

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS**

**VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION**

**Revised August 2002**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Victorian Government welcomes the opportunity to revise its submission to the Federal Government Inquiry into the Education of Boys. Since the Department of Education & Training (DE&T) representatives presented our submission to the public hearing in Melbourne, in November 2000, the Victorian Government has introduced a range of initiatives and targeted programs that will support improved educational experiences and outcomes for all students, and boys in particular.

This submission outlines some social, cultural and educational issues affecting the education of boys in Victorian schools and the Victorian Government's efforts since 1999 to improve the engagement, achievement, participation and completion rates of students in Victorian schools.

The Victorian Government is committed to improving the performance and participation of all students and has set the following goals and targets for education and training:

### *Goals*

- Improve the standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schooling.
- Increase the percentage of young people successfully completing Year 12 or the equivalent.
- Increase the percentage of adults taking up education and training and so increase the overall level of educational attainment and literacy levels in Victoria.
- Increase the level of participation and achievement in education and training in rural and regional Victoria and among groups where it is presently low.
- Make near-universal participation in post-school education and training the norm in our society.

### *Targets*

- By 2005, Victoria will be at or above national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy as they apply to primary students.
- By 2010, 90 per cent of young people in Victoria will complete Year 12 or its equivalent.
- By 2005, the percentage of young people aged 15-19 engaged in education and training in rural and regional Victoria will rise by 6 per cent.

There are a number of reasons why individual students may need additional assistance to reach these educational standards or meet their full potential and the Government acknowledges that student achievement is best improved through strategies that are flexible enough to address all of these factors in a holistic manner. Although particular groups of boys might be underachieving in school, individual students' difficulties can rarely be reduced to one single factor that can be treated in isolation. Student engagement usually suffers when several variables of potential disadvantage, such as socio economic status, gender, aboriginality and rurality intersect.

The Government also believes it is important that concern about boys' education does not overshadow girls' disadvantage or foster the impression that very serious inequalities in educational opportunity still experienced by girls have been sufficiently addressed. While current debate about boys' education outcomes has principally concerned high early leaving rates, research demonstrates that young women are more disadvantaged than young men if they exit school early, and are still more likely to select subjects and courses which do not lead to high status, high earning professions. Further, young men are still more than twice as likely to obtain employment if they leave school early than young women, in spite of their lower overall literacy rates (Teese, 2002).

This submission emphasises that underachievement of both boys and girls should be addressed through a whole-of-government response to risk-taking behaviour that recognises the complex nature of this underachievement. The Victorian Government believes that all students need to be given the best possible chance of acquiring the skills that will enable them to participate in the community, the labour market and the global economy. The range of skills required to achieve these ends are changing at a rapid pace and boys and girls alike need to develop strong literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving skills while they are at school.

The Government has taken action to improve the education of all students and ensure that they have access to ongoing pathways and employment opportunities. Recent data on apparent retention rates in Victoria demonstrate that these initiatives are improving student participation in education. The 2001 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) retention statistics also show that Victoria has the highest apparent retention rates of all States and Territories (second only to the ACT). Further, boys' retention rates (which are lower than girls') are increasing faster than those for girls.

It is vital that schools support and encourage the aspirations of each individual student. The Victorian Government recognises that student performance is contingent not only on the provision of high quality education but also on self-awareness and self-confidence. Victoria will soon release its *Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools*, which will include strategies for improving student engagement in schooling, self-awareness and critical analysis skills, as well as classroom and whole-school strategies for promoting multi-dimensional perceptions of gender. This will heighten schools' capacity to improve student retention, participation and achievement rates, and literacy and numeracy standards.

# Victorian Government Submission to the Federal Inquiry into the Education of Boys

## 1. UNDERLYING FACTORS

This submission recommends a pro-active, whole-of-government approach to improve the educational opportunities, outcomes and experiences of all boys and girls, and to remove social and economic disadvantages that lead to significant numbers of young people leaving school prematurely, without essential knowledge and skills for life long learning.

This section outlines a number of key social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Victoria.

### 1.1 New economies, new demands

The performance and participation of boys needs to be considered in the context of the changing nature of work and the impact of these changes on pathways from school to work. The rapid growth of knowledge-based service industries and information and communication technologies has placed pressure on education systems to design courses to meet new skill requirements. Those entering the labour market now and in the future will require diverse skills and literacies and a capacity to engage in lifelong learning.

Notwithstanding technological advancements, Victoria remains highly dependent on traditional manufacturing industries. Victoria is Australia's leading manufacturing State, with the most full-time manufacturing workers and one-third of all Australian manufacturing. These industries require a technically competent and knowledge skilled workforce. Further, in order to be globally competitive, these industries need to constantly innovate and modernise.

Industry capacity to modernise will depend on Victoria's capacity to develop a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The Government's *Knowledge & Skills for the Innovation Economy* Statement (2002) outlines how vocational education and training systems will continue to expand to provide the necessary skill formation to support the 'innovation economy' and successful pathways for young Victorians. Under the *Knowledge & Skills for the Innovation Economy* plan, the Government will:

- establish three funds of \$10 million each for TAFE institutes to trial new initiatives in innovation, emerging skills and industries, by freeing up existing resources
- provide \$5 million in seed funding for Specialist Centres, initially in health services, manufacturing, food processing, building, environmental design, hospitality, services to small to medium sized enterprises and post-compulsory pathways (submissions for these centres will be taken from Registered Training Organisations, Adult Education and TAFE Institutes)
- establish a centre for initial and advanced TAFE teacher training, set professional standards, provide assessment and career development services, recognise innovative teaching and management practice and increase and enhance professional development for teachers
- provide \$4 million over two years for specialist design centres, as part of a \$9.2m allocation to develop Victoria's design capabilities (the first centres will be in digital design and automotive/aerospace design)
- allow TAFE Institutes to offer degrees in niche areas such as viticulture, aquaculture, information technology and biotechnology

- provide an additional \$1.5m to increase the number of students doing school-based apprenticeships or traineeships from 1,200 to a minimum of 3,000 by 2005.

Victoria has also recognised the importance of innovation in curriculum and teaching practice with the establishment of the Victorian Schools Innovation Commission. Announced in the 2001-02 budget, the Commission will provide advice on strategies to foster innovation and creativity in schools.

## **1.2 Gender equity**

Discussion about the education of boys in Victoria also needs to be placed within the context of ongoing gender equity reform. Since the 1970s, discourses of ‘social justice’ and ‘access and equity’ have informed the gender equity debate, which has mostly focused on the disadvantages faced by girls in schools. Historically, girls have had less access to resources and, therefore, had different educational experiences. Girls were also more likely to have their subject selection and career choices limited by institutional restrictions or by external social and cultural pressures, including gendered perceptions of ability and appropriate pathways.

Today, the discourse of disadvantage is also applied to boys’ educational experiences (Allard, 2000, p. 3). Various forms of data illustrate boys’ disadvantage. Boys as a cohort are less literate than girls. Boys do not go on to university education in the same numbers as girls and achieve lower average tertiary entrance scores than girls (Allard, 2000, p. 4).

However, statistics that generalise about boys as a group or girls as a group often hide other more important measures of performance and participation, and are not useful from a public policy perspective, as they fail to acknowledge the diversity within the experiences of male and female students.

## **1.3 Risk-taking behaviours**

Economic and social change has stimulated growing concerns about the health and wellbeing of young people in the community. Health services are now more aware of men’s and boy’s health issues such as ‘road accidents, industrial injuries, diet, heart disease and sexually transmitted diseases’ (Connell, 2000). These concerns, as well as concerns about criminal or risk-taking behaviours among boys, have been the impetus for new educational programs to support the health and wellbeing of boys.

The growth of risk-taking behaviours among young men in particular is a cause for serious concern in the community. In Australia, boys commit suicide more frequently than girls and are increasingly diagnosed with mental illnesses. They engage in crime more often than girls and are more likely to spend time in detention for criminal misbehaviour. Boys’ risk-taking behaviours are usually more public than girls; often they engage in illegal and violent behaviours on public transport, or in other public spaces. Boys are also twice as likely as girls to have substance abuse disorders.

However, it must be noted that girls engage in similarly harmful risk-taking behaviours, which are usually not common to boys and are engaged in more privately. Over eighty percent of anorexics are girls, and girls and young women are far more likely to suffer from severe eating disorders than boys and young men. Young women are still more likely to be diagnosed with mental illness than young men and are three times more likely to exhibit affective disorders such as depression and

stress (ABS, 1997). There is also evidence to suggest that while male suicide is significantly higher than for girls, girls attempt suicide more often than boys but use methods that are less likely to be fatal. In addition, each year in Victoria, 1800 girls between the ages of 13 and 18 give birth, seriously affecting their access to education and productive pathways.

The Victorian Government recognises risk-taking behaviours among adolescents as extremely significant and also recognises that a whole of government approach to the issue is necessary. DE&T's response to issues associated with risk-taking behaviour is outlined in section 2.

## **1.4 Gender at school**

Entrenched gendered values and behaviours can be reinforced at school. 'Elite' boys often decide on behalf of all students what behaviours are to be considered 'masculine' or 'feminine' and they bully those who fall outside or do not conform to these constructed roles.

In schools, students should feel safe to express themselves without fear of prejudice based upon perceptions of appropriate gender behaviour. Teaching and learning about how perceptions of gender are constructed and function are important to improving student self-awareness and respect for others. Student engagement levels, performance and successful completion of school are all in some way dependent on the way in which students perceive their own and others' gender roles.

## **1.5 The impact of teaching and role models**

Debate about the education of boys is often constructed in simplistic, artificial, binary ways. In particular, there are often suggestions in the media that our education systems are producing 'winners' and 'losers', that the 'disadvantaged' are competing with the 'advantaged', that girls are competing with boys and so on. In so doing, gender differences and commonalities are simplified, and the socially and culturally complex and changing nature of gender is denied.

Simplistic statements about the over-representation of women in teaching are often made in this context. This can lead to 'polarized responses and hasty reaction, and/or a kind of stubborn inaction where teachers – often women – object to the discourse which constructs schools as overly feminised and anti-male' (Rowan et al, 2002). However, there is no research to suggest that females are less successful at mentoring adolescent boys than males and a profitable line of inquiry might be to commission research to determine why men are less inclined to take up mentoring roles – such as teaching and other community services - than women.

The Government recognizes that one of the most important influences on student learning is the knowledge, skills and attributes of teachers. There are significant challenges facing the teaching profession at present in Victoria. It is expected that there will be a generational change in the profession over the next ten years, and the need to maintain the high quality of teaching is crucial. The nature of teaching is also changing. The changing labour market, increasing cultural diversity, and the impact of information and communication technologies are altering the learning relationship between students and teachers.

The Government has therefore established the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) to promote and improve the quality of teaching in all Victorian schools through the regulation of the teaching profession. Among a range of functions, the VIT will develop, establish and maintain standards of professional practice for entry into the teaching profession, develop and maintain a professional



learning framework, undertake and promote research about teaching and learning practices, and provide advice on the professional development needs of teachers.

## **2. IMPROVING THE ACHIEVEMENT & PARTICIPATION OF BOYS**

This section of the submission outlines a range of targeted initiatives in Victoria that are impacting positively on the performance and participation of boys. These initiatives have been developed in the context of systemic improvement to support all students achieve success in education and enter viable post-school pathways.

### **2.1 Retention and attainment**

Improved retention and attainment is a key priority for the Victorian Government. As noted in the Executive Summary, the Government has set a number of goals and targets in relation to school retention and completion.

In 2001, Victoria's apparent retention rate for all students was 83.6 per cent – the best of any State. For females, the rate was 86.7 per cent and for males it was 72.2 percent. The difference between genders, 14.5 percentage points, while still a concern, fell from 16.6 per cent in 2000 and reflects the impact of initiatives implemented by the Government (outlined below).

However, the Government recognises that early school leaving is a complex issue and 'not a uniform phenomenon.' It covers a range of behaviours and school experiences and therefore requires a range of targeted solutions that combine to create a systemic program. (Kirby Report, pp. 58 - 59).

According to Associate Professor Richard Teese, Director of the Education Outcomes Research Unit of the University of Melbourne, early leaving 'should be viewed as part of a range of educational and economic behaviours – part of a pattern which may be regionally distinct' (Teese, 2002). This research has largely informed Victorian Government initiatives to improve post-compulsory pathways for young people (outlined below). In developing these initiatives, the Victorian Government recognises that the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) meets the needs of many students. However, in order to achieve the education and training targets, a broader range of choices should be available for all students.

#### **2.1.1 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)**

The establishment of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) across Victoria is an important initiative of the Victorian Government to improve the education, training and employment outcomes for young people. The LLENs are a new way of bringing together the expertise and experience of local education providers, industry, community organisations, individuals and government organisations.

LLENs work at the grass roots level, breaking down traditional boundaries and facilitating cooperation to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people in metropolitan, rural and regional communities across Victoria.

Each of the 31 LLENs currently in operation develop a local strategic plan, which includes specific activities for improving the education, training and employment outcomes for young people, in line with the Victorian Government's education and trainings targets. All LLENs focus on gathering local data on the participation of young people in education and training and identify specific groups at risk. Where issues related to boys' education and training are identified, specific programs are brokered to address these issues. The LLENs

also provide a source of quality local advice on statewide policy and program issues, and facilitate a range of local initiatives. Further information on LLENs is available at <http://www.llen.vic.gov.au>.

### **2.1.2 VET in the VCE**

Vocational Educational and Training (VET) in the VCE programs provide students with the opportunity to:

- combine general and vocational studies
- undertake learning in the workplace
- gain a nationally recognised training certificate as part of their VCE.

This enables them to take new pathways into further full-time vocational training or combined work and vocational training that supplement existing pathways into tertiary studies.

Since its inception, the program has grown considerably:

- enrolments in government schools have increased from a few hundred, in 1994, to over 19,700 in the government school sector, in 2002
- the number of programs has grown from 3 to 32.
- the number of government secondary colleges providing programs has increased from 19 to 280 (covering 90% of eligible government schools).

Research into the destinations of VET in the VCE students highlights the success of VET in the VCE programs. A summary of the destinations of the 1999 Year 12 VET in the VCE students (the latest available figures) shows that:

- 29.4% received offers for entry to VET
- 20.6% received offers to enter university
- 23.7% received offers for full-time /part-time work
- 17.4% received an offer to start an apprenticeship/traineeship
- 5.8% were repeating or completing their VCE
- 3.1% were unemployed.

### **2.1.3 Managed Individual Pathways**

The Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) initiative is a key Government response to the recommendations of the *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (the Kirby Report, 2000).

The focus of the program is the development of a tailored, Managed Individual Pathway plan for each young person to enable them to:

- develop and enhance their skills, knowledge, understanding and experience
- manage their pathways and move through the transition from compulsory schooling to further education, training and employment.

The MIPs initiative has grown to become the primary tool for providing school age youths with pathways guidance and case management.

Funding support for MIPs is provided to all Victorian government secondary schools and TAFE institutes and over 25 Adult & Community Education (ACE) providers.

#### **2.1.4 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning**

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is being trialled this year by more than 500 students in Years 11 and 12, in 15 government secondary schools, five Catholic colleges and two TAFE institutes. The new certificate is focussed on applied learning and sits alongside the VCE as a senior secondary qualification.

The Government is committed to a large-scale roll out of VCAL in schools and TAFE providers for 2003. The certificate is expected to be generally available through all schools in 2004.

VCAL students are required to undertake a Learning Program comprising four compulsory curriculum strands:

- Literacy and Numeracy Skills
- Industry Specific Skills
- Work Related Skills
- Personal Development Skills.

VCAL Learning Programs are made up of accredited VCE, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Further Education (FE) units and modules that meet national and State quality requirements. The VCAL will be a fully accredited certificate in its own right.

#### **2.1.5 Part-time Apprenticeships and Traineeships for School Students**

Part-time apprenticeship and traineeship programs for school students are employment driven and enable VCE students to undertake paid employment and structured training to achieve nationally-recognised training qualifications in addition to the VCE.

This program commenced in 1998 and has developed significantly:

- over 2000 students had commenced by the end of 2001
- there are now programs in 12 industry areas which are approved by the VCAA for credit into the VCE
- there were 139 government schools which had part-time apprentices and trainees in 2001(70% of the total number of schools which had students undertaking this pathway program).

#### **2.1.6 Vocational Learning Projects**

There are an increasing number of projects and programs related to vocational learning on offer in Victoria, especially in the compulsory years of schooling. These projects generally focus on Years 9 and 10 and on the acquisition of key competencies, enterprise education skills and initial vocational education and training. Current activity includes:

- teacher professional development about vocational learning through the Quality Teacher Program
- the Working Community enterprise education initiative
- implementation of the Practice Firms initiative

- the coordination of industry initiatives in collaboration with the Victoria Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

### **2.1.7 School Networks**

In February 2002 the Minister for Education officially launched the cooperative *School Networks* strategy. School Networks generally comprise between ten and thirty-five schools or colleges, although network groupings can be defined differently in different parts of the State, to recognise geographic, demographic and educational requirements, as well as Local Government Areas.

School principals, teachers, school councillors, parents and the broader community all have a critical role to play in School Networks, which will provide improved access to educational opportunities and better outcomes for young people. Over time, networks will link with and complement the work of LLENs, and develop partnerships with other agencies, businesses and the community, to improve student attendance and participation, facilitate pathways to further education and employment, enhance the provision of local resources and services, and support student wellbeing.

School networks have developed accords, with funding assistance from the Victorian Government, to outline their purpose, management arrangements and expected outcomes.

### **2.1.8 Young Offender Pilot Projects – Early School Leavers**

Early school leaving and lack of connectedness to educational, vocational or employment opportunities are known to be risk factors for the development of delinquent and/or offending behaviour. The Young Offender Pilot Program for Early School Leavers has been identified under *Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria, 2002 - 2005* as a model appropriate for continuation and replication in high need locations. The program is coordinated in the Northern Region by the Salvation Army and offers supportive learning environments for those not attending or returning to school.

### **2.1.9 Handbrake Turn**

The Government's *Safer Streets and Homes* Strategy also identified the Handbrake Turn scheme as an exemplary program for young people at risk. Operated by Care and Communication Concern in areas including the City of Greater Dandenong, the program works with young people who have been excluded from school and are involved in, or at risk of being involved in motor vehicle theft. It comprises a 10-week course that gives young people vocational skills and improves their employability, self-esteem, anger management and attitude to work. The program has been shown to be successful in reintegrating young people back into school or helping them progress into apprenticeships, trainee places or the workplace.

### **2.1.10 Operation New Start**

Operation New Start is a school term length program based around outdoor activities. It offers experience in basic navigation, sailing and mountaineering. Participating students, aged 14-18, are also involved in projects with local community groups. The program is a partnerships initiative and is supported by DE&T, the Department of Human Services and

the Victorian Police. Initially offered to students in the City of Frankston, the program has now been extended to accommodate all schools in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

## **2.2 Literacy and numeracy**

In Victoria, as in other education systems around the world, the improvement of literacy levels is a high priority. International research suggests that students who leave the early years of schooling unable to read and write struggle to make up ground in later years. The Victorian Government has set a target of ensuring that all Victorian primary students will be at or above national benchmark levels for reading, writing and numeracy by 2005.

DE&T has implemented a range of early years of schooling strategies that have had a positive impact on the achievement of all students in the early years, which are outlined below.

### **2.2.1 The Early Years Literacy Program**

The Early Years Literacy Program includes daily, focused, two-hour classroom literacy sessions, case management of 'at risk' students, strategically planned home/school partnerships, professional development at teacher, Early Years Coordinator, Early Years Trainer levels, and the identification of an Early Years Coordinator and whole-school commitment to improvement. All government primary schools, P-12 colleges and some special settings in Victoria provide this program.

### **2.2.2 Reading Recovery**

Schools implement literacy intervention programs at Year 1 level for students most at risk of underachieving. Most students at risk are engaged in the Reading Recovery program.

The great majority of students generally discontinue Reading Recovery when they achieve levels within the class average band. While there are more boys than girls in the program (approximately 60% of enrolled students) boys' and girls' successful discontinuation rates are almost identical. Overall, 86% of all students successfully discontinue Reading Recovery. Similarly, the percentage of boys and girls referred from the program to longer-term learning assistance is very similar and comprises less than 10% of those enrolled in Reading Recovery.

### **2.2.3 Numeracy in the Early Years**

From 1999 – 2001, DE&T conducted the Early Numeracy Research Project (ENRP), which included 70 schools - 35 trial schools and 35 matched reference schools. Findings from the ENRP final report show, in terms of mean gains for Prep to Year 2, that students in trial schools significantly outperformed students in reference schools in all areas of mathematics assessed at each year level. Data from the project shows there were no educationally significant differences between the achievement levels of boys and girls.

DE&T has devised the Early Years Numeracy Program based on this research and the Government allocated \$34.6 million over four years in the 2002-03 budget to support the implementation of early years numeracy programs, leading to improved mathematics learning for all students.

At June 2002, 84% of schools had school-based Early Years Numeracy Program coordinators who participated in a six day professional development program

On top of these commitments, the Victorian Government has allocated \$34.6 million over four years in the 2002 - 03 State Budget to support a school-based coordination role for the implementation of early years numeracy programs, leading to improved mathematics learning for all students.

#### **2.2.4 Reduced Class Sizes**

The Victorian Government has committed to reduce, by 2003, the statewide average class size in government school P-2 classes to 21 students, to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students. Significant reductions in primary class sizes have been achieved since the Government announced its policy:

- The average Prep–2 class size in 2002 was 21.8 students compared to 24.3 in 1999. This is a reduction of 2.5 students in three years and represents substantial progress towards meeting the 2003 target of 21
- Primary class sizes in 2002 have decreased at all year levels, but especially in the Early Years (Prep–2). In particular, school principals have ensured that the size of Prep classes, where the foundations for literacy and numeracy are established, are much smaller than other classes. The average class size in Prep in 2002 was only 20.4 students, which is substantially lower than the average Prep class of 23.2 in 1999 and below the Government’s target of 21
- The average primary class size in 2002 was 23.5 compared to 25.4 in 1999, a reduction of 1.9 students in three years
- Despite speculation that there may have been an increase in the average size of classes in Years 3–6, these class sizes have in fact reduced further in 2002. The average Year 3–6 class in 2002 was 24.8 students compared to 26.2 in 1999, a reduction of 1.4 students
- In 2002 there was only one school with an average Prep–2 class size of 28 or more students compared to 59 schools that averaged 28 or more in Prep–2 in 1999.

In the 2002 - 2003 State Budget, the Government extended its commitment to reducing P-2 class sizes in order to improve literacy and numeracy standards, through funding for an additional 285 teachers.

### **2.3 Engagement**

The Victorian Government recognises the importance of student engagement and wellbeing and has implemented a range of targeted initiatives in Victorian government schools.

#### **2.3.1 Middle Years Support**

##### ***Middle Years Research and Development Project (MYRAD)***

The MYRAD Project, undertaken in 1999-2001 and involving sixty-two clusters of secondary schools and their associated primary schools (250 schools), researched and

implemented strategies for improving student outcomes in the middle years. The final report of this research clearly indicates that the middle years schooling experience is not meeting the needs of a significant number of students. It also indicates that strong leadership, primary-secondary school partnerships and curriculum and structural reforms can reverse this trend. Accordingly, DE&T has developed the *School Leadership Development Policy Framework* to underpin Professional Development programs for school leaders.

### ***Middle Years Reform Project***

From 2001, the Victorian Government has allocated additional funding to all schools with students in Years 7 to 9 to improve the literacy outcomes and retention and attendance rates of these students. Programs offered through this project help schools to ensure that the educational progress of all students is not impeded by factors within a school's control. These projects are underpinned by research examining the reasons why particular groups of boys and girls are not succeeding at school. Schools are exploring ways to engage these students in their learning and to support them in their relationships with peers, teachers and the broader community.

### ***Restart Initiative***

From 2002, 100 additional teachers were provided to selected secondary schools through the *Restart* program. Restart allows schools to offer intervention programs for Year 7 students struggling with literacy and the diversity of the curriculum.

### ***Innovation and Excellence in the Middle Years***

In the 2002 - 03 State Budget the Victorian Government provided additional funding for two new initiatives for middle years students:

- \$84.3 million for the *Schools for Innovation and Excellence in the Middle Years* initiative, which will provide funding for primary and secondary schools to collaboratively deliver effective education programs to advance student learning, targeting literacy, attendance and curriculum innovation.
- \$84.6 million for the *Access to Excellence* initiative, which will provide 300 teachers for approximately 100 secondary schools to help them improve attendance and retention rates, and literacy and numeracy levels of students in Years 7 to 10.

### ***Student Action Teams (SATs)***

DE&T (in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Justice and VicHealth) also funds Student Action Teams (SATs) as part of the Middle Years Strategy. Participation in SATs not only raises middle years students' interest and involvement in their school communities, but also demonstrates how they can make a valuable contribution to their school and their local community. SATs are of particular value to young people 'at risk' and have been effective in secondary schools in addressing concerns such as bullying, personal safety, vandalism, graffiti and drug abuse.

## **2.3.2 The Advocacy Program**

*The Advocacy Program* promotes processes that engage a student in an intensive one-to-one relationship with a significant adult or advocate, usually a teacher. The program involves four central elements essential to a successful engagement relationship:

- establishing a relationship



- self-knowledge
- planning and goal setting
- review

The program was initially developed for students of post-compulsory age to ensure that students had intensive support and advice as they were progressing through the later years of schooling. However, the program has proved so successful that the model has been extended to cover learners of any age and now involves 20 schools in a research program, “Connecting through the Middle Years”, which is developing the program for students in Years 5-9.

The quantitative and qualitative results of the program have been impressive. Increases in student retention (up to 250%) and very significant improvements in academic results have been reported.

### **2.3.3 Science in Schools Strategy**

The Victorian Government is investing heavily in the nationally-agreed key learning areas of science and technology. The Government has provided \$26.7 million over five years (from 1999 – 2003) to improving the teaching and learning of science P-10 in Victorian schools through innovative pedagogy.

The Science in Schools Strategy encourages all students to pursue VCE science subjects and science-related careers. The Strategy is funding:

- research and development
- extensive professional development
- a broad range of projects that connect students and schools with business, industry and the tertiary sector
- development of student and teacher resources.

To complement the Science in Schools Strategy, the Government has allocated \$14.7 million in 2001, to fund the construction of three state-of-the-art Science and Technology Centres:

- the Victorian Space Science Education Centre at Strathmore Secondary College
- a Gene Technology Access Centre at University High
- an innovations centre at Bacchus Marsh Secondary College, linking schools to community resources, to help them create local, sustainable environmental practices, .

### **2.3.3 Sports Education**

Providing students with opportunities to achieve across a range of activities enhances students’ confidence and engagement. DE&T has implemented a number of sports programs at a system and school level. These programs have been remarkably successful in heightening students’ engagement and leadership skills.

#### ***Sport Education Model - Sport Education In Physical Education Program (SEPEP)***

Under this program, students learn to plan, implement and play in a sporting competition as part of their PE or sport education program. Students take responsibility for administering a season of sport at school, planning and implementing the competition. Boys in particular

have shown a distinct interest in this approach and have responded well to being given positions of authority.

### ***Leadership***

Many schools are involving students in sports leadership programs, to develop links with community initiatives. Having participated in an extended training program through their PE classes, students become involved in administration and/or officiating local or school sport programs. As a result of leadership programs, students are offered an opportunity to participate in a refereeing/coaching course.

### ***School and Club links***

DE&T is in contact with State sporting associations and supports the development of programs of mutual benefit to schools and clubs. A range of programs within school and after hours have been established to offer students a pathway to community sport participation and achievement.

## **2.3.4 ICT and Student Engagement**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the use of ICT in the classroom increases student engagement. DE&T has designed and developed a range of high quality online teaching and learning resources to engage students. Resources such as [curriculum@work](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/curriculumatwork) (available online at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/curriculumatwork>) support 'productive pedagogies' across the different Key Learning Areas and foster improved engagement.

Three key ICT initiatives in Victoria are:

- *Bridging the Digital Divide*: this initiative, announced in the 2000-01 budget, provides \$23 million over three years to ensure equity of access to information and communication technology for all students. It will enable all schools to attain a computer to student ratio of 1:5, undertake additional networking for improved Internet access and enhance distance education for students.
- *ICT Achievers Program*: this program provides innovative and enterprising ICT curriculum for Years 9 and 10 students. Developed in partnership with Multimedia Victoria, the project involves 50 schools. Further information is available at: <http://www/sofweb.vic.edu.au/itcareer/ICTprojects.htm#achieve>
- *New Realities*: a resource developed in partnership with Multimedia Victoria and specifically designed to aid teachers and students seeking information about the impact of ICT skills on the modern workplace. Further information is available at: <http://www.mmv.vic.gov.au/newrealities>  
<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/itcareer/>

## **2.4 Addressing socio-economic disadvantage**

Research undertaken for the *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (The Kirby Report, 2000), concluded that socio-economic status has considerable influence on retention and achievement:

In regions of Melbourne where there are many tertiary educated families, fewer than one in ten young people leave school early. In regions of mixed socio-economic status, dropping out increases to around 20 per cent of girls and 30 per cent of boys (p. 50).

A report of the former Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Factors Influencing Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School* also found that socio economic status (SES) has an overarching impact on student participation and performance. Gender, language background and other disadvantages are amplified in communities of low socio-economic status.

In recognition of this, the Government is helping schools to address disadvantage through a range of programs.

#### **2.4.1 Funding provided in School Global Budgets (SGB)**

Programs include:

- Disabilities and Impairments funding to support the education of students with disabilities and their integration in mainstream schooling
- Special Needs funding allocated through the Special Learning Needs Index
- English as a Second Language funding for students from language backgrounds other than English
- Rurality and Isolation funding, which provides for a rural size adjustment factor, shared specialist teachers in small rural primary schools and location-based funding
- Priority Programs which respond to Government education policy and the needs of individual school communities. These programs currently include Student Welfare and Support, LOTE, Koorie Educators, Literacy Coordination, Reading Recovery and Managed Individual Pathways.

Funding for targeted initiatives is weighted to improve access for students who are disadvantaged for a range of reasons.

#### **2.4.2 Student Support Services**

The Government has also implemented a number of targeted programs to support students in difficult personal circumstances.

- *The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS)* is a joint initiative of the Department of Health Services (DHS) and DE&T to enhance cooperation between schools and community agencies to provide a more coherent and “whole of community” response to the needs of vulnerable young people, including those not currently enrolled in school.
- *Student Welfare Coordinators* are funded in secondary schools to respond to the welfare needs of students and provide welfare related resources including assistance to students receiving an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
- The *Secondary School Nurses program* is a DHS funded initiative which has deployed 100 nurses into 200 secondary schools of greatest need, as part of the school welfare team.
- *Alternative programs* support students who are experiencing significant difficulties adjusting to mainstream schooling. These programs are intensive and short term and involve schools, parents/carers and community agencies.

## 2.5 Koorie Students

Koories in Victoria demonstrate lower average levels of literacy than other students and are less likely to complete Year 12. Rural Koorie students achieve lower outcomes than city Indigenous students and Koorie girls have higher outcomes than boys. DE&T strongly supports goal 3.3 of *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, which states that it is essential that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in schooling, so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students.

DE&T has in place a comprehensive approach to improving the educational experiences and outcomes of Koorie students, which are outlined below.

### 2.5.1 Koorie Education

In December 2001, the Premier launched the 'Yalca' initiative for the education of Koorie students. Yalca strengthens and formalises the involvement of Koorie people in educational decision-making and builds on the partnership between the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and DE&T. Resources and decision making responsibilities have been devolved to a regional level, through Regional Koorie Education Committees. The Yalca strategic plan for 2001-2004 includes the following initiatives:

- *Koorie Educators Program*: Provides support to Koorie students' schools and facilitates dialogue between the school and the Koorie community
- *Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) campuses*: KODE campuses provide a culturally inclusive learning and teaching environment for Koorie students and increase community involvement in education.
- *Koorie Home School Liaison positions*: Koorie Home School Liaison Officers improve educational outcomes for Koorie students, particularly in the areas of student well being and attendance, strengthening thereby enhancing support for Koorie boys.
- *Koorie Student Support Teams*: The Koorie Student Support Team Strategy supports students from Prep to 10 in their learning. Three Koorie Student Support Teams across identified regions service government schools to help improve both literacy and attendance outcomes.
- *Koorie Literacy Links Project and the Koorie Middle Years Link Project*: These projects focus on improving literacy outcomes for Koorie students in Prep to Grade 4. An estimated 400 Koorie students, along with their teachers and community members, are supported by the projects in the following ways:
  - motivational aspects of technology for boys

- school community teams act as support networks for Koorie students particularly male members acting as role models
- communication with other Koorie males across the State, including family
- identification of high interest texts for Koorie males
- sharing of teaching strategies which support different learning styles.

DE&T also helps VAEAI to deliver a mentor program across a number of community sites. Initiatives supported by the mentor program include art, social, educational and cultural projects as well as the provision of individual mentor support. In addition, the Koorie Education Strategy Team of DE&T and the Regional Koorie Education Committees provide advice on the specific needs of Koorie students.

## **2.6 Students from language backgrounds other than English**

The school population in Victorian government schools reflects the cultural diversity of the State. Over 25% of the school population is from language backgrounds other than English. Students or their families come from over 100 countries and speak over 100 languages.

Approximately 3500 newly arrived students enrol in Victorian government schools each year. These students have a range of pre-migration experiences. Approximately a third of these students are humanitarian or refugee migrants. Boys account for 51.8% of all students from language backgrounds other than English enrolled in Victorian government schools.

At the school level, negotiating mutually acceptable solutions for accommodating cultural difference is important if students are to maintain sufficient levels of engagement and not be isolated from the school community.

Refugee students may find settling in a new country particularly difficult. They may have experienced war or the death of or separation from a member of their immediate or extended family. They may lack parental support and have had to assume a leadership role within their family. Such additional burdens and responsibilities on students need to be catered for by the State education system.

Refugee experiences, combined with the need to learn English and adapt to a cultural environment can impact on student learning and development. Students who have had severely interrupted schooling in their first country, or no schooling at all, face additional challenges and require substantial support.

Victoria has developed an extensive range of strategies and programs to:

- improve the educational outcomes for students of varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- expose a greater number of students to learning languages and learning about other cultures
- increase professional development opportunities for teachers who have students from varied linguistic, cultural and experiential backgrounds in their classes.

These strategies and programs are described below.

### **2.6.1 Languages, ESL and Multicultural Education**

#### *The Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools*

The Multicultural Policy for Victorian Schools aims to ensure that by 2006, all students will have multicultural perspectives integrated into all eight key learning areas and incorporated into all aspects of school life. On-going professional development for teachers and administrators and a number of support and curriculum materials have been developed to help schools to implement the policy.

### ***English as a Second Language support***

New arrival and on-going support is available for students from language backgrounds other than English:

- Intensive new arrival programs provide an invaluable opportunity for students attending Victoria's four English Language Schools and five Language Centres to learn English language skills across the curriculum. Students also learn about Australian culture
- Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs) are provided to all English Language Schools and Centres and to approximately 240 mainstream schools to help students settle into their new environment, and to provide classroom assistance
- ESL funding is provided to approximately 480 mainstream schools for on-going ESL programs.

### ***Professional development***

ESL teachers can access a range of resources and professional development activities including cultural background sessions, effective classroom strategies and specialist training in dealing with students suffering from the affects of torture and trauma.

### ***Welfare support***

English Language Schools and Centres, which many newly arrived students attend for between 6-12 months, assist students and their families in the settlement process. Students who have left the Schools and Centres can then receive special assistance from ESL teachers at their new school.

Students suffering from the effects of torture and trauma are referred to the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST). DE&T works with the VFST to provide professional development for teachers and other educational professionals, and has introduced the Rainbow Program, developed by the VFST, into schools for students who have experienced torture and trauma.

DE&T has recently completed a research project in which specially-trained teachers supported and documented the transition of ESL learners from low literacy backgrounds from intensive programs in English Language Schools and Centres into mainstream schools. The report's recommendations are currently being implemented. The research highlights the need to establish a range of pathways for older ESL students less suited to an academic pathway.

### ***Languages***

According to DE&T's annual Languages Survey (2000), boys learning a language other than English outnumbered girls in Years 7 and 8, but by Year 12 female students outnumbered male students by more than two to one. Research has shown that, overall, boys have a less positive attitude to learning a language than girls and are disproportionately represented among students who discontinue language studies.

To help reverse this trend, DE&T has implemented the following strategies:

- annual Year 10 student forums to promote the benefits of learning languages, for enhancing vocational opportunities and improving retention
- Year 10 student scholarships to promote the benefits of learning languages and to increase the uptake of languages in Years 11 and 12
- professional development activities for language teachers focussing on learning and teaching strategies that lead to more creative curriculum delivery, and enhanced engagement and retention
- development of curriculum kits in a range of languages to provide cross-curricular language-specific learning experiences in environments such as the zoo and the botanical gardens.

## **2.7 Different learning styles**

Students learn in a range of different ways and pedagogy should support different learning styles and needs. All students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their skill level in a way that reflects their individual learning style. While it is possible to identify different strengths among male and female students, it is overly simplistic to categorise particular learning behaviours according to sex. Victoria has implemented a range of innovative teaching and learning strategies to support students with different learning styles and needs.

### **2.7.1 Thinking Oriented Curriculum**

Analysis of the research findings from the Middle Years Research and Development (MYRAD) project and surveys of students indicate that where students see an emphasis on thinking and learning skills there is:

- an increase in student focus on the objectives of the task
- an improvement in motivation
- a readiness on the part of the students to adopt positive cognitive strategies in their work
- an increased likelihood of students feeling they have greater control over their learning
- an increased feeling that the school is more focused on the learning of all students, rather than being focused on competition and students with ability.

The MYRAD research has identified a need to integrate thinking and learning skills across core learning areas. Schools engaged in middle years reform are working towards this objective.

### **2.7.2 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning**

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) has been developed to broaden pathways options for young people moving from secondary school to work and/or further education and training. It will be delivered as a complementary qualification to the VCE and is designed to meet individual learning, personal development and transition needs that cannot be fully met by VCE curricula.

### **2.7.3 High potential students**

Students of high potential often do not perform well in regular classroom settings where it can be difficult for a teacher to meet their specific education needs. Students may feel alienated and 'different' and manifest a range of behavioural problems. Research indicates that students of high potential are likely to feel depressed, often have poor self esteem and are over-represented in the early school leavers group.

For this reason, DE&T offers teachers ongoing professional development guidance in relation to 'at risk' high potential students. Over 1000 teachers attended training seminars during 2001- 2002. A collaborative project with the Koorie Education Strategy Team is currently training educators to identify Koorie students of high potential. Similar projects with other seriously at risk high potential students are planned and there are currently 22 schools offering Select Entry Accelerated Learning Programs (to increase to 25 from the beginning of 2003). 52 local Gifted Education Networks also operate across the State.

## 2.8 Early Childhood

The *Review of the Issues that Impact on the Delivery of Preschool Services to Children and Their Families In Victoria* (Kirby and Harper, 2001), found that quality developmental programs in the preschool years favourably influence subsequent learning, health and behaviour. Other research suggests that:

- educational outcomes and physical and emotional wellbeing are improved when early life experiences are positive
- children whose cognitive and behavioural characteristics are poorly developed in their early years are more likely to experience difficulties throughout schooling (McCain and Mustard, 1999)
- for every \$US1,000 invested in early years education the return is estimated to have been \$US7,160 in terms of savings in special education, income support, unemployment and crime (Perry Preschool Project). Arguments also include improving retention and drop out rates (Barnett 1993)
- early behavioural traits such as persistent crying can translate into difficult behaviour in later years (*Australian Temperament Project 1983 - 2000*).

Given the over representation of boys with behavioural and mental health problems, as demonstrated by the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2001), there is a strong argument for early intervention and parental support.

*Safer Streets and Homes: A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria, 2002 - 2005*, launched by the Victorian Government on 8 April 2002, identifies strengthening families as a key factor in reducing social problems in young people's lives, including youth offending. The strategy promotes risk minimisation factors for children within a family context, including equipping parents with appropriate child rearing skills, knowledge and confidence and enhanced parental supervision skills.

Research has also identified an association between events in early childhood and crime prevention. Ross Homel, Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University, argues that children exposed to high quality preschool programs demonstrate significantly less juvenile crime activity (Homel, 1998). Longitudinal studies also show that they exhibit improved outcomes in a range of educational and life adjustment criteria. This is significant, given the over representation of boys in the juvenile justice and the correctional service systems.



### **2.8.1 Victorian Preschools**

Victorian four-year-olds are currently participating in preschools at the highest rate on record. In 2002, 60,012 children have enrolled in 1628 funded preschool locations across the state. This means 96.4% of all eligible preschool children are accessing a funded preschool program.

In the 2002 - 03 State Budget, the Government allocated a further \$23.4 over four years to address the major issues raised in the Kirby Harper Review and commence the reform program to improve preschool services in the State. These budget initiatives include strategies to:

- enable better participation in preschool for children with special needs who still may not be attending preschool or who attend in a limited way
- meet the needs of children with developmental delay to access an additional year of preschool before moving into the structured learning environment of school
- ease the pressure on parents to manage services, particularly the administrative burden. Funds have been allocated to develop Group Employment Models that group local preschools together to:
  1. offer better employment opportunities and conditions to teachers across several preschools
  2. reduce the pressures of the day-to-day administration of preschool services managed by volunteer parent committees.

The active involvement of parents remains a vital element in ensuring services identify and meet community needs and expectations.

\$6.5 million has been allocated to upgrade preschools to meet requirements of the *Children's Services Regulations 1998* in relation to building and safety issues. Already 535 preschool Services have been funded a total of \$5.2 million to upgrade their premises to meet requirements, with a further \$1.3million to be made available in the 2002 - 03 year.

DHS is currently reviewing the Koorie Early Childhood Education Program in Victoria to improve access to, and participation in, preschool programs as well as improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for children. Recent budget initiatives include an additional \$0.29 million over 4 years to increase Koorie participation in preschool programs.

### **2.8.2 Best Start**

Best Start is a prevention and early intervention initiative that aims to improve the health and development, learning and well-being of all Victorian children, from pregnancy through transition to school (usually taken to be eight years of age). This will be achieved through trial activity that brings parents, health and education providers, government and communities together to improve local early years' services so that they are more responsive to local needs. It is anticipated that these improvements will result in:

- better access to child and family support, health services and early education
- heightened parents' capacity, confidence and enjoyment of family life
- communities that are more child and family friendly.

Ten demonstration projects across a range of metropolitan, regional and rural settings will trial activity to provide essential information about how early years services can be improved in diverse settings. Wherever possible, sites will be selected so that they can build on related Government and community priorities and initiatives. Two of these projects will focus on addressing the specific needs of Koorie children and their families and communities. Vulnerable groups, including drug using parents and families with a member suffering from an illness or disability, will also be a focus.

## **2.9 Addressing risk-taking behaviours**

Research indicates that boys are more public in their response to problems of depression and social-emotional issues and have higher rates of completed suicide than girls. In recent years, the suicide rate for males aged 15 - 24 has been four to five times higher than women of the same age (ABS, 1997). The Victorian Government has developed a range of whole school, whole-of-government and community initiatives to address mental health issues.

In a review of adolescent health promotion strategies, undertaken by DHS in May 2000, a number of risk-taking behaviours, including tobacco use, drug and alcohol use, depression, suicidal behaviour, anti-social behaviour and sexual risk taking were examined to identify possible effective intervention strategies. The review concluded that intervention through schools has been successful and that the school is an appropriate platform for health promotion for young people.

The Government's initiatives addressing risk-taking behaviours are outlined below.

### **2.9.1 Student Wellbeing**

DE&T provides guidelines and programs for Victorian schools to develop whole-school approaches to student wellbeing. Issues identified as relevant to particular groups of boys include:

- student attendance
- bullying
- drug taking
- vulnerability
- health and wellbeing
- gender identity and orientation
- gender and power in sexual relations and relationships.

A series of prevention, intervention and post-intervention strategies and programs are therefore required.

The *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* outlines a comprehensive conceptual and operational framework for the provision of student welfare. The *Framework* helps schools to respond to a wide variety of issues such as depression, self-harm and drug misuse, and suicide prevention. Four major concepts underpin the *Framework*:

- primary prevention, early intervention, intervention and post-intervention
- continuity of care
- partnerships between schools and the community

- accountability.

The *Framework's* major emphasis is primary prevention and providing population-based strategies and targeted programs to young people, endowing them with skills and strategies to enhance their resilience.

Other initiatives include:

- *Addressing Bullying Behaviour – It's Our Responsibility* - a package aimed at assisting schools to develop preventative strategies addressing bullying
- *Keeping Kids at School* – a document for schools addressing student attendance issues
- *Individual School Drug Education Strategy (ISDES)* – Schools consult with the school community to implement a comprehensive drug education curriculum and policy
- *The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS)* – a joint initiative of DE&T and DHS to enhance cooperation between schools and community agencies responding to the needs of vulnerable young people. Forty-one SFYS clusters have been developed in Victoria.

Curriculum Resource documents to promote the health and well-being of all students include:

- *Catching On* - developed as part of an STD/HIV prevention education strategy, in response to research and trialling conducted by DE&T and the current research available on adolescent sexuality. The kit is aimed at students in Years 9 and 10, and has a particular emphasis on risk behaviours, gender identity, and gender and power in sexual relations
- *Get Real and Get Wise* – drug education resources giving young people essential information about drugs in our society.

## **2.9.2 Social Competencies Initiative**

The Victorian Government recognises that students' learning, social functioning and well-being are interconnected and that students learn more effectively in a supportive and engaging environment.

Research literature attests that students who are generally disliked, aggressive and disruptive or unable to sustain close relationships with other students will experience difficulty in all domains of life. These difficulties become evident during adolescence and are the target of vastly expensive intervention programs and government services. These students, often boys, are at risk of failing to reach their potential and are particularly likely to be involved in anti-social and criminal behaviour with resulting widespread and long-term social repercussions.

The Government's social competencies initiative is a research-based conceptual model and implementation strategy for whole-school and whole system practice supporting the integrated cognitive, social and emotional development of all students.

## **2.9.3 SAINTS**

The SAINTS program is an innovative example of Victoria's strategic approach to addressing issues of bullying, harassment and violence through community partnership projects. The program sees St Kilda football players assume a relationship-building role within the classroom. After completing a training program, the players share personal experiences and relate football to school, discussing the purposes of rules and consequences for rule breaking, the importance of teamwork and family support, self-management and working towards goals.

The SAINTS program affirms a positive image of masculinity involving social and emotional competence and connectedness to others.

## **2.10 Children at risk, children in care**

Many children and young people involved with Child Protection services are excluded from school because they pose risks to themselves. Distance education is not an appropriate form of educational instruction for them either, because they need the social relationships as well as the educational content offered by school. These students must be educated, however, as exclusion from the education system often promotes sustained problems in adulthood (including aggressive and sexually aggressive behaviour) and increases the likelihood of risk-taking behaviours.

Like students involved with Child Protection, children in the out of home care system often have low levels of educational achievement and school retention rates. This is due to a range of factors including abuse or neglect in the pre-school years, followed by the trauma and disruption of being removed from their families, which is often compounded by placement changes that require changes of school.

To improve the educational achievement and retention rates of children in Child Protection and out of home care, vulnerable children need to be identified early and provided with additional assistance. Children who are performing poorly at school, failing to attend regularly or running the risk of suspension or expulsion are in particular need of assistance.

### **2.10.1 Supporting children at risk**

#### ***Attendance***

The Victorian Government in the 2002-03 budget allocated \$84.3 million over four years to employ 70 teachers and develop local solutions to keep students actively engaged. Victoria has also developed Student Attendance Guidelines to help schools improve attendance rates, with the help of community organizations.

#### ***A Partnering Agreement***

DE&T is currently working with DHS to develop a Partnering Agreement to meet the special educational needs of children and young people living in foster or residential care. Local level implementation of the agreement will ensure:

- close liaison between DE&T, local schools and DHS
- the strengthening of Child Protection involvement in the educational planning for children in out of home care
- increased support and assistance for the children in schools.

### ***Protecting Children***

In order to improve its capacity to protect children, DE&T has strengthened its Protocol with DHS. Launched on 21 November 2001, the Protocol between Child Protection DHS and Victorian Schools developed in consultation with DHS, representatives from Catholic, government and independent schools and the relevant unions and principal associations. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of all parties in responding to child abuse and will be distributed to all Catholic, government and independent schools during 2002.

The Protocol, along with DE&T legal advice to schools (Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide Section 4.6, Student Care and Supervision), will be incorporated into DE&T's ongoing commitment to provide advice and support to schools on child protection and mandatory reporting.

The Safe from Harm training package provides strategies for work places to ensure that internal protocols and procedures are set up to guide staff through the notification process and appropriate support is provided to a child and their family.

## **2.11 Gender education in schools**

Since gender reform began in schools, girls have had their subject selection horizons expanded and other opportunities extended to them. However, reforms have not yet translated to equal enrolments across the range of subjects available to students at Year 12. Males' subject choices are still far more likely to include science, mathematics and ICT subjects. Females overwhelmingly outnumber males in health and human development, food technology, psychology and biology. A recent report conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (Fullarton & Ainley, 2000) found that in relation to subject selection:

- students' choice of subject is still heavily influenced by gender, the type of school and their parents' occupations
- enrolment patterns reflect the traditional gender differences in subject choice – males tend to choose the higher-level maths and physical science subjects, and females dominate humanities, languages and the biological sciences – although the size of enrolment disparities has narrowed slightly
- participation in the physical sciences by students whose parents are in professional jobs remains more than twice that of students whose parents are in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs
- higher levels of parental education are also associated with higher enrolments in mathematics, and humanities and social sciences.

In Victoria in 2001, less than three percent of students enrolled in Systems Technology were female. More than 86% of students enrolled in Health and Human Development were female. The 1999 VET in Schools Destination Report showed that gender perceptions also affected subject choices made in the VET in Schools (VETIS) program.

Besides pointing to gender divides in subject selection, these participation patterns impact on the performance of male and female students. Collins et al found that "the fact that the average girl is performing slightly better than the average boy is in part the result of boys' preference for particular high pay-off, and/or traditional subjects even when they may not do well in those areas." In subjects highly rated by male students there is likely to be a larger cohort of poorly performing male students bringing down the average performance. Girls' broader choice across subjects suggests a greater inclination not to gamble on higher status subjects if they are likely to do poorly in them (Collins et al, 2000). Boys may, therefore, need to be encouraged to explore careers other

than traditional, high status professions, trades and other male-dominated areas. This will improve their overall achievement and retention, as all students are more likely to stay on where they are experiencing success and fulfilment.

In addition to subject and selection, young adults make critical future life choices based on their perceptions of appropriate gender pathways. Consequently, they are often disadvantaged in the labour market and also often fail to develop necessary life skills for success in the roles of partnering, parenting and self-care. Schools have a key role to play in assisting all students to develop these life-skills.

DE&T is developing a *Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools* in order to:

- facilitate the implementation of strategies designed to improve the participation and performance of boys and particular groups of girls in schools
- provide schools with a pedagogical framework to address issues related to gender.

Schools should support and encourage the aspirations of each individual student. The *Gender Education Strategy for Victorian Schools* will include strategies to improve student engagement in schooling, self-awareness and critical analysis skills, as well as classroom and whole-school strategies for promoting multi-dimensional perceptions of gender.

Victoria's strategy recognises that student performance in part reflects self-awareness and self-confidence, which can be influenced by limited understandings of gender roles and pathways. By addressing such understandings, schools' capacity to improve student retention, participation and achievement rates, and literacy and numeracy standards will be enhanced.

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