

# Towards Victoria as a Learning Community



Published by the Communications Division for Flagship  
Strategies Division  
Department of Education & Early Childhood Development  
Level 3, 33 St Andrews Place  
Melbourne VIC 3001

Melbourne  
November 2012

© State of Victoria (Department of Education  
and Early Childhood Development) 2012



The copyright in this document is owned by the State of Victoria (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development), or in the case of some materials, by third parties (third party materials). No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968, the National Education Access Licence for Schools (NEALS) (see below) or with permission. An educational institution situated in Australia which is not conducted for profit, or a body responsible for administering such an institution may copy and communicate the materials, other than third party materials, for the educational purposes of the institution.

Authorised by the Department of Education  
and Early Childhood Development,  
2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002.

ISBN 978-0-7594-0709-1

# Contents

<b>Minister's Message</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The case for change</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The third wave of reform</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Clear expectations will drive professional practices in the school and classroom</b>	<b>10</b>
Professional practice	10
<b>2. Increased autonomy will allow schools to transform teaching and improve student outcomes</b>	<b>13</b>
Compact	13
Curriculum (F-10)	13
Curriculum (senior secondary)	14
Curriculum and specialisation	15
Reporting	15
Behaviour management	16
Workforce and Funding	16
Infrastructure	18
Governance	18
<b>3. Rigorous accountability arrangements will complement school autonomy</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4. Schools will have access to quality, evidence-based resources and support</b>	<b>23</b>
Teaching Practice	23
Curriculum	23
Assessment	24
Supporting leadership	24
<b>5. Partnerships will support efficient and effective learning opportunities</b>	<b>25</b>
A partnership model	25
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>27</b>

# Minister's Message

Every Victorian deserves a world-class education that gives them the skills to succeed in life.

The Government has outlined an ambitious commitment to lift the performance of Victoria's students into the global top tier in the next ten years.

Achieving top tier performance is critical. For individuals, it will result in vastly improved opportunities in the labour market and in life. We know that strong education outcomes support improved social outcomes – a more cohesive society, improved health, and reduced crime and welfare reliance. As a state, Victoria will be equipped with the global competitive advantage it needs to prosper, driving economic growth and labour productivity.

Victoria's education system must improve significantly if we are to reach the top tier: performance has flat-lined; the full benefits of past reforms have not been realised; achievement levels decline over the years of schooling; and there is significant inconsistency both within and between schools.

Our reform history does, however, put us in a position to reach our goals. In the 1990s, structural reform achieved world-leading levels of school autonomy, which is now embedded in our education culture. More than in any other Australian government school system, Victorian principals are the primary education decision-makers. Despite pockets of excellence unleashed by these reforms, inconsistent performance between and within schools continues to hold Victoria back.

The central focus on capacity-building for teaching and learning in the 2000s generated a shared commitment and a common language for improvement. Despite this focus and significant investment, student outcomes in Victoria have not improved.

We are now embarking on a 'third wave' of school reform, targeting universal excellence that improves the life chances and contributions of all young Victorians. This third wave will be driven by local responsibility for system improvement. The best systems achieve this through a highly professional and networked workforce: a community of professionals where the best make everyone better.

My colleague Peter Hall and I recently set out important options for reform in our paper *New Directions for school leadership and the teaching profession (New Directions)*. That paper focussed on improving the quality of teaching and leadership, the most important factors in lifting student performance in schools. The Government will announce its response to that paper and subsequent consultations in coming months.

This position paper, *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community (TVLC)*, sets out the other school-based reforms that will be pursued to support achievement of global top tier performance. These reforms are underpinned by professional trust and autonomy, balanced with accountability and support. We know that our profession will be the driver of real improvement in outcomes; that it can only do this if it has the responsibility and flexibility to make locally appropriate decisions; and that the right types of accountability and support need to be in place for improvement to be widespread and sustainable.

Victoria's school system is, of course, just one part of the broader education experiences available to our children and young people. The interconnectedness between early childhood services, schools and the higher education and skills sector is key, and I will continue to work with Minister Hall and Minister Lovell to ensure that reform activities across the sectors are complementary.

Together, this paper and the Government's response to *New Directions* will establish the Victorian Government's vision for school education – the next wave of reform that will take excellence to scale and lift Victorian education into the global top tier.



**The Hon Martin Dixon, MP**  
Minister for Education

# The case for change



## Victoria's commitment to education and its benefits

The Victorian Government is committed to lifting the performance of Victoria's students into the global top tier. The benefits of strong educational outcomes are clear and compelling:

- *Education drives growth, productivity and global competitive advantage.* Increasing international test scores lifts GDP growth, with conservative estimates suggesting that increasing scores by one standard deviation would lift GDP growth by 1 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Productivity growth in Victoria has largely resulted from increases in the quality of the labour force through education and training. Education is the most important policy lever to increase workforce participation.
- *High levels of education have a direct impact on individuals' success in life.* More education leads to

approximately 10 per cent additional income per annum for each extra year of education.<sup>2</sup> Improved skill levels are associated with enhanced life chances, which are in turn passed on to the next generation.

- *Education is the basis of a good society.* There is good evidence that education creates better physical and mental health, increases social cohesion,<sup>3</sup> reduces crime and lowers welfare needs<sup>4</sup> – strengthening civil society and saving society and government resources which can be directed elsewhere. Education is also essential to managing and reforming the complex business of government.

## The current performance of Victoria's education system

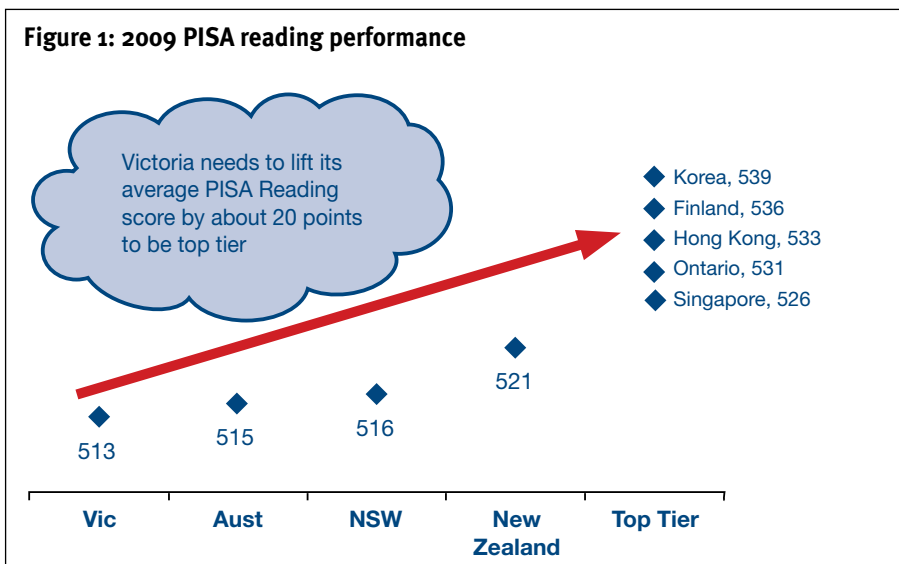
While Victoria's education performance is good by national and international standards, it is not good enough.

<sup>1</sup> Jensen, B., 2010, *Investing in Our Teachers, Investing in Our Economy*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Hanushek, E. and Wößmann, L., 2007, *The Role of Education Quality in Economic Growth*, Working Paper 4122, World Bank.

<sup>3</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010, *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, B. and Haveman, R., 2002, "Social and nonmarket benefits from education in an advanced economy", in Kodrzycki, Y. (Ed.), *Education in the 21st Century: Meeting the Challenges of a Changing World*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Boston.



There are clear signs that our education system’s performance is lagging behind top tier jurisdictions.

***Victorian performance has fallen behind global competitors and is not improving***

Assessment programs such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) show us that Victoria’s performance has not generally improved in the past decade, despite significant reform and growth in investment.

For example, based on PISA reading scores, Victoria sits below the global top tier of performers (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> PISA further shows that Victorian 15 year olds are, on average, six months behind their peers in top tier jurisdictions in reading and mathematical literacy.

In a global market, this has serious implications for the competitiveness of Victorians when vying for further education and employment opportunities.

***Past reform efforts have not yielded expected benefits***

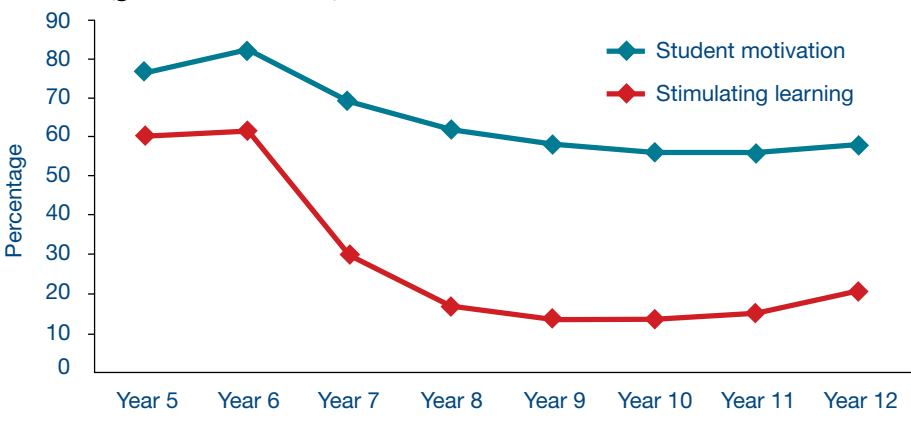
Twenty years ago Victoria began a school reform journey that led the world in creating a model of autonomy which places the principal at the centre of school decision-making and allows schools to dynamically and flexibly respond to local needs.

While some schools have benefitted from these reforms and have shown the outstanding results that can be unleashed by autonomy, performance across the system has not improved as expected. This can be attributed to many factors – schools have not used the flexibilities available to them and there has not been enough focus on the things that matter most, including teaching practice, curriculum, assessment, and reporting. At times, these elements have been subject to central direction and control that has inhibited local decision-making.

This has contributed to Victoria’s failure to achieve the same improvement in learning outcomes experienced by other highly autonomous systems such as Finland

<sup>5</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010, *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume 1)*, OECD, Paris.

**Figure 2: 2011 Student opinion, by percentage of students with positive opinions, (government schools)**



and Hong Kong. In addition, there is far less diversity and specialisation across the system than would be expected, compromising the effectiveness of the system in tailoring provision to meet the needs of individual learners.

***Achievement levels drop over the years of schooling***

As is the case in many systems, levels of achievement in Victorian schools decline throughout the years of schooling.

By Year 10, fewer students are achieving at the highest levels and far too many have fallen below acceptable standards.<sup>6</sup> Students who are performing poorly at the start of school are unlikely to change their learning trajectory throughout the years of schooling and develop the skills needed for participation in life and work. It also means that the pool of students with the knowledge and skills required to shift into demanding further education and highly-skilled professions is far smaller than is needed if Victoria is to be globally competitive.

Stimulating learning opportunities decline in the secondary school years (see Figure 2).

By Year 9, the difference between students’ opinion of their own motivation and of stimulating learning opportunities has increased to approximately 44 percentage points.<sup>7</sup> This places students at serious risk of disengagement, which can ultimately result in poor educational, employment and health outcomes.

These data suggest the need for major changes in the organisation and approach at the secondary level, particularly in the middle years.

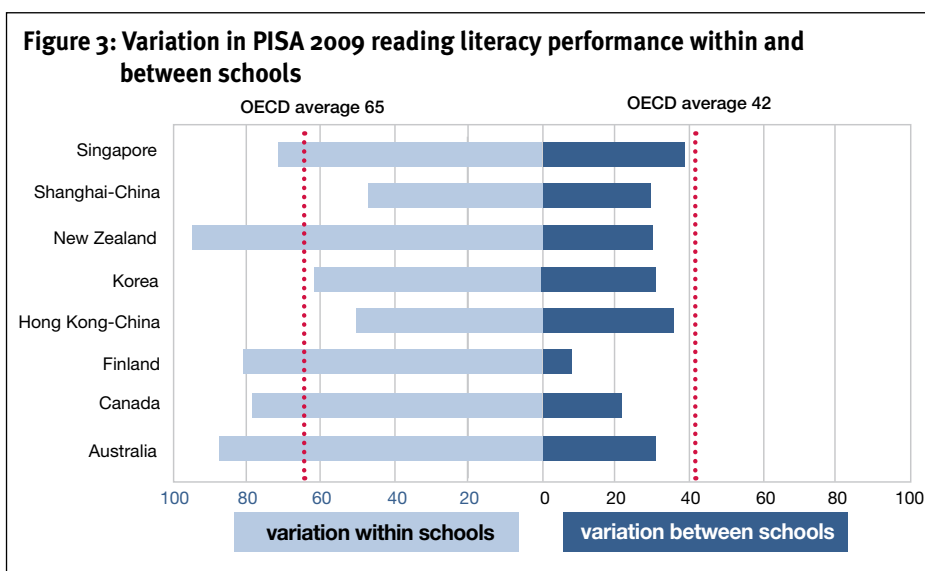
***There is inconsistency within and between schools***

There is too much inconsistency of results both within and between schools.

While there are pockets of excellent performance, there is a small but unacceptable number of under-performing schools. There is a significant middle band of schools that is not adding as much value to student outcomes as they could and

<sup>6</sup> Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011, *NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2011*, ACARA, Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> Based on data from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s Attitudes to School Survey.



should, and the achievement levels of our high performing students are flattening out.

Of greater concern is the variation in performance *within* individual schools. Analysis of PISA highlights the extent of this problem, with the variation within Australian schools (approximately 88 per cent) very much higher than the difference between schools (approximately 31 per cent) in reading literacy performance (see Figure 3).<sup>8</sup> This within school difference is much higher than in most other jurisdictions.

This large variation means that the outcomes a student is likely to attain are largely influenced by which teacher they are allocated. This is clearly unacceptable.

### Victoria's educational performance has high stakes and demands immediate action

There are high stakes for under-performance:

- *Economic:* Victoria's future prosperity and economic success hinges upon the skills, productivity and dynamism

of our workforce - characteristics that are put in jeopardy by a flagging education system.

- *Societal:* Without a robust and lively education, Victorians' ability to contribute to the social sphere is threatened, imperilling Victoria's future social cohesion, participation and the health of our democracy.
- *Individual:* The negative effects will be felt at the individual level, with serious implications for the life and work chances of individuals.

These stakes ground a powerful case for change. Victoria must raise educational performance, and the Government is committed to doing so in a bold and systematic way.

***This document sets out Victoria's plan and a third coordinated and comprehensive wave of reform to propel our education system to the global top tier.***

<sup>8</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research, 2011, *Challenges for Australian Education: Results from PISA*, ACER.



# The third wave of reform



Substantial and rapid improvement is required to achieve the aspiration of top tier performance.

Pockets of achievement and high performance are not enough, and a focus on improving only the lowest-performing schools and students will not help achieve our top tier goal. Victoria must achieve system-wide excellence through a focus on improving the performance of the middle band of schools, as well as addressing under-performance and the flat-lining performance of high-achieving students.

This position paper, *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community (TVLC)* outlines the school-based reforms that will be pursued to support Victoria to achieve global top tier performance. *TVLC* builds on the conversation which the Government started in the *New Directions* paper, launched in June 2012.

The third wave of reform is underpinned by three key elements that are common to the world's highest performing education systems: professional trust, autonomy, and accountability and support.

## **Professional trust – valuing the leaders and teachers who will drive the third wave**

The Victorian learning community cannot thrive and improve without the efforts of our committed and capable school leaders and teachers.

We know from the experiences of high-performing jurisdictions, like Finland and Singapore, that education reform will succeed where it is anchored in the professionalism of teachers and leaders and focuses on building professional practice.

Section one of this paper outlines clear expectations about the professional practices we expect to see in all government schools and the reforms needed to achieve them. This includes coherent and documented approaches to teaching practice, curriculum, assessment and reporting. Quality teaching practice must entail rigorous, universal peer to peer accountability, observation and feedback practices.

While the role of the Department is to outline clear, high-level professional

practice expectations, schools led by teachers and principals have ultimate responsibility for determining how these expectations will be met in their school, subject to local expertise, innovation and context.

### **Autonomy – providing schools with the flexibility to make locally-informed decisions**

The evidence shows that school autonomy can have many benefits, including improved student performance.<sup>9</sup> Autonomy can also support more effective use of resources, increased participation of the community, more collegial relationships amongst educators, and greater tailoring of the educational offering to meet local needs and interests.

It is important that schools have autonomy over the things that matter most, including curriculum and assessment. In addition, autonomy must be matched by appropriate levels of support and direction, as well as effective and sophisticated accountability mechanisms.<sup>10</sup>

Victoria retains its position as the most autonomous government school system in Australia.

Section two of this paper outlines a commitment to extend Victorian school autonomy in a number of critical areas, including curriculum, reporting, behaviour management, workforce and funding, infrastructure and governance. This commitment reflects trust in the ability of the profession to use this flexibility to tailor educational approaches that meet the needs of their students and communities.

### **Accountability and support – building a rigorous and effective approach that supports continual improvement and addresses lagging performance in a targeted and timely way**

The best educational systems complement high levels of school autonomy with effective accountability and support mechanisms.

Effective accountability approaches:

- have a greater focus on outcomes than inputs and processes
- are supported by access to excellent data and information about good practice
- focus on accountability to peers and communities more than to the Department.

These approaches include clear thresholds for intervention where it is necessary, and ensure that support is available to help struggling schools get back on track.

Section three of this paper describes enhancements that will be made to the current Victorian accountability approach, including the development of a differentiated accountability model. It outlines a commitment to not intervene in schools unless strictly necessary and a much stronger focus on peer accountability.

Section four describes the resources that will be made available to schools to support the elements of the third wave of reform, including new evidence-based models for teaching practice and leadership, curriculum, and assessment.



<sup>9</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011, *PISA in Focus: School autonomy and accountability? Are they related to student performance?*, OECD, Paris.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*



In keeping with the commitment to autonomy and professional trust, schools will be free to use or adapt these resources or identify alternative evidence-based resources to support effective teaching and learning.

**A shared commitment to reach top tier**

Victoria can only reach the global top tier if school leaders, teachers and the learning community share a collective commitment to this goal.

Moreover, the type of student and school outcome improvements we are seeking can only be achieved if we partner together

in more sophisticated ways than we have in the past. Schools have a core obligation to connect to other schools, local community and business, and other government services. This includes stronger partnerships across the government and non-government school sectors. Section five outlines the importance of partnerships in the learning community and commits to removing barriers and facilitating such arrangements in future.

# 1. Clear expectations will drive professional practices in the school and classroom



Teaching and school leadership are the key in-school determinants of student learning. Becoming a top tier education system requires school leadership and teaching of the highest quality.

Victorian workforce reforms have achieved some important gains in student learning and today the state is home to some of the world's best school leaders and teachers. Uneven teacher quality and flat-lining student performance, however, suggest there has not been consistent focus on the right things. We cannot become a top tier system unless we address this inconsistency. The Government's *New Directions* paper discusses reform options for lifting teacher standards.

We know excellent teaching needs to be supported by professional practice comprising a coherent teaching model, quality curriculum, effective assessment and reliable, accessible data that identifies the progress and needs of individual learners.

Yet many Victorian schools have no rigorous, explicit whole-school approach to teaching and learning. As

a result, student performance varies greatly between schools, and between classrooms within the same school.

## Professional Practice

Principals and their teachers will lead improvement in student learning, by working together to achieve consistently high standards for teaching and leadership. They will be trusted and empowered to do so.

This will be enabled by a shared understanding and clear expectations on the core elements of high quality teaching and school leadership and how they can be achieved in each school.

*A set of clear, high-standard expectations will be developed to guide professional practice in key areas in all schools*

Shared expectations for professional practice in all schools will be established for the first time, where:

1. Schools develop or adopt an evidence-based teaching practice model that suits their circumstances.



2. Teaching in every school is structured around a documented, school-wide curriculum, based on AusVELS,<sup>11</sup> targeted at student learning needs and used as the reference point for monitoring improved student learning outcomes.
3. Principals and teachers use high-quality assessment and the analysis of evidence to evaluate the impact of teaching practice, monitor student learning progress, inform instruction and identify professional learning needs.
4. Reporting on student learning progress:
  - includes standards-based measurement of student achievement in fundamental areas including English and Mathematics
  - incorporates student reflection on their learning
  - is accessible to and shared regularly with families and students
  - is shared between teachers to strengthen mutual responsibility for student learning.
5. As part of this leading new approach, all government schools will plan and document their professional practice in each of these areas and make this available to parents and the school community.

Resources will be developed that support this activity in schools and new accountability arrangements will reflect and uphold these expectations.

***A set of evidence-based expectations for observation and feedback will be established to sustain professional practice in schools***

Evidence increasingly shows that effective feedback loops between students, teachers, school leaders, parents and system leaders are the most powerful force for improved teaching and learning.<sup>12</sup>

The isolation of individual students, classrooms and schools from each other and from best practice is the greatest cause of inconsistent and poor performance in Victorian schools. The Government is committed to supporting transparency and professional collaboration in all schools, whereby staff observe, provide feedback and support each other's practice.

Meaningful engagement within and between government and non-government schools and the wider learning community will be essential to drive sustainable system-wide gains in Victoria.

***Within schools***

Differences in achievement between classrooms in the same school are too large. We know that closing these gaps will positively impact Victoria's education performance.

Feedback between teachers on their performance has been a feature of leading schools in Victoria and in leading jurisdictions around the world for decades.

As indicated in the *New Directions* paper, the Government recognises that a culture of peer observation, evaluation and feedback in individual schools and across the system is a primary driver of school improvement.

<sup>11</sup> From 2013, AusVELS is the Foundation to Year 10 Curriculum for Victorian government and Catholic schools. AusVELS outlines what is essential for all Victorian students to learn for F-10 and includes the Australian Curriculum F-10 for English, Mathematics, History and Science.

<sup>12</sup> Hattie, J., 2009, *Visible Learning; a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, London, Routledge.



To lift performance, teachers' observation of one another's teaching, and provision of specific feedback against explicit criteria should become standard in every school and every classroom.

Teachers often support each other to improve through team-based professional learning, but such practices could be more consistent and widespread. This needs to take place within the school in real time and should be considered a core part of the way schools organise their programs. This professional learning and development will occur regularly throughout the school year.

Just as important as peer-to-peer feedback, is that teachers seek and respond to student feedback. Students and families should also receive regular feedback on learning progress.

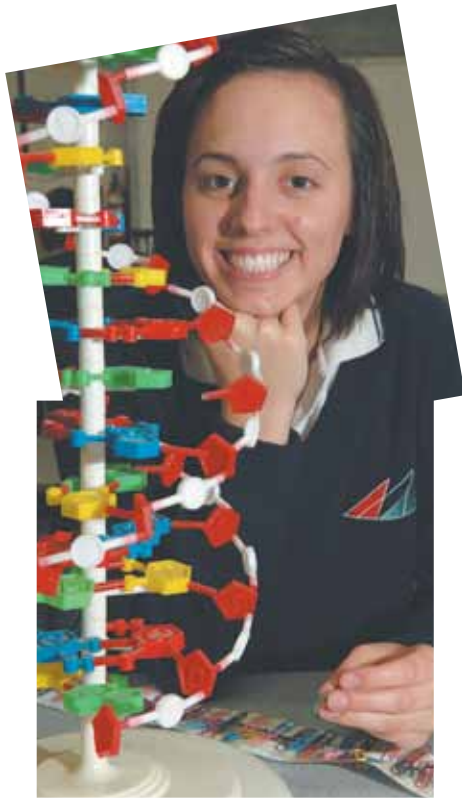
This also means acknowledging and fostering parents' key role in their child's education by assisting them to understand and contribute to student learning.

### ***Between schools***

Victoria is home to some world-leading schools but at present there are few reliable mechanisms to connect and share best practice.

Previous attempts to build engagement through centrally-led networks of schools have not achieved system-wide improvement. To ensure principals and school leadership teams observe and share practice, government schools that are not already doing so will be supported to create their own, self-determined school improvement networks.

Under new guidelines, networks will be selected and driven by principals focusing on sharing school improvement evidence, analysing what's working in schools, and providing feedback to each other through peer-to-peer processes.



### ***Between schools and the Department***

Experience has shown that the light-touch technical support focus which drove autonomy reform in the 1990s and the more interventionist teaching and learning focus in the 2000s both failed to achieve consistent improvement in school outcomes.

The most effective education systems strike the right balance between clear expectations for all schools and targeted support to help each school drive its own improvement.

As we move toward a more profession-led school improvement model, the Department has a strengthened obligation to set high standards, monitor performance and intervene to address under-performance.

Schools will be provided with analysis of system data to determine what's working for which students and in what contexts.

This type of feedback is common to high-performing jurisdictions, which use system-level reach and capacity to help schools drive their own improvement. Schools will be supported to act on this information.

Schools will also be supported to maintain their focus on the things that matter most. The administrative and compliance burden on schools will be regularly reviewed, with a view to freeing schools to focus on teaching and learning, and the more strategic management of their resources.

## 2. Increased autonomy will allow schools to transform teaching and improve student outcomes

Recent analyses of high-performing schools and school systems show that system-wide excellence must be owned and driven by the profession.

The best schools in Victoria confirm this. They are led by teams that take personal responsibility for excellence, operating in a range of different contexts and achieving success regardless of external circumstances.

The structural autonomy reforms of the 1990s unleashed many of these schools, freeing them to develop into world-leading institutions. The centrally directed school improvement model of the 2000s saw additional individual schools transform into world-leading institutions, and some schools achieved major gains from a low base.

At a state level, however, Victorian student performance has not improved as expected, in large part because schools have not exercised autonomy over the elements that matter most. The third wave of reform commits to increased school autonomy in a range of critical areas, including curriculum, reporting, behaviour management, workforce and funding, infrastructure and governance.

Greater flexibility for schools in these areas, combined with effective support, will provide the necessary environment for the profession to drive individual and system improvement.

### Compact

As a first step, this profession-led improvement requires clear understanding and expectations about respective responsibilities of schools and the Department.

### *A Compact will establish clear education responsibilities with government school leaders*

The Compact reflects the Government's commitment to a profession-led school improvement model.

It clarifies roles and responsibilities in the government school system and describes the resources, guidance and support that will be offered.

The Compact also strips away some of the long-standing confusion around human resources, funding and local decision-making that has led to unnecessary intervention in schools and has distracted from the focus on student outcomes.

It will empower school leaders in their decision-making in areas like staff management, school planning and student management. It will also provide a framework for the support schools can expect. This clarity in roles will ensure that both the Department and school leaders are accountable for their contributions to school improvement.

*The draft Compact accompanies this paper.*

### Curriculum (F-10)

Victoria's current curriculum model, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), reflects quality research about the student learning and development continuum.

As a curriculum model, however, the VELs are too restrictive for many schools, while offering too little guidance and support for others.

The Australian Curriculum will be adapted and implemented to build on the strengths of Victoria's curriculum. The current 16 domains of learning will be reduced to 12 and schools will be able to base their





curriculum planning on stages of schooling rather than a year by year approach.

*All schools will be given greater curriculum freedom through a new principles-based framework that unclutters the curriculum*

This new curriculum model will outline high-level principles across the key stages of schooling (Foundation– Year 3, Years 4–8 and Years 9–10) that will be common to every school.

Under the new model, core learning areas of English, Mathematics and Health/Physical Education will be addressed every year, ensuring every student develops core skills essential for other areas of learning. At each stage of learning schools will construct a high-quality, integrated curriculum that provides access to each of the other nine domains.

This will include the Victorian Government priority area of languages education, which has been shown to support students to develop literacy in English and to become engaged and informed global citizens, as detailed in the *Vision for Languages Education* (November 2011).

The 12 AusVELS domains
English
Health & Physical Education
Mathematics
Technology (including ICT)
Languages
Critical and creative thinking
The Arts
Personal and social capability
Humanities
Intercultural understanding
Science
Ethical behaviour

## Curriculum (senior secondary)

Increasing curriculum freedom at F-10 will be complemented by a more diverse range of programs at the senior secondary level.

*Schools will have increased senior secondary curriculum options as part of an expansion of current programs*

These programs include a Victorian Baccalaureate, Industry Pathways Program and Specialist Senior Secondary Programs.

- *The Victorian Baccalaureate* (VicBacc) will provide a pathway for students performing at the highest standard, recognising excellent achievement across a broad program of study, for example subjects drawn from the following learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Languages and Humanities and the new Extended Investigation Project.
- *The Industry Pathways Programs* (IPPs) will be developed in consultation with selected industry groups and will enable students to undertake relevant Vocational Education and Training competencies at Certificate III level and selected VCE and/or VCAL subjects. Students will be able to gain credit toward trade apprenticeships through the IPPs, while developing their literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills to ensure they are well equipped to enter the workforce. These programs will provide excellent opportunities for partnerships between industry, schools and the community.
- *Specialist Senior Secondary Programs* will recognise high achievement in specialist areas of study. They will, for example, be awarded to students who



achieve excellence in subjects from specified subject groups within the current VCE qualification. They will recognise and reward students who excel in specialist areas including sport, the arts, science, technologies and humanities.

## Curriculum and specialisation

Preparing young Victorians for the future demands an ever-expanding range of personal learning experiences.

Specialisation is an increasingly important option for Victorian schools looking to develop their own identity, foster deep knowledge and expertise, and increase student engagement.

As the breadth and complexity of student demands increase, it will become even more important for students to access high-quality learning opportunities from specialised providers. Increasingly, information and communication technology will support collaboration across providers and connections to a broad range of opportunities.

***School specialisation will be fostered, promoted and supported, with focus on:***

- ***exploring options for specific curriculum areas, such as vocational education, to be more effectively delivered by specialised schools***
- ***developing a stronger partnership model, allowing students in specialised schools to access different subjects across different school and non-school providers***

## Reporting

High-performing schools and school systems foster deep engagement between parents and their children's learning. Easily accessible and relevant information is critical to ensuring parents can support student progress and that the home environment supports learning in school.

School reporting requirements have not always provided relevant and reliable data for parents. A one-size-fits-all model has increased workloads of teachers without increasing the quality of information. School reporting activities have increasingly focused on compliance with central mandates, rather than their intended purpose of informing parents and students about learning progress.



The Government is committed to achieving simple, common-sense reporting that maximises up to date, relevant information about student progress for every parent.

***Parents will receive common-sense reports that reflect the progress and development of their child***

To achieve this, schools will be provided with further flexibility around reporting. A review of current requirements will provide schools with:

- greater flexibility in reporting student progress, including options in addition to A-E reporting
- practical support in the use of existing student reporting software packages.

## Behaviour management

The evidence confirms that a safe and orderly school environment is essential for improved student learning.<sup>13</sup> Unruly behaviour impacts not only the students concerned, but also disrupts the learning of other students.

The Government is committed to removing barriers that prevent principals and

teachers from applying consistent discipline and to changing the way students can access alternative settings.

At times, Victorian schools experience threats and abuse by parents. This is unacceptable and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

***Principals will be guaranteed the right to require behaviour standards from students and parents as a condition of enrolment***

Principals will be supported to make student enrolment contingent on students and their parents meeting school behaviour standards.

As outlined in the Compact, school leaders will retain the responsibility to facilitate student referral to other education settings in instances where the needs of the student cannot be met in the school.

## Workforce and Funding

In the 1990s, schools were granted considerable control over budgets and staffing through hiring and performance management powers. Despite reservations at the time, those reforms are now embedded in Victoria's education culture.

<sup>13</sup> Marzano, R., 2003, *What works in schools: translating research into action*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria.

Local decision-making can be supported further, however, by the extension of existing powers and improved support to use existing powers to their full extent.

***Existing local decision-making will be complemented by the extension of local control over budgets and staffing for government schools***

The Department will:

- consider options for more devolved decision-making at the school level (see boxed text)
- support the use of existing autonomy, by providing succinct advice on current workforce flexibilities and how they might be used
- consolidate more funding lines within the Student Resource Package to provide schools with greater flexibility in planning and allocating their funds
- examine options to incorporate funding from outside the Student Resource Package into it, to further enhance funding autonomy for schools
- implement funding that follows the student and new guidelines for alternative settings that support individuals to shift between education settings and pursue pathways that meet their needs
- support schools to purchase professional development directly from their choice of high-quality provider.

### **Choice and flexibility in managing the school workforce**

Victoria is a national leader in the delegation of human resources responsibilities to schools, but there is capacity to provide schools with greater flexibility.

In developing our response to the *New Directions* paper, options are being considered to give schools greater ability to select the best available employees and manage them for high performance.

These changes will balance important obligations to open merit-based processes with the legitimate expectations of fixed-term employees seeking ongoing employment and employees who are excess to workplace requirements. As indicated in the *New Directions* paper, the Government is examining the potential for principals to more efficiently deal with under-performing teachers.

The Government is also considering what further decision-making powers in respect of remuneration could be delegated to principals. This could include determining commencement salaries, accelerating high-performers and determining higher salaries on attraction or retention grounds.

Further workforce management powers will be delegated unless there is a sound reason for not doing so – such as the potential for creation of financial obligation beyond an individual school or legal liability for the State.

## Infrastructure

In an autonomous system, school leaders and communities need to know what school infrastructure funding support they can rely on.

In the past, infrastructure funding in Victorian schools has been incoherent, disorganised and often highly politicised. Schools have been confronted with publicised promises of funding, despite no budget capacity, creating confusion in the community and undermining long-term planning for school maintenance.

The Government is committed to addressing this uncertainty by establishing a more transparent, professional and coherent school capital program.

*A school capital works pipeline will be developed that will provide much needed certainty for government school building works*

This new infrastructure and asset management model will be designed to:

- best respond to state-wide school infrastructure challenges
- provide more transparency around capital funding allocation
- enable increased certainty about infrastructure planning and investment
- reduce red tape for schools.

This new model will complement recent infrastructure reforms that have given schools new options about how their school's infrastructure projects are managed.

## Governance

Some high-performing schools around the world, particularly those serving

disadvantaged communities, have benefitted from additional autonomy over school governance.

Examples such as the UK Academy model, the US Charter school model and similar models in Sweden have demonstrated the potential for innovative new school structures to drive real school improvement.

To ensure Victoria remains a world leader, the Government is committed to supporting schools to develop and implement a range of new school governance models. There is a clear opportunity for government schools to learn from the approaches used in non-government schools.

*A school governance review will develop new options for government schools, including more strategic governance models*

The review will explore:

- additional autonomy options for long-term, high-performing schools, including the potential for the school governing body to:
  - o employ principals
  - o manage principal performance
  - o be more flexible in determining teacher career structure within the school.
- more corporate approaches to governance, including expert membership on councils or partnerships with non-school organisations
- federated governance models to enable high performing and expert school leaders to work across multiple schools.

### 3. Rigorous accountability arrangements will complement school autonomy



The Government is committed to building on existing accountability arrangements so that data, accountability mechanisms and benchmarks are more precise and relevant to school contexts. This accountability approach will focus on student outcomes rather than inputs and processes. It will provide schools with flexibility to develop the means to achieve improvement.

First and foremost, Victorian schools are accountable for student achievement, engagement and wellbeing. They are accountable for these outcomes to students, parents and the broader community, and to the Victorian public through the Department. They are also accountable for the expenditure and effective use of public funds and for compliance with minimum standards set out in legislation.

The best schools in Victoria and in top tier school systems hold themselves to account. The myriad of failed models from around the world confirm that effective accountability can only come from within the profession, with the system intervening only when necessary.

For the small number of Victorian schools that are unable to improve or meet minimum expectations, intervention and support will be provided.

Although meeting minimum standards, a greater number of schools are failing their students by not extending them and enabling them to excel. 'Coasting' is not good enough. These schools must be held to account by members of the learning community including parents, teachers, students and other schools.

The Government is committed to building on the existing accountability model, with a strong focus on peer-led school accountability and review, based on similar successful models operating in other jurisdictions. The model will be supported by greater transparency of policies, goals and outcomes.

Schools and principals will also be accountable to each other within self-determined networks and will assume collective responsibility for children and young people with complex learning needs and those at risk.



Within schools, teachers need to be accountable to each other for the practice and behaviours they expect of themselves as members of a profession. This will be incorporated in performance management arrangements for both teachers and principals.

Both internal and external accountabilities will be reflected in a new approach that ensures:

- all government schools participate in a rigorous cycle of planning and self-evaluation and can access accurate information on school performance and operations that support these processes
- the school community, peers and other stakeholders are engaged in school accountability
- there is a graduated process for school review that reflects key performance thresholds, and which draws on peer expertise and learning
- system transparency and accountability is enhanced through a comprehensive annual system performance report.

*Reliable school performance information will be more accessible through a new information dashboard for parents and an online School Performance Portal for government schools*

New school annual reports will offer parents and communities an easy-to-understand dashboard with the latest information on school outcomes.

The online School Performance Portal will provide government schools with a single point of entry to a wide range of data. This will support self-evaluation and continuous improvement, and will include student-level information. It will combine performance data with information on workforce and finance, as well as infrastructure and enrolment projections.

A powerful 'at-a-glance' picture of school performance will be delivered via an online Performance Dashboard in the portal.

The portal will replace the current School Level Report. It will allow for easier interpretation and comparisons, including between schools of similar size, type, geographic location or socioeconomic

status. This presents opportunities for schools to identify other schools with which they could network.

***A new School Performance Framework will reflect the essential elements of good accountability***

Government schools will be required to actively engage school communities in evaluating performance, planning for the future and monitoring progress. This will include greater openness and transparency of school policies, whole-school models, school outcomes and data.

Schools will be expected to work with their local community on the development of a four-year strategic plan, which will capture their vision and values; outline expectations for teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment; and establish key priorities for coming years.

Strategic plans will be living documents, supported by an annual cycle of planning and reporting to the school community and engagement with peers. To support this process the current system of school reporting will be simplified and replaced with greater local engagement.

Government schools will engage their school community, peers and the wider community (including business), in an annual cycle of self-evaluation. This will focus on evaluation findings from within classrooms and between peers to support whole-school learning and development.

Exemplars of best practice will be developed and shared to support schools to determine the approach to self-evaluation that best suits their circumstances and priorities.

***Victorian principals will review each other's performance and hold each other to account for outcomes as part of major reforms to the school accountability process***

As part of the commitment to professional trust and collaboration, government schools will be required for the first time to conduct a peer review. This should occur at the completion of their self-evaluation every four years and more regularly if needed. The scope of the review will be sufficiently flexible to match the learning needs and priorities of the school, with a set of core requirements ensuring sufficient rigour and consistency.

Reviews will:

- examine a consistent set of state-wide performance measures and lead indicators
- examine curriculum, assessment, reporting, teaching practices and leadership
- examine the quality of the relationships between the school and the wider community, and any partnerships it has established
- consider how effectively school resources are deployed to achieve school priorities, including consideration of financial, physical and information resources and staffing
- make recommendations for improvement
- deliver findings that are reported to the school community and shared with the Department to increase transparency and facilitate sharing of evidence across the system.



The peer review will be conducted by a panel of at least two principal class peers from government, Catholic or independent sectors, and led by an externally accredited reviewer.

The existing cycle of government school review will be the basis for the scheduling of the new reviews.

This process will demonstrate our commitment to profession-led improvement based on real connections between members of the profession, while contributing to system knowledge. It is based on the Government's belief that principals and teachers must drive higher standards and school improvement across the system by holding one another to account. The process will also provide a collaborative learning opportunity for participants, enhancing interactions and strengthening professional relationships between schools, school sectors and stakeholders.

The effectiveness of peer review in lifting standards will be reviewed and the process revised over time. Under-performing schools will continue to be subject to review and potential intervention as outlined in the following.

***Independent review will be triggered where a school does not meet key performance thresholds***

In a Victorian first, in 2013 the performance of government schools will be assessed against a consistent set of key performance indicators of achievement in literacy and numeracy (including growth), and student engagement and wellbeing.

The indicators will be drawn from state-wide data sets comprising NAPLAN assessments, teachers' professional

judgements of student achievement, student perceptions of engagement in learning and safety, and attendance and retention rates.

Where a government school's performance falls below minimum thresholds for these indicators, or where there is other evidence of significant risk to student achievement, wellbeing or engagement, an independent school review will be triggered. A panel of expert reviewers (including principals) will be commissioned to support this process.

In addition to data relating to minimum standards, these reviews will consider the findings from previous peer reviews, the school's self-evaluation, locally collected data and contextual information. They may also include examination of school resource deployment, business processes and operating structures.

Independent review may result in:

- a finding that the school has the capacity to deliver improved student outcomes, with the provision of monitoring and support
- a finding that the school should adopt particular evidence-based resources in areas where professional practice requires improvement (e.g. curriculum plan, teaching practice model)
- a recommendation that additional intervention is required, in which case support will be tailored to the specific organisational development needs determined by the review.

The goal of any intervention will be to support the school's autonomous operation.

## 4. Schools will have access to quality, evidence-based resources and support



Clear expectations, effective accountability, consistent targeted investment, local decision-making opportunities and timely support are all essential to lift Victoria's education system into the top tier.

High-performing schools in Victoria and most high-performing systems around the world rely on explicit, evidence-based models to guide professional practice. Victorian schools are not currently provided with explicit, evidence-based models that they can use.

To support schools to meet expected standards, a suite of quality-assured tools, models and quality practice examples will be developed across key areas including curriculum, teaching practice and student behaviour management. Such tools will support the work of the high-quality, highly connected and committed profession that will be required to achieve top tier outcomes.

### Teaching Practice

The evidence base for good teaching practice is better than ever, yet best practice approaches are still not in use in every

classroom. Schools may need support to meet the requirement to identify, implement and document an explicit teaching practice model.

*A single model will not be mandated but a selection of high-quality, evidence-based teaching practice models will be developed for schools to adopt if they choose*

These models will support staff to adopt common teaching practices within schools. They will include evidence-based practices and allow for straightforward and effective peer observation, analysis and feedback.

### Curriculum

Victoria's curriculum approach has produced a number of creative, personalised examples of world-class curriculum. Reforms to free up local decision-making within the AusVELS framework will support this trend.

There is evidence that a number of Victorian schools lack a consistent, rigorous whole-school curriculum planning approach and require support to develop this.

***Whole-school curricula that are scoped, sequenced and documented will be developed to support uncluttering of the curriculum – ensuring schools can devote attention to both essential learning and each student’s broader needs***

These whole-school curriculum materials will show how learning can be organised across the key stages and learning areas to ensure that all important skills and knowledge are covered.

Schools will be free to choose whether to use this or other source material as the foundation for a locally tailored curriculum that is documented and shared across the learning community.

Additional curriculum resources will also be made available, including self-assessment tools to identify areas of strength and growth, high-quality digital content, and AusVELS work samples and progression points.

## Assessment

Teachers need highly developed assessment practices that support feedback for learning before, during and after teaching.

Formative assessment, which identifies student progress and provides feedback to both teacher and learner, is one of the most powerful drivers of improved student outcomes.

Teachers need access to a range of assessment tools that support the gathering and analysis of student achievement data and progress to inform their curriculum planning and teaching practice at regular intervals.

***Schools will be provided with ready access to high-quality, on-demand assessment tools through a new online assessment platform***

This leading-edge platform will improve access to a quality-assured set of tools across a range of learning areas. It will support assessment to be used more flexibly and provide the capacity for student data to be easily combined and analysed.

Increasingly, student achievement data will be available online. This will make it easier for data to be shared with students, parents and teachers and will support data to more easily follow the student to different schools. The potential for content management systems to support the movement of data between schools more effectively will be explored.

## Supporting leadership

***As signalled in the New Directions paper, principals will be prepared and supported to lead professional practice and develop and manage a quality workforce***

We will refine and offer:

- high-quality preparation opportunities for new and aspirant principals
- ongoing development opportunities for early stage and experienced principals.

A systematic approach to succession planning, including the early identification and support of high-potential leaders, will ensure an adequate supply of high-quality principal candidates.

## 5. Partnerships will support efficient and effective learning opportunities



The best schools draw on the widest possible range of resources and partnerships inside and outside the school to support students.

### A partnership model

Meaningful engagement within and between schools, with families, school sectors, and the wider learning community will be essential to drive sustainable system-wide gains in Victoria.

Victorian schools will only be able to fully meet the future needs of students by collaborating and fostering networks of partners to build personal learning experiences for each student. This is particularly true in addressing the complex needs of students who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

***Barriers to new partnerships inside and outside the education community will be removed; groups or clusters of schools will be prioritised when distributing core and non-core funding streams for government schools; and schools will have control over self-determined school improvement networks***

As part of the third wave of reform, we will work to remove current barriers to the establishment of effective partnerships and explain existing flexibilities that support the establishment of partnerships.

Schools will be provided with advice and guidance on how to create, maintain and expand partnerships that contribute to improvement in student outcomes and stimulate learning communities. It will be critical to highlight examples of effective partnerships that currently exist in Victorian schools and how similar arrangements can be pursued.

Meaningful partnerships between the non-government and government school sectors will be supported. At a system level, this will include improved opportunities to identify and work together on a range of reforms and initiatives that will benefit all Victorian students.

The Government is committed to encouraging the spread of this approach across all Victorian schools, and will demonstrate this commitment through investment in partnerships where practicable.

### **Successful partnerships come in many forms**

The ***Supporting Parents – Developing Children program*** is a partnership between nine primary schools, Scanlon Foundation and Hume City Council. It offers language, literacy and learning programs for families and children. Mothers and children learn new skills together and develop confidence and community connection.

The ***Extended School Hub*** in Wyndham provides a model of schools working together to form partnerships with business and community agencies to deliver services that remove learning barriers to students, their families and local community. The Hub's governance structure includes representatives from local government, leaders from each of the schools and The Smith Family. The Hub uses school and community data and extensive community engagement to inform its strategic direction.

The ***Asia Engaged program*** in the Eastern Metropolitan Region has established a system-level partnership between the region and Suzhou Education Bureau, China. Participating Victorian government schools have formed a highly effective professional network to manage and lead the project. This has resulted in strong and sustainable sister school partnerships, which provide students with authentic opportunities to develop intercultural understanding through virtual and actual exchanges.

The ***Boys, Blokes, Books and Bytes program*** is run by Delacombe Primary School with the help of community organisations and volunteers to improve the literacy skills of Grade 5 boys. The majority of students attend the activities with their father or a male relative. The activities are designed to make learning fun and include visits to the library, pizza nights, sporting activities and a celebratory breakfast with special guest speaker.

# Next steps

This position paper sets out the Victorian Government's education reform priorities and a pathway to future success. It will be realised through a shared commitment and the efforts and contribution of all members of the learning community.

As a priority we want to engage key stakeholders on how the reforms committed to in this paper can be implemented most effectively.

As a first step, key groups and individuals will be engaged to explore the details of implementation in key areas such as the

Compact, school accountability, school governance arrangements, partnerships and curriculum, assessment and teaching practice. This will offer opportunities for schools and educators to identify examples of leading practice and provide practical input and advice that will guide implementation, for example, for the development of professional practice standards and models.

Further information will be available via:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/pages/learningcomm.aspx>



