

Message from the Ministers

One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is the solid foundation of a high quality education.

In Victoria, we are fortunate to have a world class education system with a strong and vibrant government school system at its core.

The recent national testing program in schools across the country showed that Victoria is the equal top performer in Australia, along with the ACT and NSW. Victorian students at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 performed significantly higher than the Australian average in reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and numeracy and significantly higher than the Australian average at Years 3, 5 and 7 in spelling.

Education remains the number one priority for the Victorian Government. Our recent *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (available from www.education.vic.gov.au) outlined our five-year agenda to create outstanding learning opportunities for every child, in every classroom, in every school, no matter where it might be.

The Blueprint includes strategies to integrate early childhood services and school education and develop transition plans to help children make the move from kindergarten to primary school.

You and your child are about to take an exciting step in your child's learning and development journey. This handbook is designed to assist children make a smooth transition to primary school, and to provide you with useful information about government schools and the 2009 school year.

We wish your family well on this journey and encourage you to become actively involved in your child's school community.



Bronwyn Pike

Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP
Minister for Education



Maxine Morand

Maxine Morand MP
Minister for Children and Early
Childhood Development





Every child, every opportunity

Congratulations on choosing a Victorian government school for your child. Our schools offer opportunity, choice, cultural diversity, life skills and, most importantly, a great education for every child.

Victorian government schools are part of a strong and vibrant education system that ensures every child has the opportunity to thrive, learn and grow. You can be confident that high educational standards are maintained, no matter where you are in Victoria. Within this statewide system, each school has the flexibility to tailor their programs to meet the individual needs of students.

Government schools also form an important part of the local community. The people who make our schools great places for your child – principals, teachers, school staff and school councillors – make every effort to be involved in and connect with their community.

Starting school is an exciting new phase of life for you and your child. This handbook has been designed to help you to make your child's transition to school easy and enjoyable. The information contained in this booklet is based on suggestions from other parents who, like you, want the best for their children.

This handbook gives you information about the innovative programs and activities offered in the early foundational years of school that aim to make school exciting and engaging. It also has useful information to help you to become involved in and to understand your child's education in a school setting.

For information about Victorian government schools visit www.education.vic.gov.au or call **1800 809 834** (freecall) to speak to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Information and Referral Service.

Getting ready for school

Children are born ready and eager to learn

From the time they are born, children want to make sense of the world around them and to find out all about it. They develop more in their first six years of life than at any other time. Areas of the brain develop, organise and become fully functional at different stages during childhood. Positive relationships and experiences in early childhood are the building blocks that support health, learning, development and wellbeing at school and later in life.

Building blocks

Throughout the early years of life your child has learnt how to form and maintain positive relationships, establish routines, develop thinking skills in order to solve problems, develop self-control and gain self-confidence. You have helped your child to understand the world around them and to develop their language.

Over the years there are a range of activities you may have been involved with to support your child's development, such as:

- attending Maternal and Child Health centres so that the nurse could monitor your child's health, growth and development and help you to support your child
- participating in playgroups to provide your child with opportunities to meet and play with other children, learning how to form relationships with others and how to make friends
- enrolling your child in kindergarten, giving your child vital support for their learning and development.

Kindergarten

Most children in Victoria will have attended kindergarten in the year before they start primary school. This may have been in a sessional kindergarten or in a long day care setting.

The kindergarten experience will have supported your child's development by:

- providing an environment to explore, discover and learn about their world
- encouraging their natural curiosity and learning to solve problems
- understanding their own emotions and those of others
- teaching them to cooperate with others
- helping them to establish friendships with children of their own age and relationships with other adults
- learning to share and care for materials and equipment that belong to everyone
- encouraging them to take responsibility for their needs – such as using the toilet and dressing themselves
- teaching them to become aware of the needs of others
- developing an understanding that the kindergarten staff share their time with all children in the group.

Kindergarten Parents Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that provides information, support and advice about kindergarten and kindergarten management. For more information visit www.kpv.org.au or call 9489 3500 or 1300 730 119 (regional Victoria).

Supporting your child's transition from kindergarten

You may want to ask the kindergarten teacher about how to share information with the school about your child.

Providing information about your child's development and skills to the school will help the prep teacher to get a better understanding of your child's needs and abilities before they start school.

Links between schools, kindergarten programs in sessional kindergartens and long day care centres may have been organised through:

- school tours for parents and their children along with opportunities for children to visit the school with the kindergarten teacher. This all helps to support preparing your child for a larger physical environment
- school information nights for parents
- prep teachers visiting kindergartens and long day care centres.

Schools often set up a 'buddy' system with older children to help prep children have a welcoming experience from the very beginning.

There are some practical ways in which you can help your child to make the move to school.

The last term of kindergarten

- ask the staff who work with your child about activities organised between kindergarten/child care and school
- participate in the information sessions the school organises for you and your child
- provide opportunities in your family's day-to-day routines for your child to practise their independence
- visit the school with your child so they are familiar with the grounds, including the drink taps, toilets and classroom
- arrange a time with the prep teacher to discuss your child's interests, experiences and strengths

During the January holidays

- catch up with other parents and their children who will be attending the same school as your child. It will help if your child knows another child in the class before they start
- let your child practise dressing for school, using a lunch box and drink bottle and packing a school bag
- adopt a low-key approach to the big day, initiating casual conversations with your child about this new step in their life and sharing positive memories of your own school life with your child





- read stories about starting school
- establish family routines linked to the school year, such as getting ready for school in the morning
- encourage the efforts your child makes in doing things for themselves and others
- avoid any last-minute rushes by doing as much in advance as possible, such as labelling your child's belongings
- confirm your before or after school care arrangements. Show your child where the after school care facilities are
- be positive about starting school and enjoy your child's excitement.

You know your child best. It may be that you observe signs of anxiety in your child about starting school. It's important to talk about how they are feeling, to listen and to acknowledge their concerns. This will help to build their confidence and lessen the stress they may be experiencing.

Financial assistance

The School Start Bonus helps every family of a child starting prep or year 7 at a government or a non-government school. Parents receive a one-off payment of \$300 to help meet the costs of purchasing school and sporting uniforms, school bags and related equipment. You will be issued with a voucher by the school that your child is enrolled to attend. This can be redeemed at an Australia Post outlet from 12 January 2009 so you have the opportunity to purchase required school items prior to the commencement of the school year.

The School Start Bonus is in addition to the **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**. This is provided to low-income families to help with education-related costs.

If you have a child under 16 years of age and receive an eligible Centrelink benefit and hold a valid Health Care Card or a valid pension card, you may be eligible to receive the EMA.

This amount is split evenly between the parent and the school, and is paid in two instalments – the first in March and the second in August/September. The parent portion is often used to help with uniforms and excursions, while the school portion may be used for expenses such as text books, stationery and special programs for your child.

For further information or to apply for this allowance, contact your child's school. Students 16 years and over may be eligible for financial assistance through the Centrelink Youth Allowance scheme.

For more information about the School Start Bonus and the EMA, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/financialassistance/

Parent payments in Victorian government schools

Victorian government schools provide free instructions in the standard curriculum programs. Schools are able to charge for

the goods and services used by students in the course of instruction and schools can also raise funds through seeking donations.

There are three categories of education items or services that school councils can request payments from parents for students in Victorian government schools:

- **essential education items** which parents are required to provide or pay the school to provide for their child, for example stationery, text books and school uniforms
- **optional extras** which are offered on a user-pays basis and which parents may choose to allow their child to access, or participate in, for example, school magazines or extra curricular programs or activities
- **voluntary financial contributions** which parents may be invited to donate to the school.

Case Study

A great start to prep

Parents at Langwarrin Park Preschool now have a greater insight into their child's life at kindergarten since the introduction of School Transition Portfolios.

The portfolios are books filled with pictures, photos and stories that the children have produced. Accompanying the work is a 'commentary' by the teachers about what the child was learning during a particular activity or game. The portfolios are a partnership between the kindergarten staff, family and children and will inform the transition process between kindergarten and primary school.

The family of five year old Caitlyn Dempsey say that the portfolios have given them an insight and deeper understanding of her learning, play and development through the year.

"The detailed observations and analysis of learning taking place enabled me to appreciate that my daughter was learning through her play. Describing the numeracy, literary, social and emotional skills that came from cooking mud pies in the sand pit was really fascinating. It was also interesting to see how other people perceived my child," said Caitlyn's mum, Lisa.

Caitlyn is going to Langwarrin Park Primary School next year and during the four day transition program she took along her portfolio to show her future prep teacher. Now they too, will have more than just a glimpse of the little girl gearing up to start the next stage of her learning.

School councils are responsible for developing and approving a policy about parental financial obligations for their school. This school-level policy must reflect the Department's policy and be made available to parents on request.

For the Department's policy and further information about parent payments, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/parentpayments/

Children with additional needs

Each child is an individual with unique strengths, abilities, learning styles and needs. Sometimes children with additional needs require extra supports and special learning programs. These can be put in place so that all children can participate fully in the range of activities at school.

If your child has additional needs, you may be receiving extra support from an early childhood intervention service

or a preschool field officer. Staff in these services can assist you to provide information to the school about your child's developmental needs. This enables the school to start planning programs or supports that may need to be put into place.

You can find out more about supports for children with additional needs on page 18 of this booklet.

Services for Koorie children

Koorie early childhood field officers and Koorie preschool assistants provide extra support to Koorie children to participate in kindergarten, and to ensure a culturally rich experience.

If your family and child have had involvement with these professionals, you may wish to seek their advice about the move to school next year.

You can find out more about support for Koorie children on page 19 of this booklet.



Beginning school

Starting school is an important milestone for parents and children and the beginning of a new journey together

The beginning of the school year

Getting ready

- encourage your child to organise clean clothes and pack their books and bag the night before
- check your child's timetable to make sure they have the necessary equipment

A sleep routine

- you may find your child needs more sleep when they start school. Try to establish a routine with a set bedtime to ensure your child is well rested

Dressing for school

- check the weather forecast and be prepared for unexpected changes
- look for easy fasteners when choosing belts, shoes, bags and clothing
- encourage your child to dress so they can manage things like taking jumpers on and off at school

Looking after belongings

- label all your child's belongings
- show your child where these labels have been placed
- check when any special items, such as a library bag or art smock, are needed at school
- note where lost property is held at the school

Food for energy

- be sure your child has a balanced breakfast
- pack a healthy lunch and snacks and explain when they should be eaten
- make sure your child can manage to unwrap any food wrappings

Avoiding the last-minute rush

- try to leave home on time
- it helps to arrive at school well before the first class to allow time to say goodbye and for your child to join others at play

Saying goodbye

- at first you might stay a while to ensure that your child feels secure at school
- once your child has settled into school, a short and reassuring goodbye encourages independence
- always tell your child that you are leaving and what the arrangement is for their collection at the end of the day
- be guided by your child's teacher

Going home

- check what time school finishes – during Term 1 some schools have earlier finishing times for prep children
- arrive in plenty of time to collect your child

Notes between home and school

- check the school bag with your child each night for newsletters and notes from school
- make sure your child knows when you place a note in their bag and what needs to be done with it
- parents of separated families are encouraged to agree on methods of communication between home and school so the child is not affected

Home reading and homework program

- establish a quiet time for reading together – this could be part of the bedtime routine. Early in the year your child's teacher will tell you about the home reading and homework program
- read with your child in English and/or your home language
- let reading together be a pleasurable activity. Your child's teacher can assist you to find books which are both interesting to your child and developmentally appropriate.

Travelling to and from school

In some locations, students who live more than 4.8 kilometres from their nearest government school may be eligible for transport support. Some students may also be eligible for the Victorian Government conveyance allowance to help with travel costs. You can find out more by getting in contact with your child's school.

Any child enrolled in a special school or special developmental school may be eligible for transport assistance to school. To be eligible, a student must reside within the designated transport area for that school.

Walking or riding to school is a great way to get a healthy start to the day. It can also be a good opportunity to teach your child about traffic safety. The *Walking School Bus* and *Ride2School* programs involve groups of children walking or cycling to and from school under the supervision of adult volunteers.

Contact your child's school to find out whether it has a *Walking School Bus* or *Ride2School* program. You can contact VicHealth on 9667 1319 about the *Walking School Bus* and visit www.bv.com.au for more information about the *Ride2School* initiative.

For more information about travel support, contact your local school or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/traveltoschool

Attendance

In Victoria, education is compulsory for children aged between 6 and 16 years. Once enrolled in primary school, your child is expected to attend school every day of each term. It is important that children develop regular attendance habits at an early age. Children who are regularly absent from school are at risk of missing out on learning the basic building blocks in subjects, and may experience long-term learning difficulties.

For further information, contact your child's school or the regional office or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/attendance for the Department's attendance policy and programs.

What can you do?

- encourage school attendance
- notify your school if your child is absent
- when your child is absent from school due to illness avoid special activities, ask them to stay in bed or on the couch and keep activities low key
- schedule medical/dental appointments outside of school hours where possible





Student-free days

Schools are entitled to schedule student-free days for staff professional development, school planning and administration, curriculum development and planning, and student assessment and reporting.

In 2009, there will be four student-free days. The first three days in Term 1 will be student-free days, (Wednesday, 28 January – Friday, 30 January 2009). Students start back at school on Monday, 2 February 2009. The remaining student-free day will be held at the end of Term 2.

Outside school hours care program

Many primary schools offer programs for school children outside school hours, including before and after school, during the holidays and on student-free days. Contact your school to see what services are available. You may also be able to obtain the Child Care Benefit

(a Commonwealth Government benefit) to assist with the cost of this program.

For more information on the Child Care Benefit visit www.dest.gov.au/sectors/early_childhood/ or call 136 150.

Uniforms

Each school council decides whether its school will have a uniform, what the uniform will be and whether wearing it will be compulsory. Students are generally required to wear their school uniform during school hours, while travelling to and from school and when they are engaged in school activities out of school hours. Some schools have arrangements with uniform suppliers, or a school shop, where you can buy uniforms. Schools may also sell second-hand uniforms.

Contact your school for more information about the uniform code.



In the classroom

The prep year is a significant shift in environment for a child

When children enter the formal education setting of school they develop more independence. In addition to developing skills for learning, children are also gaining new physical and social skills.

The prep classroom

The prep classroom is an exciting and stimulating place where your child will be challenged and supported. Teachers aim to create a safe and happy environment in which children are valued, praised and encouraged to have a go.

Classrooms are designed to welcome and stimulate your child, with colourful displays of children's learning materials, books, computers, construction materials and art supplies.

How to help your child in the classroom

- share with your child good stories and memories of your own school days
- be positive about school, teachers and learning
- talk with your child about the kinds of activities they will take part in during the school day
- talk about friendships and how to be a good friend
- take your child to your local library and choose books together
- talk about the letters, words and numbers your child sees when shopping, on television, in books and on computer screens
- encourage your child's curiosity by asking questions and encouraging questions in return
- introduce yourself to the families of other children.



During the normal school day activities, teachers may ask your child to perform certain tasks so they can assess their development, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Children are regularly assessed in a range of tasks that are more like fun and games than 'tests'.

Prep entry assessment procedures

When a child starts school they are assessed so that the teacher can design a learning and teaching program that best suits their individual needs. Early in the school year, your child's teacher may

request an interview with you to discuss how your child is progressing.

This discussion is likely to cover:

- your child's kindergarten or child care experiences and what your child has already learnt
- how independent your child is
- how easily your child mixes with children of various ages
- the languages your child speaks and understands
- your child's particular health and medical requirements

Case Study

Enviro movies

Budding Niddrie Primary School filmmakers have put water savings in the spotlight through the creation of two films starring lively water drops.

As part of their involvement in City West Water's education program, Water-Learn It! Live It!, and in the spirit of Wallace and Gromit, the Years 3 and 4 students developed two seven-minute claymation films that explore the water

cycle, why it rains, how drought occurs, and ways to save water at home and school.

One film, *Raindrop Escapade*, follows the journey of three raindrops through Melbourne's water cycle, while the other, *Residential versus Industry*, explores how water is used and wasted in these different settings.

Claymation films move at 12 frames a second, half the speed of a regular film, and the students created more than 10,000 individual still frames for their films.





- family events that may be affecting your child (eg births, deaths, divorce or change in family circumstances).

Contact your child's teacher or school if you would like to discuss this assessment procedure.

The curriculum

The prep curriculum emphasises literacy and numeracy skills, and includes a two hour daily literacy block and a one hour daily numeracy block.

There are also opportunities to develop physical, creative, and information and communications technology skills as students are encouraged to explore their world.

Your child will sometimes work with the whole class, and at other times be grouped for sessions with children who have similar learning needs. As your child develops, they will learn to work independently and cooperatively in small student groups.

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (also known as the Standards or VELS) outline what is important for students to learn at school. Schools use the Standards to plan their teaching and learning programs, including

assessment and reporting of your child's progress. The Standards cover the learning areas of English (including English as a second language), mathematics, science, humanities, languages other than English (LOTE) and the arts. Within these subjects, students learn physical, personal and social skills that they can use in school, their personal lives, the community and later in the workplace.

There are Standards at six levels and level 1 is broadly associated with the prep year of schooling. At levels 1 and 2 children develop foundation knowledge, skills and behaviours in:

- English (reading, writing, speaking and listening)
- mathematics
- the arts (creating and making)
- interpersonal development (with an emphasis on socialisation)
- health and physical education (movement and physical activity).

Your child's school report card will show how your child has progressed during the year (see page 25 for more information on student reports).

To find out more about the Standards and what they mean for your child visit <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/parent/>

Information and communication technology

Many children are confident users of new technologies. Knowing how to use technology helps children with the fundamental skills of reading, writing and mathematics and also forms part of the skill set children need for life in the 21st century.

Information and communications technology (ICT) involves students using computers, digital cameras and a range of online resources and software. Victorian schools are leading the way when it comes to eLearning. Starting from prep, schools are integrating ICT into their curriculum in ways that increase children's computer literacy, ability to share knowledge and information creatively and, in some cases, overcome barriers such as isolation or disability.

Every government school in Victoria is being upgraded to high speed, fibre optic broadband through the Victorian Government's *VicSmart* initiative.

This means that your child will have easy access to the best online learning materials and will be able to share their knowledge online. Additional funding is also being provided to schools to purchase new computers.

If you feel that your child knows more than you do in this subject area, you may consider contacting your local community centre and asking if computer courses are offered that could benefit you as a parent. For more information about adult, community education visit www.acfe.vic.gov.au or visit www.shortcourses.vic.gov.au

For more information about ICT in schools visit www.education.vic.gov.au/ictinschools

Languages other than English

In recognising the value of knowing another language, including its potential to assist literacy development and expand career opportunities, government schools provide high-quality language education programs.



Case Study

Fun at school

Students in Years 5 and 6 at Diamond Creek Primary School have immersed themselves in an economics inquiry unit called 'Money, Money, Money' and raised \$900 for charity from 18 stalls, which they set up and ran during the school's market day.

Students worked in collaborative groups to create small businesses that offered goods or services for the whole school, including family and friends. As part of their small business, students were assigned roles through negotiation.



These included CEO, advertising, marketing, resources, finance, business plans and site allocations.

"As teachers, we could see how engaged the children were as they had been empowered to direct their own learning. We have seen the benefits and are looking forward to our next exciting inquiry," teacher Robyn Jones said.

The most commonly taught languages are Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Auslan (language for the hearing impaired). Other languages include Arabic, Croatian, Greek, Khmer, Indigenous languages, Korean, Macedonian, Maori, Somali, Turkish, Spanish and Vietnamese.

Language programs offered in most government primary schools are determined by the school council. Children in Years 1 to 12 who do not have access to the study of a specific language in their school can attend language programs outside school hours at the Victorian School of Languages. For more information visit www.vsl.vic.edu.au

English as a second language

Many students start school speaking a

language other than English at home. Funding is provided to schools to provide *English as a second language (ESL)* programs for children learning English as a second language. Newly arrived ESL students who meet eligibility criteria are able to access intensive ESL tuition for six to 12 months at an English language school or centre. A range of services are provided in mainstream schools to support ESL students.

For more information about ESL programs visit www.education.vic.gov.au/eslprograms

Special religious instruction

Your child's school may offer special religious instruction in one or more recognised faith based religions. Classes are taught by accredited instructors. Participation in these classes is not compulsory, so you can choose whether

Support for students



Government schools are for all children. Diversity among students is recognised and welcomed

Different types of support and individual learning programs are offered to make sure all children can participate in education and achieve their best.

Students with disabilities

The Victorian Government is committed to the delivery of an inclusive education system that ensures all children have access to a quality education that meets their individual needs.

To improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities, the following strategies are in place:

- providing parents with the choice of learning environments that best develop their child's potential

- supporting children and their families in making the transition from pre-school to school, and from school to higher education, training and employment
- involving children and parents in programming and planning decisions through a student support group
- supporting children to access programs that allow them to pursue achievable pathways
- ensuring that the expertise of professionals working in mainstream and special schools is maintained and developed through professional development.

Schools enrolling eligible children with disabilities may receive additional support from the Government to meet their individual needs through the program for students with disabilities. Resources are provided to schools for the support of children who satisfy the criteria as outlined in the *Program for Students with Disabilities and Language Support Program Handbook 2008*.

This handbook is an excellent resource and provides extensive information for parents. This handbook and other useful resources can be viewed online at www.education.vic.gov.au/disability

Services for Koorie students

Schools and teachers are committed to working with you to ensure that your child is supported throughout their schooling pathway. If a Koorie child requires extra support, schools and teachers can access a number of programs that target the specific needs of children and families.

The Department is committed to delivering the best possible education to Victoria's Koorie students and has recently launched a new strategy, *Wannik, Learning Together – Journey to Our Future*. This means more Koorie support workers will be employed across the system, and there will be a higher level of support for individual Koorie students and their families.

For more information contact your school or regional office. Alternatively, you can contact the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development on **9637 2308**.

Student support services

Schools and teachers are committed to working with you to provide every possible assistance and support for the wellbeing of your child. Your school has student wellbeing staff to support students with additional learning and wellbeing needs. These staff may include school nurses, school chaplains, student welfare coordinators and primary welfare officers.

Student support services officers can also provide support to students and to schools. These include:

- guidance officers/psychologists
- social workers
- visiting teachers (for visually, hearing and physically impaired students)
- speech pathologists
- curriculum consultants.

For more information about student support services contact your school or region or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/supportinschools





Wellbeing, health and medical matters

Children thrive in school when they are healthy and feel happy, confident and secure

Government schools build positive learning communities where children feel valued and supported. This section outlines the type of support and programs that government schools offer your child.

Wellbeing

Student behaviour

Helping children to learn effectively and develop positive attitudes and behaviours are goals that have long been shared by school communities, teachers and parents.

Government schools have a duty of care to provide a safe, secure and supportive environment for all children. Teachers are required to supervise children, in both the classroom and the school grounds. All schools have codes of conduct in place for the principal, the staff, the school council and other school community members. These codes outline the expectations and responsibilities of these people, including how conflicts and disputes will be resolved.

Schools must also develop strategies to promote care, tolerance, courtesy and mutual respect. The Department has policies and guidelines in place to assist schools to implement effective whole-school approaches to the prevention and management of bullying. Schools also have personal development programs

to equip children with attitudes and values such as confidence, persistence, organisation, 'getting along with others' and resilience. These attitudes and values are the foundation for academic achievement, sound interpersonal relationships and overall healthy psychological living, as well as the successful transition from school to adult life.

For more information on the Department's student wellbeing policies visit www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing

Buddy system

The 'buddy' system is common in government primary schools. Many schools set up 'buddy' systems for prep children with older students to ensure a stimulating and welcoming experience from the very beginning of school. The benefits are twofold, as the older children learn to take on responsibility, while the younger children know that they have a fellow student they can confidently turn to for support.

Health

Physical education and sport

Government schools promote the development of a healthy lifestyle by providing a supportive and active environment for physical education and sport. As well as increasing activity levels, physical education and sport help to develop a sense of fair play, self confidence and the capacity for teamwork.

Swimming and athletics, Australian rules football, soccer, netball, softball, surfing, golf and cricket are just some of the sports offered at the school, district,



zone, region, state and national levels. The achievements of our young sports stars are honoured with prestigious annual school sports awards at the regional and state levels. Physical education and sport is timetabled for all students from prep to year 10.

Healthy eating

Healthy eating has a long-lasting and positive impact on a child's growth, development and health. Healthy eating will also maximise a child's concentration and ability to learn. The 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit has been developed by the Department to help students make healthy food choices at school and in life.

Foods eaten at school contribute significantly to your child's daily nutrient intake and have a considerable influence on the development of their eating habits, growth patterns and energy levels. You have an important role to play in helping ensure your child eats well and stays active.

Healthy school lunch ideas include:

- sandwiches or pita bread with cheese, lean meat, or salad
- cheese slices, dry biscuits with spread, and fresh fruit
- washed and cut-up raw vegetables or fresh fruits
- frozen water bottle, particularly in hot weather, or Tetra Pak of milk.

Highly processed, sugary, fatty and salty foods should make up only a very small

part of your child's diet. Foods to limit in school lunches include:

- processed meats such as salami, pressed chicken and strasbourg
- chips, sweet biscuits, and muesli and breakfast bars
- fruit bars and straps
- cordials, juices containing sugar, and soft drinks.

School canteens follow healthy eating guidelines when planning the canteen menu.

The 'Go for your life' Free Fruit Friday initiative available at participating primary schools, provides schools with grants to purchase free fruit and vegetables once a week for prep to year 2 students. This aims to boost fruit and vegetable consumption in young children and assist in establishing a lifetime habit of healthier eating.

The 'Go for your life' Kitchen Garden Project with Stephanie Alexander assists project schools to establish a kitchen garden where the students take an active role in growing harvesting, preparing and sharing healthy food.

You must let your principal know if your child is allergic to certain foods.

For more information about healthy eating programs, you can contact your school or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/goforyourlife to access the 'Go for your life' Healthy Canteen Kit website.

Medical

Immunisation

When enrolling a child in primary school, or transferring between schools, parents need to bring their child's immunisation status certificate. Children who are not immunised can still attend school. However, if an outbreak of an infectious disease occurs at the school they will be sent home until the danger has passed. Local councils can provide immunisation certificates.

For more information contact your local council, your doctor or the Immunisation Program (Department of Human Services) on **1300 882 008**.

Medical conditions

If your child has a medical condition you need to inform the principal and your child's teacher. In particular, the

school needs to know if your child has epilepsy, haemophilia, asthma, diabetes or severe allergic reactions such as to certain foods (anaphylaxis – see page 24), bee stings, etc. You will be asked to provide this information when you enrol your child and it is important to keep it up to date. Further information is available at www.education.vic.gov.au/studenthealth

All children with a medical condition or illness should have a management plan completed by their doctor in consultation with you. This plan must be attached to the child's records.

If your child needs to take medication during school hours, you should talk with their teacher or principal about necessary arrangements and provide written instructions for administering the medication.

Case Study

Yoga brings calm and energy to the classroom

Yoga and meditation are being used to help children in Keysborough feel relaxed and more focused on their work, through a combination of classroom and after school activities.

Jenny Tran, a Year 3–4 teacher at Chandler Primary School and a qualified yoga and creative dance instructor, has seen “dedicated yogis” revelling in tree poses and the lotus position term after term.

Jenny provides the yoga and dance sessions as part of the *Active After School Communities* program, which was introduced in 2005 at schools around Australia to offer children fun, free, fitness activities. She also incorporates yoga and meditation into her classroom.

“Yoga shows children the power of stillness and quiet time,” she says.



Jenny started using yoga in the classroom about five years ago, when she first started as a teacher. She has noticed profound benefits, with children feeling calm, relaxed and energised.

“When a child does a pose a second time, they are a bit better,” Jenny says. “This correlates to the classroom; you can point out that they didn’t know how to spell a certain word last week, but now they do.”



Anaphylaxis

The *Anaphylaxis Guidelines for Victorian Government Schools* have been developed for schools to support children at risk of anaphylaxis. Schools with children diagnosed at risk of anaphylaxis have prevention and management strategies and provide regular training and updates for school staff in recognising and responding appropriately to an anaphylactic reaction.

If your child has anaphylaxis you must provide the school with an action plan which has been developed by your child's doctor, along with your child's medication or EpiPen®. The school will work with you to develop a detailed anaphylaxis management plan for your child, which will include strategies to prevent exposure to allergens, a communication plan for the school community and information about storage and use of medication.

Primary school nurses

Primary school nurses offer a service to all prep students and their families and are part of a network of local health and support services. The school will provide you with a questionnaire to complete about your child's health, development and wellbeing. This information will assist the nurse to undertake a health assessment of your prep child and provide you with follow-up information and advice if needed.

Head lice

Head lice can be managed with the cooperation of parents and the school. They are not a threat to health and they do not spread other infections. As there is no guaranteed method of prevention, early detection is the best way to avoid an outbreak. Your child's school will have a policy for managing head lice. For more information, contact your school or visit www.health.vic.gov.au/headlice

Communication between schools and parents



The more you know about your child's school, the more you will be able to support your child's learning

The following communication channels are available so you can be kept informed of your child's experience at school. You can also arrange meetings during the year with class teachers or the principal.

Student report cards

Parents are keen to know how their child is progressing at school and it is most important that they are kept informed. Victorian government schools do this by sending home student report cards.

Your child will receive two report cards a year: the first in June and the second at the end of the year. You will also be invited to attend a parent-teacher interview at the school to discuss your child's progress.

For more information about student report cards visit www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/studentreports

Parent-teacher interviews

You should expect to have at least one formal interview with your child's teacher/s during the year. However, if you have concerns about your child's progress you should discuss these with the teacher when they arise. You can contact the school to make an appointment at a mutually convenient time.

A parent-teacher interview gives you the opportunity to:

- discuss how your child is progressing, both academically and socially
- see examples of your child's work
- get to know your child's teacher
- find out about plans for your child's future learning.

Interpreting and translating services are available free, to ensure that parents and guardians who require an interpreter are better able to communicate with schools.

Visit www.education.vic.gov.au/interpreting for further information.

Parent complaints

If you have any concerns about your child's education, you should raise them in the first instance with your child's teacher or principal. Make an appointment through the school office.

For more information about dealing with complaints visit www.education.vic.gov.au/parentcomplaint

School newsletters

Reading school newsletters is a good way to learn about what is happening at your school and activities that you and your child can be involved in. School newsletters can remind you about important dates, promote student achievements and help you understand elements of teaching and learning. Most primary schools publish a regular newsletter on a weekly or fortnightly basis during the term. In some schools these newsletters are available electronically.

Parent Update

The Department produces *Parent Update*, a free email newsletter, which will keep you up to date with the latest information and changes to education and early childhood services in Victoria.

To subscribe to *Parent Update*, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/parentupdate

School annual reports

Each school provides a concise annual summary of its achievements and progress towards improving student learning, engagement and wellbeing.

Government schools are required to share their annual reports with their local communities. Reports are provided to parents and placed online on the school's website.

Contact your school for more information about its annual report.

Interpreting and translating services

All government schools can provide access to interpreting and translating services, free of charge, for parents from language backgrounds other than English.

Schools can provide interpreters for services including:

- parent–teacher interviews
- information sessions on school programs
- issues concerning discipline or welfare
- educational assessment of students
- enrolment of students.

Schools can arrange translations of key newsletter items, school notices and program information.

For further information contact your school or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/interpreting



Being involved



Parent participation is important if your child is to achieve the best possible learning outcomes

There are many ways to participate in school life. These range from standing for school council or joining the parent club to being involved in less formal school activities. You are free to choose activities that best suit you.

School councils

All government schools have a school council. The school council provides an opportunity for parents and other community members to be involved in

governing the school. Councils have between six and fifteen members and include parents, the principal, staff, and sometimes community members. Parents do not need any particular qualifications or experience to take part. Schools look for enthusiastic parents who want to help improve learning outcomes for all students.

Elections are held early in the school year and must be completed by the end of March. All parents of students enrolled at the school are eligible to vote.

For information about school councils visit www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/participation

You may also contact the Department's Community and Stakeholder Relations Branch for advice on legislation and

policy matters relating to school council governance and responsibilities via email at community.stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au. Regional office staff can also provide advice.

Two independent school council organisations provide information about, and support for, school councils:

- Association of School Councils in Victoria (visit www.asciv.org.au or call **9808 2499**)
- Victorian Council of School Organisations (visit www.viccsso.org.au/contact.htm or call **9429 5900**).

Parent clubs

Many government schools have a club or association for parents of children at the school. Parent clubs provide parents with the opportunity to participate and contribute to the wellbeing of their school community and the education of their child. Parent clubs, in partnership with the school council, also organise social, educational and fundraising activities.

Contact your school to find out what parent organisations are in place.

Parents Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that offers advice, support and information for parent clubs in government schools, as well as providing an advocacy service for individual parents. Parents Victoria can be contacted on **9380 2158** or **1800 032 023** (freecall for country callers). For more information visit www.parentsvictoria.asn.au

Volunteers in schools

Government schools have volunteer programs through which parents can directly participate in school activities. Schools determine how and when they will use volunteers. For instance, you may have the opportunity at your child's school to be involved in activities such as canteen duty, excursions and events,

reading and mathematics, environment committees and cultural groups.

For information on the regulations regarding parents working with children in schools, refer to the Department of Justice's website at www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren

Homework

You can help your child establish a homework routine in a number of ways, such as finding a regular time to read together. Homework helps students by supporting classroom learning, fostering good lifelong learning and study habits, and providing an opportunity for students to be responsible for their own learning. In prep, homework mainly consists of daily reading.

Parents are usually advised of homework expectations at the beginning of the school year. You may also be provided with a copy of the school's homework policy, which is determined by the school council. If not, please ask your school for a copy.

Tips for getting involved

- communicate regularly with your child's teacher
- read the school newsletter and other school notices
- attend school open days, family events and other special activities at school
- help out with fundraising activities, excursions, sports days and other events
- be involved with school councils or parent associations