.

Source: ACARA NAPLAN National Results. https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results

Victoria has performed better than all other states in terms of its lowest performing students — Victoria had the lowest or second lowest proportion of students who were classified as 'Needing Additional Support' for all NAPLAN measures in 2023.

In key learning areas, Victoria's performance has improved, not declined, over recent years. However, numeracy remains a national challenge, with jurisdictions reporting a decline in mean NAPLAN scores from 2019 to 2022. Nonetheless, Victoria maintained a relatively high ranking compared with the other Australian jurisdictions. For Year 7 numeracy, only New South Wales had a higher mean score. For Year 9 numeracy, only Western Australia and New South Wales had a higher mean score in 2023.

The Productivity Commission has also highlighted that the gap in learning outcomes between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students remains a national challenge.[48]

Further information on the learning outcomes of Victorian students is in section 5.4.

5.2 Student learning

Curriculum

All Victorian government schools teach a defined Victorian curriculum. This includes the Victorian Curriculum F-10 for primary and secondary years of school, the VCE and the VPC for senior secondary years of school. The curriculum includes the knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development and active and informed citizenship (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 – The Victorian curriculum

- The **Victorian Curriculum F–10** is organised under 8 key learning areas and 4 capabilities. It is based on the Australian Curriculum and reflects Victorian priorities and standards.
- The Victorian Curriculum F-10 includes the **Towards Foundation Level Victorian Curriculum**, which enables students with disabilities and additional learning needs to progress towards the learning described at Foundation level.
- The **Victorian Certificate of Education** (VCE), which includes a VCE Vocational Major pathway from 2023, is the senior secondary qualification and opens pathways to university, higher-level TAFE or VET certificate courses, apprenticeships, traineeships and the workforce. From 2023 students are also able to enrol in a Victorian Pathways Certificate to provide flexibility for students in year 11 and year 12.

A small number of government schools offer an alternative curriculum approved by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) alongside a Victorian curriculum, such as the International Baccalaureate, Steiner or Montessori.

The VCAA is developing the next version of the Victorian Curriculum F–10. While the overarching structure will not change, the revised curriculum will be informed by the review of the Australian Curriculum and by the expertise and feedback of Victorian teachers, making it easier for them to plan, assess and report on student learning.

Pedagogy

Endorsed teaching approaches are set out in the **Victorian Teaching and Learning Model** (VTLM), which provides school leaders and teachers with a framework to systematically review student outcomes, reflect on the impact of current teaching practices and put in place evidence-based strategies to improve student learning. The VTLM includes the **High-Impact Teaching Strategies** (HITS). The HITS are a bank of 10 instructional practices that are internationally recognised as some of the most reliable teaching strategies for improving learning outcomes.

To support teachers to plan and implement the Victorian Curriculum F-10, the department has delivered a suite of resources for teachers, including the **Literacy Teaching Toolkit**, the **Mathematics Teaching Toolkit** and the **High-Ability Toolkit**. In addition, **lesson plans** are being developed to support the introduction of the revised Victorian curriculum in the key areas of English, mathematics, science and technologies. These lesson plans will assist teachers in planning their classes and help to reduce some of their workload pressures.

The department offers a range of professional development for teachers, including the Teaching Excellence Program delivered by the Academy, which enables highly-skilled teachers to advance their capability for exemplary teaching (see section 6.2).

Assessment and reporting

Teachers in Victorian government schools can access a range of resources to assess student learning. Government school teachers can access free assessment tools hosted by the VCAA through the **Digital Assessment Library** and the **Insight Assessment Platform**.

All students in Foundation and Year 1 must complete the **English Online Interview** assessment to enable to early detection of literacy learning difficulties.

Students in Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 participate in the **NAPLAN assessment**.

VCE students complete VCE assessments, including the Year 12 **General Achievement Test** that assess students against literacy and numeracy standards.

Student learning progress, based on teacher judgement, is reported twice a year to parents and carers.

A sample of Victorian schools also participate in the following international assessments: Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

5.3 Targeted supports

Literacy and numeracy support

The **Tutor Learning Initiative** provides funding to government (and low fee non-government) schools to deliver small-group tutoring to students who need additional support, with a focus on literacy and numeracy. So far in 2023, more than 5,400 tutors have supported 120,000 students in government schools. An independent evaluation found that 88% of primary school principals and 75% of secondary school principals surveyed reported improvements in students' achievements attributed to the tutors.

The **Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support** initiative provides funding to government schools to provide intensive support to students in Year 10 who need additional help with the literacy and numeracy skills needed to succeed beyond school. In 2023, the program is supporting more than 5,000 students.

Students with disability

In 2022, just over a quarter of students in Victorian government schools were recorded as requiring additional supports or adjustments at school due to disability through the NCCD on School Students with Disability.

In 2021, the department commenced a multi-year **Disability Inclusion** statewide reform program to improve outcomes for students with disabilities enrolled in government schools. The Disability Inclusion reforms introduces a strengths-based Disability Inclusion Profile, a facilitator workforce to administer the profile in schools state-wide, a new school-level funding allocation (Tier 2 funding), and a new student-level funding allocation (Tier 3 funding). New scholarships are available for teachers and regional employees to complete postgraduate study in inclusive education to continue strengthening inclusive practice and supporting students of all abilities.

Disability Inclusion also invests in capability-building initiatives to ensure that school workforces are equipped to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. These state-wide initiatives include the Diverse Learners Hub, the Inclusion Outreach Coaching Initiative and other opportunities for on-the-job educator training.

Schools can also access an Inclusive Schools Fund that has funded more than 385 projects enabling schools to build new facilities, such as outdoor sensory gardens and learning areas.

There are also 82 Victorian government specialist schools across Victoria supporting students with a range of disabilities. Victorian government specialist schools will receive funding to employ a

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Navigator to support parents and carers to understand, advocate for and access appropriate NDIS-funded support services for their children. NDIS Navigators will also support collaboration between NDIS-funded services and schools. The NDIS Navigators initiative is being rolled out from Term 3, 2023. By the end of 2025 all specialist schools will have NDIS Navigator funding.

High-ability students

The department provides targeted supports for high-ability students. The **Student Excellence Program** supports government schools to build teacher capability to extend their high-ability students. As of late 2023, the **Victorian High-Ability Program** has provided almost 70,000 high-ability government school students in Year 5 to Year 8 the opportunity to participate in 10-week online enrichment programs in English and mathematics, and the **Victorian Challenge and Enrichment Series** has supported almost 119,000 students from Foundation to Year 12 with extension activities. The **high-ability toolkit** provides advice and information for primary and secondary school teachers in the classroom.

Victoria also has a range of select entry and specialist schools:

- **Select Entry High Schools** including Melbourne High School, The MacRobertson Girls' High School, Nossal High School and Suzanne Cory High Schools, with enrolment based on an examination of academic ability
- The **Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School** develops Year 7 to Year 12 students performing and visual arts specialities
- **John Monash Science School** is a specialised science school where students in Year 10 to Year 12 can study emerging science electives in fields such as nanotechnology, astrophysics, pharmaceutical science and bioinformatics
- **Elizabeth Blackburn Sciences** is a specialised campus of The University High School that exposes Year 11 and Year 12 students to the latest innovations and excellence in the teaching of contemporary science and mathematics
- **Maribyrnong Sports Academy** is an elite sports program run from Maribyrnong Secondary College that provides a high-performance environment for students in Year 7 to Year 12
- The **Centre for Higher Education Studies** makes first-year university-level studies and select VCE subjects available to students studying VCE onsite or online
- 10 **Tech Schools** across Victoria (with a further 6 to be established by the end of 2026) that provide secondary students with access to high-tech, hands-on science and technology programs.

Pathways to further learning and work

A key focus of Victorian secondary schools is to ensure that every student has a strong pathway from school to post-secondary training, education and employment. In response to the 2020 Review into vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling (the 'Firth Review'),[49] Victoria has embarked on a substantial program of reform to senior secondary education, vocational learning and pathways.

These reforms will lift the quality and perception of vocational and applied learning, help more students access high-quality applied learning programs, and provide students with a vocational pathway that gives them the skills they need to move successfully into further training and jobs post-school (Box 5.2).

Box 5.2 – Reforming senior secondary education, vocational learning and pathways

The key elements of the reforms include:

- a new VCE Vocational Major and the VPC, both introduced in 2023
- a core offering of 12 Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathways aligned to student interests and local industry needs, including a new Clean Energy Pathway
- free VET subjects, essential VET materials and support for VET-related transport for students in regional and rural areas
- establishing VET clusters and place-based planning for every Victorian school to improve access to and quality of VET provision
- the state-wide roll out of Head Start, which provides wrap-around supports for students participating in School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships while completing senior secondary
- work to continue to strengthen careers education, including through personalised student insights using My Career Insights, and improved access to vocational and applied learning prior to senior secondary, including work experience.

Rural and regional students

The department invests significant resources to ensure rural and regional students can access opportunities commensurate with their metropolitan counterparts. This includes support for workforce attraction and retention (see Chapter 6.2), additional school funding to address challenges disproportionately affecting rural and regional schools (such as Equity Funding for socioeconomically disadvantaged schools), and funding loadings for small and isolated schools (see Chapter 2.1).

In addition, the department has many initiatives and programs to address the particular challenges of rural and regional schools to ensure these students are supported in the development of aspirations, high expectations and informed choices (Box 5.3).

Victoria performs well compared to other jurisdictions in outcomes for rural and regional students. In 2023, Victoria's inner regional students have the first or second highest mean scores in 14 of 20 NAPLAN measures, and Victoria's outer regional students have the first or second highest mean scores in every NAPLAN measure.

Box 5.3 – Improve access and quality in rural and regional education

- Virtual School Victoria (VSV) offers the largest range of subjects of any Victorian school, providing choice for students who live in regional and rural areas. From 2024, this will include almost all VCE subjects thanks to the VCE Expansion Initiative. Enrolment fees at VSV were also removed so all rural and regional students can access virtual subjects.
- From 2024, students in Gippsland can access a wider range of VCE subjects and specialist teachers at a new Regional Blended Learning Hub operating as a campus of VSV and working with the local TAFE and Tech School.
- The Victorian Virtual Learning Network, based out of Bendigo Secondary College offers online senior secondary subjects to over 2,000 students across Victoria.
- Blended language programs for small rural and regional schools are available through live virtual lessons delivered by the Victorian School of Languages, alongside supports for classroom teachers to deliver languages instruction.
- The Collaboration and Curriculum Access Fund, and the VCE Collaboration Fund support rural and regional schools to form partnerships to share VCE offerings. Funding is also available to support schools with small cohorts offer the new VCE Vocational Major and the VPC.
- Place-based support is available to clusters of schools to provide students in rural and regional areas with access to VET aligned to their strengths and interests.
- Six Science and Mathematics Specialist Centres are working to lift primary and secondary student engagement and aspirations in STEM learning through onsite and outreach programs to rural and regional students.
- Seven new regional Academies provide access to localised professional learning to help raise the teaching and leadership capability in regional schools, in turn positively impacting student outcomes in regional areas.

Koorie students

In 2022, there were 16,564 Koorie students in Victorian government schools, having grown substantially from 9,200 Koorie students in 2011. In 2022, 88% of Victorian government schools had at least one Koorie student.

The department is committed to strengthening self-determination in education for improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for Koorie students. Self-determination requires the transfer of power, control, decision making and resources from government and the non-Aboriginal service sector to Aboriginal communities and their organisations in recognition that Aboriginal Victorians hold the knowledge and expertise about what is best for their communities.[50]

Strengthened self-determination will support the education system to evolve to meet the needs and aspirations of the Aboriginal community, including the changes that will be necessitated by Treaty in Victoria and through the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

Throughout 2022, a series of Campfire Conversations on self-determination in education were held across Victoria, bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schools to listen, share and connect about the possibilities and opportunities for strengthening self-determination in education. Truth-telling and deep listening were major features of Campfire

Conversations throughout the state. This process has established the following community-identified reform directions that drive the focus of further efforts towards strengthened self-determination in education: truth-telling, capacity building, strong partnerships, Aboriginal voice in decision-making, a culturally safe and responsive school system, and accountability.

The **Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026** guides the department's approach to supporting Koorie learners of all ages, which was developed in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated.

The **Koorie Education Workforce** of approximately 150 staff across the state, guides schools on strategies to support the learning and wellbeing of Koorie students, enhancing cultural inclusion practices, and facilitating strengthened school-community partnerships.

Community Understanding and Safety Training (CUST) is being delivered in all government schools to build the capacity of all school staff to provide culturally inclusive learning environments and better support their Koorie students.[51] As at June 2023, over 90% of government schools have completed CUST.

Box 5.4 Improvements to Koorie educational outcomes

Victoria has made improvements in Koorie educational outcomes.

- Victorian Aboriginal children showed improvement in 4 out of 5 domains in the Australian Early Development Census between 2018 and 2021.
- Since 2015, the proportion of Aboriginal students achieving in the top 2 NAPLAN bands for reading has improved in Year 3 and Year 5 and increased slightly for numeracy in Year 7. In addition, in 2023, Victoria's Koorie students outperformed their interstate peers, achieving the first or second highest mean scores in 18 of 20 NAPLAN measures.
- Year 9 reading improved for Koorie students from 2012 to 2022, and the outcome gap for Koorie students decreased for both Year 7 and Year 9 reading between 2014 and 2022.
- Year 12 completers' employment outcomes have risen from 24.7% in 2018 to 32% in 2022 and an 8.2% increase in Year 12 completers securing an apprenticeship or traineeship (15.5% in 2018 to 24.2% in 2022).

As a result of these achievements, Victoria is one of the few jurisdictions to have made progress against the National Agreement on Closing the Gap targets in education, and there are signs of long-term improvement.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Over one-in-three Victorian government students come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

To ensure students who need support with English can grow, learn and participate effectively in school, schools and the department deliver a suite of additional support. Newly arrived students have access to an **English language** school or centre for between 6 and 12 months after arrival (depending on their educational background and/or refugee status). Mainstream schools are provided with **English as an Additional Language** (**EAL) Index funding**, based on the number of EAL students in their school. This allows schools to deliver programs that develop students'

English language proficiency, delivered by qualified EAL teachers or multicultural education aides. Community language schools are funded to provide language programs to pre-school and school-aged children after school or on weekends.

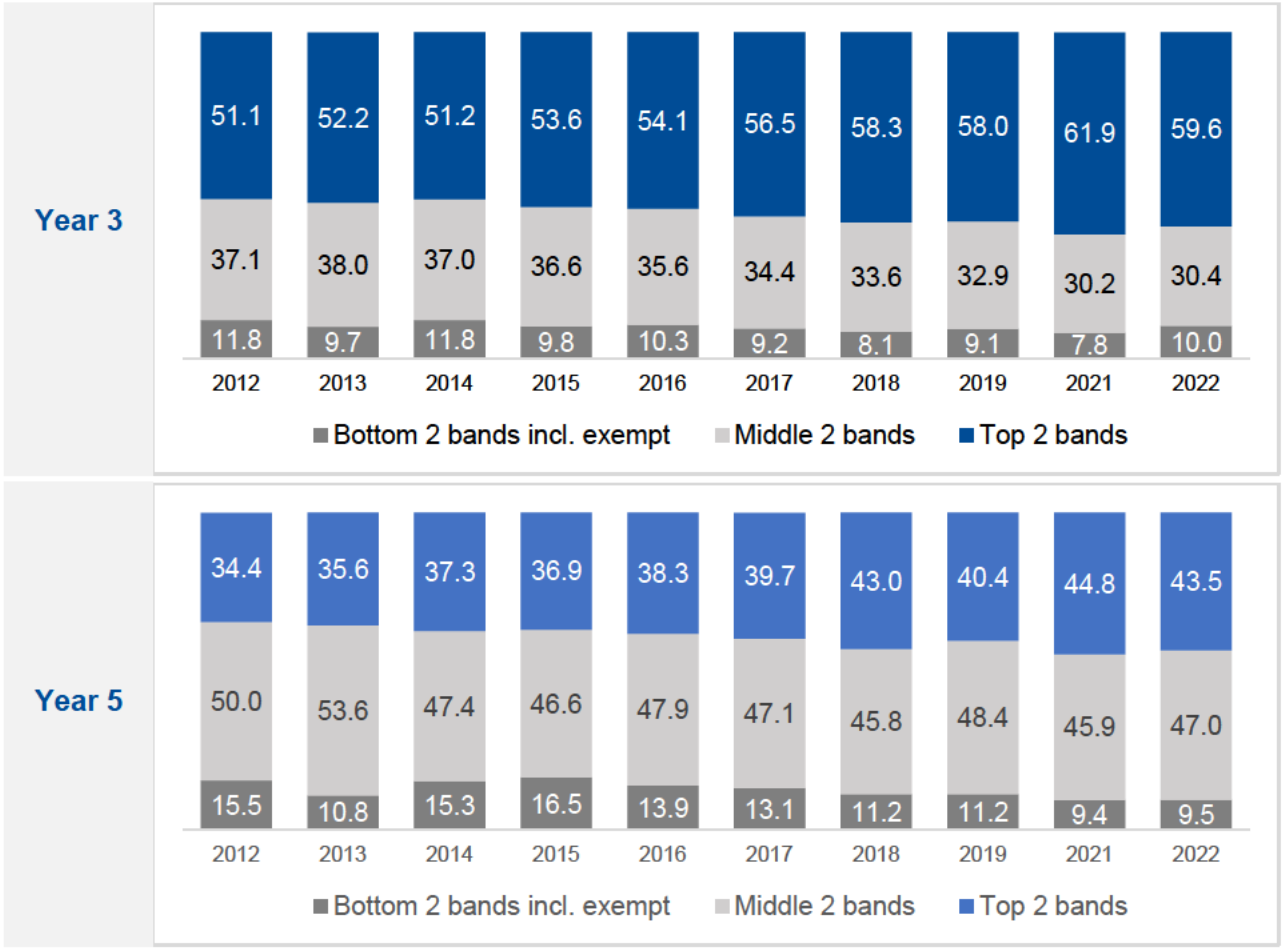
In addition, a range of supports are available to ensure schools are culturally inclusive, including interpreting and translation services for parents and carers, cultural inclusion training for school staff, and a suite of resources to help schools and students to tackle racism and bullying.

5.4 Student learning outcomes

Since 2012, Victorian primary school students have demonstrated clear improvement in average reading in both Year 3 and Year 5, and remained stable in numeracy.

Much of the improvement in NAPLAN reading results among primary school children has been evident in both high and low performing students. For example, since 2012, there were relatively more Year 3 students in the top 2 bands in 2022 compared with 2012, and 7,200 more Year 5 students in the top 2 bands in 2022 compared with 2012. There were also relatively fewer students in the bottom 2 bands for reading in Year 3 and Year 5 (Figure 5.2).

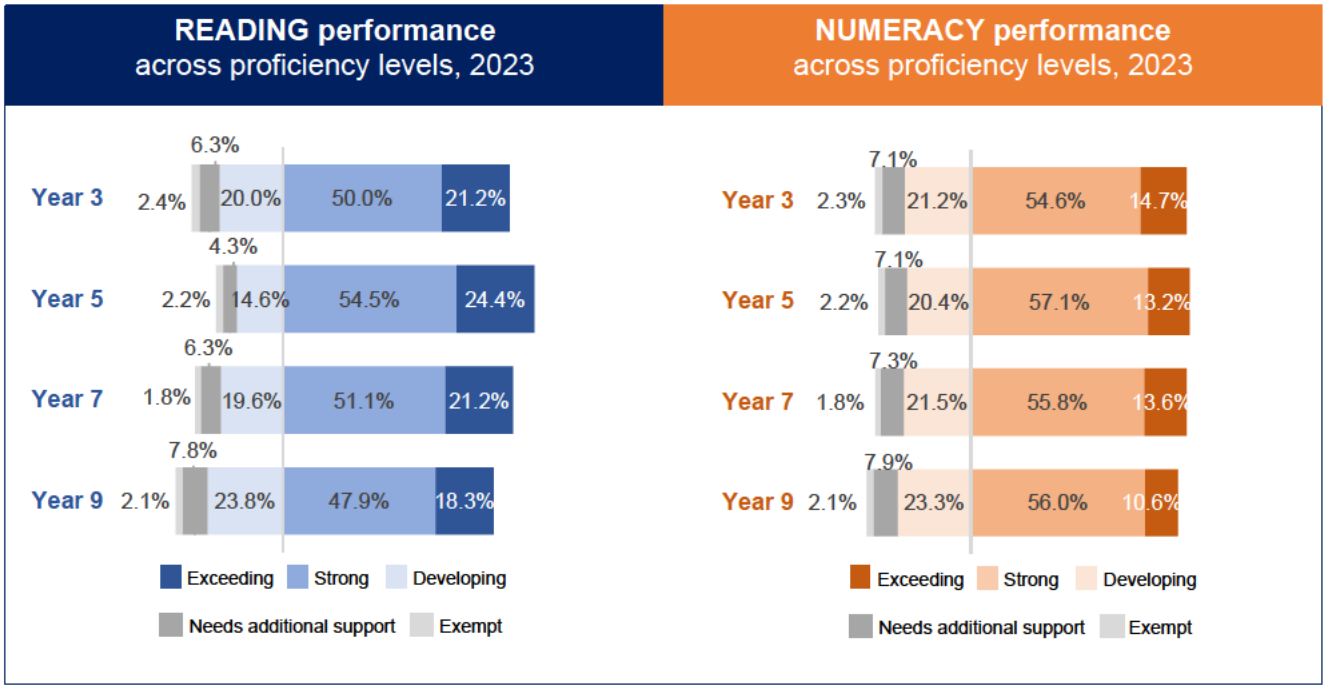
Figure 5.2: Victorian Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN reading results, under old NAPLAN scale, 2012 to 2022[52]



Source: ACARA NAPLAN National Results. https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results

When assessed across all year levels, 70.6% of Victorian students achieved 'Exceeding' or 'Strong' proficiency in reading and numeracy, more than any other state or territory (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Proportion of Victorian students in each NAPLAN proficiency level in 2023 for reading and numeracy, all year levels



Source: ACARA NAPLAN National Results. https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results

Victorian secondary schools performed relatively well in reading in 2023. In reading and numeracy, Victoria achieved among the highest mean scores of any jurisdiction nationally. In Year 7 reading, the Victorian mean score was the second highest of any Australian jurisdiction, with only the Australian Capital Territory achieving a higher mean score. In Year 9 reading, Victoria was the third highest performer of all Australian jurisdictions, with only Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory achieving a higher mean score. In Year 7 numeracy, only New South Wales had a higher mean score, and in Year 9 numeracy, only Western Australia and New South Wales had a higher mean score.

Victoria's relatively strong performance in 2023 was also broad-based. Victoria had the lowest proportion of students 'Needing Additional Support' in Year 7 and Year 9 in both NAPLAN reading and numeracy compared to all other states and territories.

The relatively strong performance of Victorian government and non-government schools has meant that Victoria enjoys significantly higher Year 12 retention rates (that is, the lowest early school leaving) than the Australian average, and relatively more students from Indigenous backgrounds are completing Year 12 or equivalent than the national average.

Victoria continues its strong performance on school completion, achieving higher retention rates than the national average for several groups of students. In 2022, the Year 10 to Year 12 retention rate in Victoria was 82.1% compared with the national average of 79%. Notably, the retention rate was also significantly higher among Victorian Koorie students (62.4%) compared with the Australian average (54.4%).

Cohort outcomes

Victoria performs well compared to other jurisdictions in outcomes for socioeconomic disadvantaged students. In 2023, Victoria's disadvantaged students had lower NAPLAN scores than their advantaged counterparts, they nonetheless achieved higher NAPLAN mean scores in reading compared with disadvantaged students in other jurisdictions, and attained the first or second highest mean scores in 19 of 20 NAPLAN measures.

International comparisons

Victorian results compare well to other Australian jurisdictions for a range of benchmark measures, including TIMSS, which assesses students in Year 4 and Year 8, and PISA, which assesses the reading, mathematical and scientific literacy of 15-year-olds.

In recent results, Victoria has maintained its overall PISA score. Victorian students performed above the OECD average in reading and science in the most recent PISA results. When comparing the 2015 and subsequent 2018 PISA results, several Australian jurisdictions experienced a decline in average performance, however this is out of step with NAPLAN.[53] In Victoria, this decline did not occur across the reading, mathematics or science domains.

In TIMSS, Victorian schools performed above the OECD average, and Victoria has consistently performed above the Australian average since 2015. The most recent TIMSS found that 67.1% of Year 8 students achieved the TIMSS intermediate international benchmark in mathematics, and 73% achieved the benchmark in science.

No PISA results have been published since 2018, with the 2021 PISA surveys postponed to 2022 due to challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 PISA survey results are due to be published in December 2023.

Sectoral variation

When student background is accounted for, there is no significant difference between the student learning achievement outcomes in Victoria's government and non-government schools.[54] Victorian government schools outperform government schools of other jurisdictions in terms of the outcomes of socioeconomic disadvantaged, rural and Indigenous students.

6. Teaching and education workforce

6.1 The Victorian government school workforce

The Victorian government school workforce comprises of teachers, principals and other school leaders, education support staff and allied health professionals. As at June 2023, the Victorian government teaching service consisted of approximately 85,250 staff (72,750 Full Time Equivalent), including 53,100 teachers (47,400 FTE). Approximately 530 allied health staff were also working in government schools (see Appendix 1, Figure A1.4).

Teacher workforce pressures are being experienced nationally and are a consequence of a range of factors. National labour market shortages means that there has been increased competition across a range of industries for tertiary students and professionals. In addition, there has been a national decline in initial teacher education enrolments. At the same time, demand for teachers has increased because of population growth and increased investment in schools. Workforce pressures are particularly acute for specialist schools, schools in rural and remote areas, in areas of rapidly expanding population growth, and in specific subject areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Victorian schools are experiencing challenges in recruiting sufficient staff to deliver health and wellbeing services. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System highlighted that there are workforce shortages across the mental health sector. Similarly, allied health workforce supply challenges are felt by schools across the state.[55]

In December 2022, the Australian Government released a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP) — developed in collaboration with state and territory governments and key stakeholders. The NTWAP outlines 27 national actions to address teacher workforce shortages. Victoria is working closely with the Australian Government and other states and territories to implement the NTWAP.

The Productivity Commission recommended that supporting quality teaching and effective school leadership should continue to be a focus of the next NSRA.[56]

Teaching service

Student-to-teacher ratios in both primary and secondary government schools have decreased in Victoria since 2018. Victorian student-to-teacher ratios are now among the lowest in Australia, in both primary and secondary schools (Appendix 1, Figure A1.5). In 2022, the student-to-teacher ratio was 13.5 in government primary schools, and 11.6 in government secondary schools.[57]

The **Victorian Institute of Teaching** (VIT) regulates teacher registration to ensure standards of teaching and the suitability of teachers to work with children. Registered teachers in Victoria are required to complete qualifications that meet national standards and undertake assessments to obtain VIT registration.

School leaders

As at June 2023, there were 3,580 principal class employees in the Victorian government school system, including 1456 principals, 2095 assistant principals and 29 liaison principals. School leaders have significant responsibility for the delivery of a high-quality school education to the Victorian community. Principals are required to strategically manage people, financial and physical resources within a strong accountability framework. Principal class employees have a crucial role

in improving the quality of education in each school and ensuring that all students have access to high quality comprehensive education appropriate to individual needs.

Principal class employees are also supported by **Leading Teachers** and **Learning Specialists**. The **Learning Specialist** and **Leading Teacher** classifications provide career pathways for expert teachers in classroom-based roles.

Leading teachers usually have responsibility for the implementation of one or more priorities contained in school strategic plans and coordinate several staff to achieve improvements in teaching and learning. As at June 2023, there were 2,630 leading teachers in Victorian government schools.

Learning specialists are highly skilled classroom practitioners who continue to spend most of their time in the classroom providing high quality teaching and learning as well as have a range of responsibilities related to their expertise, including teaching demonstration lessons, observing and providing feedback to other teachers and facilitation of school-based professional learning. As at June 2023, there were 2,570 learning specialists in the Victorian government system.

Education support staff

Education support staff include school administration and operations (for example, human resources and finance), school support services (for example, library and information technology), direct student and teaching support (for example, classroom assistance and careers counselling) and health and wellbeing services.

Business managers support school operations and provide expertise in finance, human resources, payroll, record-keeping, procurement, resource coordination and risk management.

Other workforces

The government school workforce also includes:

- about 150 Koorie Engagement Support Officers and Koorie Engagement Coordinators to assist early years services and schools to support the engagement, attendance, wellbeing and achievement of Koorie learners (see Chapter 5.3)
- health and wellbeing staff, including psychologists, social workers, speech pathologists and other allied health staff, as well as primary and secondary school nurses who provide schools with a range of prevention, early intervention, response and critical incident support and whose numbers have expanded significantly in recent years (see Chapter 4.4)
- VET educators who deliver vocational and applied learning in schools.

6.2 Workforce initiatives

The department's workforce initiatives are focused on 5 priorities:

- Attraction
- Recruitment
- Supporting early career teachers
- Retention
- Career development.

Attraction

The department is implementing a range of initiatives to elevate the status of the teaching profession and to grow the teaching and school leadership workforce.

Victorian students who enrol in a **secondary school teaching degree** with a Victorian initial teacher education (ITE) provider in 2024 and 2025 will be eligible for a scholarship. If recipients work in a Victorian government secondary school or specialist school setting after they graduate, they will receive additional payments. Students who complete their studies and then work in a Victorian government school will receive an amount that matches the standard Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) fees charged by the Australian Government.

New **employment-based teaching degree programs** will be introduced for undergraduate students. These programs will provide the opportunity for people to study and qualify as a teacher while undertaking paid employment in a school.

The **Teach Today** and **Teach Tomorrow** initiatives are employment-based teaching degree programs. These postgraduate programs provide the opportunity for people with an undergraduate degree to work in schools while studying to become qualified teachers. Between 2023 to 2025, these programs will provide up to 1,200 places for teaching degree students to work in schools while studying to become qualified teachers.

The **Teach the Future** recruitment campaign has involved large scale television commercials as well as targeted communication activities to raise the profile of teaching and attract students and career changers to teaching degrees. The next phase of the campaign will employ targeted communication approaches to attract and engage students, career changers, and returning teachers into Victorian government schools.

In coming years, the department will implement further recruitment initiatives, including a strategy to increase the **representation of First Nations People** in the government school workforce, and a **VET Trainer Career Change (WorkSafe) Pilot** to support professionals become VET trainers.

Recruitment

Support for schools experiencing workforce challenges.

The **Targeted Financial Incentives** program supports the movement of teachers to hard-to-staff roles in government schools. Since 2019, more than 600 financial incentives of up to $50,000 (plus retention payments and assistance finding housing) have supported teachers to relocate to hard-to-staff positions in Victorian government schools.

The **Graduate Teacher Recruitment Initiative** was introduced in 2022 to support schools to attract graduate teachers. This initiative provides eligible graduates with financial incentives of up to $5,650 to take up roles in Victorian government schools.

The department is working with the Country Education Partnership to deliver a **Teach Rural** pilot program to support teaching students to undertake placements in rural and regional schools. The department also provides funding to teaching students to help them meet a range of costs associated with moving to rural and regional areas to undertake teaching degree placements in government schools, including transport, petrol, accommodation and meals.

The **Recruitment Support Service** provides recruitment advice and support to government schools.

An **International Teacher Recruitment Program** attracts teachers from overseas to fill hard-to-staff roles in Victorian government schools. In addition, a **Migration Support Service** provides government schools with free migration legal advice to assist with school-led international teacher recruitment and retention.

The **Teacher Recruitment Initiative** reduces the administrative process for teachers looking for job opportunities in government schools by allowing teachers to upload a single application into the recruitment portal and make themselves available to offers from different schools.

Specialist skills and expertise

The department is increasing the number of teachers with skills and expertise in high-demand subject areas.

- The **Primary Mathematics and Science Specialist Initiative** is a professional development program for primary teachers in government schools to become specialists in either science or mathematics
- The **Secondary Sciences, Technologies and Mathematics Initiative** aims to increase the number of in-field mathematics and science teachers in Victorian government schools by providing a fully-funded postgraduate qualification for participants
- The department funds 100 out-of-field teachers to gain a Graduate Certificate in secondary **Digital Technologies** and **Design and Technologies**.

Vocational Education and Training recruitment initiatives

Industry Connect is a professional learning program for VET teachers and trainers working in government schools that develops participants' industry skills, knowledge and professional networks.

The **Applied Learning Scholarship Program** supports 100 teachers in government schools to undertake Deakin University's Graduate Certificate of Applied Learning and Teaching. This program builds expertise in applied learning, a fundamental teaching and learning approach for the VCE Vocational Major.

Supporting early career teachers

Supports for graduate teachers in Victorian government schools include:

- school-based induction and orientation
- a 5% reduction of their scheduled duties under the Victorian Government Schools Agreement (VGSA) 2022
- access to professional learning via the department's annual Graduate Teacher Conferences.

The **Career Start** initiative supports graduate teachers in government through mentoring, time release and other professional supports. Approximately 3,200 graduates will benefit over the next 2 school years.

The **Effective Mentoring Program**, delivered as a partnership between the department and the VIT, is a training program designed to enhance the mentoring knowledge and skills of experienced teachers so they can support provisionally registered teachers progress to full registration.

Retention

The VGSA 2022 included a **reduction in maximum face-to-face teaching time** for primary, secondary and specialist school teachers by one hour per week in 2023, with a further reduction of 30 minutes per week in 2024 (Appendix 1, Figure A1.6).

Government schools are also implementing **time-in-lieu arrangements** for school camps and other work outside of school hours. These payments recognise the importance of camps and excursions for students, and the time that teachers invest in providing these opportunities.

The **Returning Teacher Support Service** program supports registered teachers currently not working in a school to return to teaching roles.

The **Safe and Well in Education Strategy** supports principal and teacher wellbeing. This includes the Employee Wellbeing Response Team, which coordinates support to schools in relation to complex health, safety and wellbeing issues; and a set of initiatives providing increased expert and administrative support to principals managing OHS obligations and processes.

The department provides targeted administrative supports to small schools. The **School Administration Support Hub** is a centralised support service for small schools that provides support with financial and payroll administration processes to reduce administrative workload for small school principals. The **Business Manager Professional Learning Suite** is a self-paced professional learning package that supports business managers to develop the essential skills and capabilities they need to be effective in their role.

Teaching technology and resources

The department uses technology and resources in a range of ways to reduce the burden on teachers and school leaders:

- All teachers are provided with **laptop computers** and a suite of collaboration platforms including **Microsoft 365**, **Google Workspace for Education** and **WebEx**
- Over 15,000 teaching resources are available on **FUSE** and **Arc**, with new lesson plans to be delivered to support the revised Victorian Curriculum in English, mathematics, science and the technologies
- Online assessments available through the **Digital Assessment Library** enable teachers to make accurate judgements about student learning
- The **School Performance Online Tool** guides school leadership teams through the FISO 2.0 planning and reporting cycle.

Career development

The department is supporting government schools to implement **flexible and part-time working arrangements** for school leaders through 200 grants that will facilitate job-sharing arrangements.

Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership

The Academy is a centre for excellence in school teaching and leadership. The Academy provides professional learning to improve the quality of school leadership and teaching.

The Academy offers more than 60 professional learning programs, for all levels of school leaders, including classroom and middle leaders, aspiring principals, assistant principals, established principals and business managers.

These programs include:

- coaching and mentoring programs such as **Principal Mentoring** and **Coaching with Confidence**
- programs to increase leadership expertise and capability, including **Leading School Improvement** and **Leading Teaching, Learning and Wellbeing**.
- programs for aspiring principals, including the **Victorian Aspiring Principal Assessment** (VAPA). Completion of the VAPA is a pre-requisite for appointment as a government school principal. It is a program that evaluates readiness for the principal role and identifies individual professional development needs.
- the **Teaching Excellence Program** (TEP) is a year-long professional learning program run each year for 500 highly-skilled teachers from government and non-government schools. Graduates of the TEP are invited to join the TEP Alumni Network and may apply for the Teaching Innovation Fellowship.
- the **Finance Matters** program develops the technical capability of business managers in areas of financial management.

The Academy's metropolitan centre is in East Melbourne, with regional centres in Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Moe and Shepparton.

Appendix 1: Victorian school statistics

Figure A1.1: Victorian schools, 2023

	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
Primary	1,146	396	34	1576
Primary-secondary (Foundation to year 12)	79	13	153	245
Secondary	254	85	14	353
Special	83	5	24	112
Language	4	0	0	4
Total schools	**1,566**	**499**	**225**	**2,290**

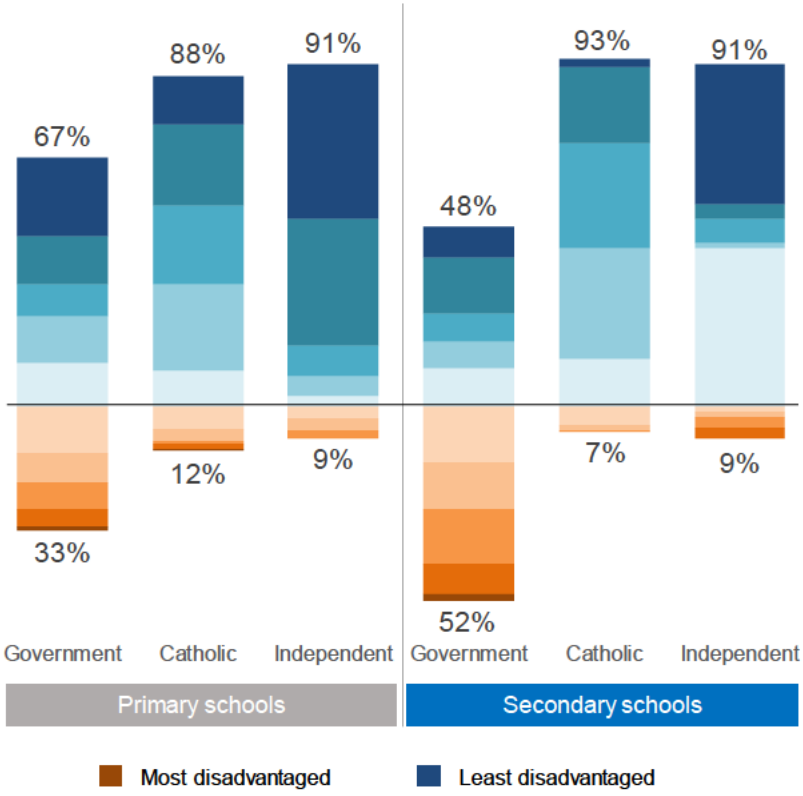
Source: Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools 2023

Figure A1.2: Victorian school students (FTE) by school type, 2023

	Government	Catholic	Independent	All Schools
Primary	382,026	110,964	68,523	561,512
Secondary	256,138	101,316	93,693	451,148
Special	13,943	898	2,809	17,650
Language	1,870	0	0	1,870
Total students	**653,977**	**213,178**	**165,026**	**1,032,180**
Proportion	**63%**	**21%**	**16%**	

Source: Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools 2023. Figures are rounded to the nearest Full Time Equivalent (FTE).

Figure A1.3: Distribution of students by socioeconomic status (national ICSEA decile), school type and sector



Source: Analysis based on school ISCEA index data available through ACARA MySchool website.

Note: The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage is a national index scale used by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority to indicate the socio-educational background of students. This chart divides students into ten colour-coded deciles to illustrate the concentration of socioeconomic disadvantage across government, Catholic and independent schools. The percentages in the chart reflect the proportion of Victorian students in a school sector that are in the top and bottom half of the distribution of all Australian students:

- In primary school, 33% of Victorian government school students are in the bottom half of the national distribution, compared with 12% of Catholic school students and 9% of independent school students
- In secondary school, 52% of Victorian government school students are in the bottom half of the national distribution, compared with 7% of Catholic students and 9% of independent students.

Figure A1.4: Victorian government school workforce as at June 2023 (headcount and FTE)

Workforce	Headcount	FTE
Executive class	183	180
Principal class	3,580	3,537.3
Teacher class	53,107	47,404.4
Education support class*	28,376	21,630.5
Sub-total government teaching service	**85,246**	**72,752.2**
Allied health**	527	430.4
Total	**85,773**	**73,182.6**

*Source: Department of Education, Annual Report 2022–23. *Education support class includes school nurses. ** Allied health staff employed under the Victorian Public Service (VPS).*

Figure A1.5: Student-teacher ratios in government schools as at August 2022

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
Primary									
2018	15.4	14.6	14.2	14.5	15.7	14.8	12.6	14.9	14.8
2019	16.8	14.4	14.3	14.5	15.8	14.4	11.8	14.0	15.2
2020	16.0	14.1	14.3	14.5	15.6	13.9	11.8	13.9	14.8
2021	15.2	13.5	14.4	14.5	15.3	13.7	11.8	13.4	14.4
2022	15.0	13.5	14.2	13.8	15.3	13.4	11.4	13.6	14.3
Secondary									
2018	12.3	12.1	12.2	12.7	12.6	12.9	12.1	12.3	12.3
2019	13.9	12.3	12.1	12.7	12.8	12.7	11.9	12.3	12.8
2020	13.4	12.2	12.1	12.5	12.8	12.5	11.8	12.4	12.6
2021	13.2	11.8	12.1	12.1	12.6	12.0	11.9	13.3	12.4
2022	13.0	11.6	12.1	12.9	12.6	12.0	11.4	12.7	12.3

Source: ABS Schools Australia: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release

Figure A1.6: Allocation of teacher work (hours per week), 2023

	Face-to-face teaching	Teaching and learning focus	Other duties
Primary school	21.5	8.5	8
Secondary school	19	11	8

Source: Victorian Government Schools Agreement (VGSA) (2022), Work requirements - teachers

Appendix 2: Map of key mental health and wellbeing support

This map sets out key mental health and wellbeing supports for students in Victorian government schools.

This is not an exhaustive list. Some supports may operate across more than one tier or differ according to local circumstance. For example in a special school, individual education plans may be developed for all students as a universal intervention.

Wellbeing workforces are key to supporting student mental health and wellbeing across all three tiers.

Key workforces include:

- Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Workforces including Student Support Services, psychologists, speech pathologists and social workers) and primary and secondary school nurses
- Primary welfare officers, student wellbeing coordinators, Mental Health Practitioners in secondary and specialist schools
- Mental health and wellbeing coordinators (expanding to all govt and low-fee primary schools)
- Doctors in Secondary Schools.

Tier 1: Universal

Positive mental health promotion to help schools to create a positive, inclusive and supportive school climate. Builds the preconditions for optimal student learning, development and wellbeing and forms a foundation for Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Victorian Curriculum	The Victorian Curriculum includes both knowledge and skills: Health and Physical Education, Personal and Social Capability and Intercultural Capability Schools are supported to deliver Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships
High Impact Wellbeing Strategies	HIWS are 7 practical, evidence-based strategies teachers can use that have a significant effect on student wellbeing.
Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion	Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit - advice on supporting student and staff mental health and wellbeing School Mental Health Menu - a list of evidence-based initiatives to help schools improve student mental health and wellbeing outcomes
Respectful Relationships	Support schools to promote and model respect and equality. It supports educators to teach children how to build healthy relationships, resilience and confidence
Mental Health in Primary Schools	Supports a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing for students, staff and families based on school community needs
SWPBS	Support and resources for evidence-based approach to improve behaviour and academic outcomes. School level data informs actions across all three tiers
Bully Stoppers and eSmart	Resources for teachers, families and students on preventing and addressing all forms of bullying The eSmart Schools is free to all Victorian schools
Protect	Supports schools to comply with the Child Safe Standards and respond to signs of child abuse
Engagement	Guidance for schools on developing a student engagement policy, student and family engagement strategies and preventing student disengagement
Lunchtime clubs	Lunchtime clubs promote engagement and inclusion during recess/ lunch
The Achievement Program	A whole-school approach to health and wellbeing, creating a healthier environment for learning

Tier 2: Early intervention and cohort specific

Provide early intervention and additional support for cohorts of students who have specific needs or vulnerabilities. Build on interventions adopted in Tier 1.

EARLY INTERVENTION: identify students with emerging or moderate mental health concerns.

Orygen early intervention guide	Practical one page guide to early intervention in youth mental health, for teachers and staff working with students.Schools are supported to deliver Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships
Student check-in resource	A screening tool teachers can use to efficiently identify students who may be at risk
School Focused Youth Service	Selected schools receive support for students from years 5-12 vulnerable to, or showing signs of school disengagement
School Breakfast Clubs program	Offers free and healthy food for students in 1000 Victorian government schools

COHORT SPECIFIC SUPPORT: some cohorts must be provided with a range of supports, including an individual Education Plan (IEP), Student Support Group (SSG) and for some a learning mentor and an Educational Needs Analysis (ENA).

Students with disabilities	School level Disability Inclusion (DI) funding Individualised student funding through (PSD) and (DI) Diverse Learners Hub and Inclusive Outreach Coaches supporting schools to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students
Students In Out-of-home Care (OoHC)	The OoHC Care Education Commitment has requirements for children in care to receive a Learning Mentor, SSG, IEP and ENA A LOOKOUT Education Support Centre is in each region to support schools meet the needs of students in care
Koorie students	Koorie Engagement Workforce provides assistance in supporting Koorie students All Koorie students are to have an IEP and a learning environment that respects and values Koorie cultures and identities
Students from a refugee background	Resources to support schools with students of refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds: Refugee Education Support Program School's In for Refugees, EAL Support and Funding and Multicultural education program and resources
LGBTIQ+ students	The Safe Schools program supports schools to build safer, more inclusive environments for LGBTIQ+ students
Young carers	Requirements for schools to identify and support young carers
Students with health care needs	A student health support plan must be completed for each student with an identified health care need

Tier 3: Targeted

Interventions targeted to individuals or small groups of students who are identified as requiring intensive tailored mental health support to engage positively in education.

Student Support Groups	These consist of parents/carers, school staff, Student Support Services staff and other allied health professionals as required and assist students with disabilities/vulnerabilities/ barriers to engage in school
Behaviour Support Plans	Developed with students, parents and allied health professionals, a school-based plan for students requiring additional support
Individual Education Plans	A tool to assist in developing individualised strategies to support educational needs of students (required for students in OoHC, Youth Justice, Re-engagement Programs and FLOs, Koorie students and students with disabilities)
Flexible Learning Options (FLO)	FLOs may be appropriate for students whose needs are not being adequately met in mainstream school settings
Mental Health Support (in addition to SSS and school wellbeing staff)	1:1 counselling for secondary students via the 26 headspace centres and a dedicated phone counseling service for rural and remote students headspace SAFEMinds and Suicide Risk Continuum Training Be You Suicide Post-vention Toolkit Suicide and self-harm and attempted suicide response guidelines
Education Justice Initiative	Reconnecting young people appearing before the Criminal Division of the Children's Court with supported educational pathways
Navigator	Funded Community Service providers deliver intensive case management and assertive outreach to support young people to re-engage with education. Supports students 12-17 years old in all Areas and 10-11 years in pilots in selected areas.
Family Violence	A range of supports are available to students, families and staff affected by family violence
Financial support	Financial support is available for eligible families through State Schools Relief and the camps, sports and excursions fund

Appendix 3: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority submission

Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

VICTORIA State Government

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The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) develops and provides curriculum and assessment, supports educators, and provides reporting for all Victorian schools, and for all years of schooling, from Early Years (age birth to 8), to Foundation to 10, and Senior Secondary.[1]

The VCAA is a statutory authority established under the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Act 2000 and continues in operation under, and subject to, the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic) (ETR Act) and regulations (ETR Regulations).

The VCAA succeeds earlier bodies with responsibilities for school curriculum and assessment: the Victorian Board of Studies (in operation from 1993 to 2002), the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board (from 1986 to 1993), and the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education (from 1976 to 1986).

The VCAA Board is responsible to the Minister for Education, and also responsible to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Trade, and Minister for Training and Skills in relation to sections within Part 2.5 of the ETR Act.

The VCAA Board is advised by its committees: the Senior Secondary Curriculum and Assessment Committee, Early Years to 10 Curriculum and Assessment Committee, Senior Secondary Certificate Reform Committee, International Committee, and Audit Committee.

Victorian and national responsibilities

The VCAA's responsibilities and functions are set out at Part 2.5 of the ETR Act. The VCAA is responsible for developing high quality courses and curriculum and assessment products and services; carrying out functions as a body registered under Chapter 4 of the ETR Act; and providing linkages that will facilitate movement between those courses and other courses.

The VCAA's functions include:

- developing policies, criteria and standards for curriculum and assessments
- developing, evaluating and approving courses intended for students in school years 11 and 12
- overseeing the delivery of VCAA qualifications
- conducting assessments of students in years 11 and 12 undertaking accredited courses.

The VCAA must be registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)[2] to award an accredited senior secondary qualification or a foundation secondary qualification in Victoria. Registration requires that the VCAA meet minimum standards set out in the ETR Regulations.

[1] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au
[2] https://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au

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To be accredited, the VCAA's senior secondary and foundation secondary courses must meet the requirements in Part 4.4 of the ETR Act and guidelines issued by the VRQA. Senior secondary courses must meet the AQF standards, policies and specifications for a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education.

At the national level, the VCAA contributes, and has responsibilities relating to the work of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).[3] ACARA's responsibilities include the Australian Curriculum, and the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

The VCAA CEO is nominee of the Victorian Minister for Education to the ACARA Board. In addition, senior VCAA officers contribute as members of the ACARA F–12 Curriculum Reference Group; the National Assessment, Data, Analysis and Reporting Reference Group; and the National Testing Working Group.

Early years

In partnership with the Victorian Department of Education, the VCAA manages implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).[4]

The VEYLDF supports children's continuity of learning from birth through the first three levels of the Victorian Curriculum F–10. The VEYLDF is focused on early experiences and learning, and incorporates best practice advice for early childhood professionals on ways to support children and families through the first eight years of a child's life.

The VEYLDF helps early childhood professionals work more effectively with other professionals and families in early years settings and programs, including maternal and child health, child care, early childhood intervention, family support, playgroups, kindergarten, cultural organisations, and the early years of school.

The VCAA works with the early years sector to support implementation of the VEYLDF. The VCAA offers professional learning, publishes a range of fact sheets and resources, and makes available literature reviews, practice guides, research and evaluation reports on VEYLDF implementation.

[3] https://www.acara.edu.au
[4] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/veyldf/Pages/Index.aspx

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Foundation to 10

For school years Foundation to 10, the VCAA provides the Victorian Curriculum F–10, administers NAPLAN testing, and delivers online assessment services that help teachers assess students' progress and better target teaching practices.

Victorian Curriculum F–10

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 is the common set of knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development and active and informed citizenship.[5] The current version of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 has been used in Victorian schools since 2016.

The Victorian Curriculum F–10 incorporates the Australian Curriculum, while reflecting Victorian priorities and standards. The Victorian Curriculum F–10 differs from the Australian Curriculum in the following ways. The Victorian Curriculum F–10:

- is structured by learning bands and levels, as opposed to age-cohort. This provides school curriculum leaders flexibility to design teaching and learning programs that best meet the learning needs of their students
- includes additional curriculum areas relevant to Victorian priorities: English as an Additional Language; curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities; and curriculum for Victorian Aboriginal Languages
- reframes the seven general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum into four: Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Capability, Intercultural Capability, and Personal and Social Capability. Each capability is supported with specified content and standards for teachers to use in their teaching and learning programs.

Victorian school sector authorities – the Department of Education, and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria – require that their schools use the Victorian Curriculum F–10 as the basis for their teaching and learning programs. Victorian independent schools determine their own use of the F–10 Curriculum. Implementation of the F–10 Curriculum, including requirements for reporting student achievement, is determined by the school and its school-sector authority.

The VCAA makes the Victorian Curriculum F–10 available to schools through a dedicated website.[6] To support teachers and curriculum leaders' use of the Victorian Curriculum F–10, the VCAA provides a range of curriculum resources, whole-school curriculum planning resources, and professional learning.

Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0

The VCAA is currently developing Version 2.0 of the Victorian Curriculum F–10.[7] In developing the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0, the VCAA will adopt and adapt Australian Curriculum Version 9.0.

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[5] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/Pages/default.aspx
[6] https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/
[7] https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/Pages/VictorianCurriculumF%E2%80%9310Version2-0.aspx

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Development of Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 follows a major review over the period 2020-2022 led by ACARA and involving state and territory bodies, including the VCAA.

Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 was approved by Australian Education Ministers on 1 April 2022. Ministers agreed that each state and territory would decide their use and adaptation of the Australian Curriculum to meet the needs and priorities of their respective jurisdictions.

Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 will strengthen alignment with the VEYLDF, and ensure the progression of knowledge and skills supports students' progression to senior secondary qualifications.

Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 will continue to support a discipline-based approach to learning, with learning areas regarded as both enduring and dynamic. This will give Victoria's students the best opportunity to thrive in a world of increasing change and technological advancement.

The VCAA's revision process is strongly informed by the expertise of Victorian teachers, and their feedback on the current Victorian Curriculum. This will ensure the next version of the Victorian Curriculum F–10 better enables teachers to plan, assess and report on student learning.

NAPLAN

NAPLAN, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, is a national test conducted in March each year.[8] NAPLAN assesses year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in writing, reading, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), and numeracy.

The results of NAPLAN tests provide information for students, parents, teachers and principals about student progress in literacy and numeracy. The results complement teacher judgement, and other testing in schools, and can be used to inform teaching and learning programs.

ACARA has national responsibility for NAPLAN. In each state and territory, NAPLAN is administered by a Test Administration Authority (TAA). The VCAA is the Victorian TAA and has responsibility for implementation of NAPLAN in accordance with NAPLAN policies and protocols. In performing this role, the VCAA provides administrative, operational and logistical support to around 2400 schools across all sectors.

NAPLAN results reporting provides data on students' performance against four proficiency levels (exceeding, strong, developing, needs additional support), and across the NAPLAN assessment areas (writing, reading, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and numeracy). Victorian schools access their students' NAPLAN results via an online service maintained by the VCAA.

NAPLAN Online

Over the period 2018 to 2022, NAPLAN testing was progressively transitioned from paper-based to online delivery. By May 2022, all Victorian schools had moved to NAPLAN testing online. In all schools, Year 3 students will continue to sit the Year 3 writing test on paper.

[8] https://www.nap.edu.au/

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The transition to NAPLAN Online has several benefits. These include the ability to use interactive questions to provide a more precise understanding of student ability, and a reduction in the time between testing and the reporting of results.

As TAA, the VCAA supported all Victorian schools during the period of transition to NAPLAN Online. The VCAA provided staff training and a program of technical readiness, monitored schools' completion of administrative and readiness activities, and established a NAPLAN helpdesk to ensure schools had access to timely assistance.

In-class online assessment services

In addition to the Victorian Curriculum F–10 and NAPLAN, the VCAA maintains online platforms that can be used by teachers to conduct assessments in the classroom. The VCAA currently operates the Insight assessment platform, and the Digital Assessment Library (DAL). Insight and DAL assessments provide for teachers to obtain timely information about student learning and progress.

Insight assessments are intended for students at Foundation to Year 2, and cover areas including speaking and listening, reading and writing, fractions and decimals. DAL assessments align to the Victorian Curriculum F-10, and are available for Mathematics, English, Science, Health and Physical Education, and Critical and Creative Thinking.

Senior and foundation secondary

For students in years 11 and 12, the VCAA provides the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC).

Victorian Certificate of Education

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education under the Australian Qualifications Framework, and is undertaken in school years 11 and 12. The majority of students in Victoria receive the VCE on satisfactory completion of their secondary education. The VCE provides students with access to pathways to further study, training and employment.

The VCE includes more than 90 areas of study[9]. Schools decide which VCE studies they offer. Studies comprise four units. Satisfactory completion requires students complete 16 units over the two years of the VCE.

Each VCE study is specified in a study design, is quality assured through annual monitoring and regular evaluation. VCE curriculum is benchmarked against curriculum from leading national and international jurisdictions. Where relevant, this includes the Australian Senior Secondary Curriculum maintained by ACARA. All VCE studies are accredited by the VRQA.

For each VCE study, the VCAA provides resources to support educators' plan their delivery to students, learning activities, and assessment.

[9] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/vce-study-designs/Pages/vce-study-designs.aspx

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The VCE also includes 26 VCE Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs, as well as other school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.[10] Schools decide which VCE VET programs they offer. VCE VET programs are designed to be taken as part of the VCE. Students gain credit in the VCE and credit for national training qualifications.

In 2023, the VCAA introduced the VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM).[11] The VCE VM is a vocational and applied learning program within the VCE. The VCE VM replaces the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Intermediate and Senior levels.

The VCE VM gives students choice and flexibility to pursue their strengths and interests and develop skills and capabilities needed to succeed in further education, work and life. Students completing the VCE VM may access apprenticeships, traineeships, university pathways not requiring an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank, or the workforce.

Victorian Pathways Certificate

Also in 2023, the VCAA introduced the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC).[12] The VPC is designed to meet the needs of students who are not able or ready to complete the VCE or VCE VM. The VPC is an AQF Level 1 certificate, and replaces the VCAL Foundation Level.

The VPC is designed to be delivered in Year 11 and and is suitable for students whose previous schooling may have been disrupted, including students with additional needs, students who have missed significant periods of learning, and vulnerable students at risk of disengaging from their education. On completion, students may access pathways into a qualification such as the VCE, vocational education and training, or employment.

The VPC has a flexible duration depending on a student's individual learning plan and the delivery setting. VPC curriculum is designed to accommodate student aspirations and future employment goals. Students undertake units in literacy, numeracy, personal development, and work-related skills, and may a undertake units from the VCE and VCE Vocational Major, VET units of competency, as well as undertaking structured workplace learning.

To support introduction of the VPC and the VCE VM in schools, the VCAA provides resources and professional learning for teachers, trainers and school leaders. These are delivered on-demand through the VPC and VCE VM Professional Learning Platform, and via learning support through professional communities of practice.

Assessment at years 11 and 12

Students undertake school-based assessment during their Year 11 and 12 studies, and examination assessments in Year 12 with results counting toward students' final score. The details of assessment for each unit of study are specified in the associated study design.

[10] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vet/Pages/index.aspx
[11] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/vce/Pages/AboutVCEVocationalMajor.aspx
[12] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/VPC/Pages/AboutVPC.aspx

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School-based assessment

School-based assessment is an essential feature of the VCE and VPC, providing for local flexibility in teaching and assessment practice.

School-based assessments are developed and delivered by schools in accordance with the VCAA's requirements. By contrast, external examination assessments are developed by the VCAA and delivered under conditions specified by the VCAA.

The forms of school-based assessment, and contribution to overall results, vary and are specified in the relevant study or curriculum design. Schools develop and deliver assessment in accordance with the standards and requirements of the course, ensure the integrity of assessments, and comply with the VCAA's administrative requirements.

The VCAA undertakes audits each year to check that schools and providers of VCAA courses are following the standards and requirements for school-based assessment, and that assessment is being carried out in line with the VCAA's assessment principles.

In addition to advising schools of audit outcomes, the VCAA uses the outcomes of audits to identify where further or improved guidance for schools and teachers may be required. The VCAA provides guidance in documentary and video formats on developing coursework for school assessment, scoping and designing assessments.

General Achievement Test

The VCAA delivers the General Achievement Test (GAT)[13] each year.The GAT is a test of general knowledge and skills taken by students undertaking senior secondary studies.

Study in subjects like English, Mathematics, Science and History prepares students for the GAT by building general knowledge and skills in writing, numeracy and reasoning.

The GAT provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate they meet the Victorian Literacy and Numeracy Standards, which are derived from Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). The skills described by ACSF Level 3 align with the capabilities students acquire through the Victorian F–10 Curriculum.

The VCAA may use GAT results in cases where, due to illness or personal circumstances, the result of a student's external assessment is unlikely to be a fair or accurate indication of the student's achievement in a study.

VCE external examinations

The annual VCE examinations are a key part of the VCAA's responsibility for assessment and reporting. The examination period generally runs from the first week of October until mid-November each year, with results issued to students by mid-December.

During this time, the VCAA administers examination centres, manages examination delivery and pick-up, marks examinations, finalizes examination scores, allocates grades, and calculates final results. The VCAA works with the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre to issue results to students.

[13] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/vce-assessment/general-achievement-test/Pages/GATOverview.aspx

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A significant number of current and former teachers are involved in assessing examinations. The VCAA offers professional learning for assessors, particularly for teachers without previous or recent experience, and for examination supervisors and school staff who conduct and administer VCE external assessments.

Examinations are conducted at over 550 centres operated by schools. In addition, the VCAA operates around 35 venues for language oral examinations, and over 110 venues for performance examinations for VCE and VCE VET performing arts studies.

Special provision

The VCAA provides for students in defined circumstances to have the opportunity to participate in and complete their secondary level studies.[14]

The VCAA's Special Provision policy aims to ensure that the most appropriate, fair and reasonable options are available for students to demonstrate their capabilities if their learning and assessment programs are affected by disability, illness, impairment or other circumstances. Special provision should provide equivalent, alternative arrangements for students, but not confer an advantage to any student over other students.

The VCAA makes available special provision arrangements for classroom learning and assessments, external examinations, and in cases where students are unexpectedly unable to undertake an examination.

Statistical information on student participation, completion and performance

Each year, the VCAA publishes on the VCAA website data on student participation and completion of VCAA programs, and on students' performance and outcomes.

Completion and achievement data covers student outcomes for all schools delivering the VCE, including completion rates, median study scores, and tertiary application rates. Student performance information is presented by program and assessment, and includes statistics for VCE, VCE VET programs, and for Literacy and Numeracy Standards.

[14] https://vcaa.vic.edu.au/administration/special-provision/Pages/SpecialProvisionVCE.aspx

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